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THE DIWAN OF ABU'L-ALA

By
HENRY BAERLEIN

Author of "In Pursuit of Dulcinea," "The Shade of the Balkans," "Yrivand," etc.

The stars have sunk from the celestial bowers,
And in the garden have been turned to flowers.
MUTAMID, *in captivity*.

Second Edition

LONDON: John Murray, 1909.

DEDICATION

TO DR. E. J. DILLON

Now the book is finished, so far as I shall finish it. There is, my friend, but this one page to write. And, more than probably, this is the page of all the book that I shall never wish to blot. Increasing wisdom or, at any rate, experience will make me frown, I promise you, some time or other at a large proportion of the pages of this volume. But when I look upon your name I hear a troop of memories, and in their singing is my happiness.

When you receive this book, presuming that the Russian Censor does not shield you from it, I have

some idea what you will do. The string, of course, must not be cut, and you will seriously set about the disentangling of it. One hand assists by holding up, now near the nose now farther off, your glasses; the other hand pecks at the string. After, say, twenty minutes there will enter the admirable Miss Fox—oh! the tea she used to make for us when we were freezing on the mountains of Bulgaria, what time our Chicagoan millionaire was ruffled and Milyukov, the adventurous professor, standing now not far from Russia's helm, would always drive ahead of us and say, with princely gesture, that if we suffered from the dust it was advisable that he should be the one to meet the fury of the local lions. But do not let us lose the scent: Miss Fox, that woman of resource, will cut the string. And later on, while to her you are dictating things political and while your other secretary is discoursing music, mournful Russian music, then with many wrinkles on your brow you will hold the book at arm's length.

"The Serbonian Bog," says Miss Fox, repeating the last lines of the dictation.

Your face is held sideways with what is called, I believe, a quizzical expression.

"Morocco," says she, "viewed from the banks of the Seine, is becoming more and more like the Serbonian Bog." Then she waits, discreet as always, while you think. Miss Fox, his thoughts are on the Adriatic!

There his boat, eleven years ago, was sailing underneath a net of stars and he was talking to a fellow-traveller. They had been joined at first by common suffering,—and how shall mortals find a stronger link? On board that boat there was an elderly American, the widow of a senator's brother-in-law, whose mission was, she took it, to convert those two. What specially attracted her to them was not, perhaps, that they excelled the other passengers in luridness, but that they had the privilege of understanding, more or less, her language.

"Feci quod potui," said Dr. Dillon, "faciant meliora potentes."

She said, and let us hope with truth, that recently a Chinaman, another object of her ministrations, had addressed her as "Your honour, the foreign devil." And this caused her to discuss the details of our final journey—in the meantime we have taken many others of a more delightful sort—and she assured us that we should be joined by Chinamen and all those Easterners. She had extremely little hope for any of them, and Abu'l-Ala, the Syrian poet, whom Dr. Dillon had been putting into English prose,—Abu'l-Ala she steadily refused to read. Nor did the prospect of beholding him in English verse evoke a sign of joy upon her countenance. "Oh," she exclaimed, "what good is it?" And there is naught for me to say but "Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes."

H. B.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West—the old world of Thought and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour. Finally, in thanking press and public for the very cordial reception given to the "Wisdom of the East" Series, they wish to state that no pains have been spared to secure the best specialists for the treatment of the various subjects at hand.

L. CRANMER-BYNG. S. A. KAPADIA.

NORTHBROOK SOCIETY, 158, PICCADILLY, W.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DIWAN

God help him who has no nails wherewith to scratch himself. *Arabian proverb*.

An effort has been made to render in this book some of the poems of Abu'l-Ala the Syrian, who was born 973 years after Jesus Christ and some forty-four before Omar Khayyam. But the life of such a man —his triumph over circumstance, the wisdom he achieved, his unconventionality, his opposition to revealed religion, the sincerity of his religion, his interesting friends at Baghdad and Ma'arri, the multitude of his disciples, his kindliness and cynic pessimism and the reverence which he enjoyed, the glory of his meditations, the renown of his prodigious memory, the fair renown of bending to the toil of public life, not to the laureateship they pressed upon him, but the post of being spokesman at Aleppo for the troubles of his native villagers,—the life of such a one could not be told within the space at our command; it will, with other of his poems, form the subject of a separate volume. What appears advisable is that we should devote this introduction to a commentary on the poems here translated; which we call a "diwan," by the way, because they are selected out of all his works. A commentary on the writings of a modern poet is supposed to be superfluous, but in the days of Abu'l-Ala of Ma'arri you were held to pay the highest compliment if, and you were yourself a poet, you composed a commentary on some other poet's work. Likewise you were held to be a thoughtful person if you gave the world a commentary on your own productions; and Abu'l-Ala did not neglect to write upon his *Sikt al-Zand* ("The Falling Spark of Tinder") and his *Lozum ma la Yalzam* ("The Necessity of what is Unnecessary"), out of which our diwan has been chiefly made. But his elucidations have been lost. And we—this nobody will contradict—have lost the old facility. For instance, Hasan ibn Malik ibn Abi Obaidah was one day attending on Mansur the Chamberlain, and he displayed a collection of proverbs which Ibn Sirri had made for the Caliph's delectation. "It is very fine," quoth Mansur, "but it wants a commentary." And Hasan in a week returned with a commentary, very well written, of three hundred couplets. One other observation: we shall not be able to present upon these pages a connected narrative, a dark companion of the poem, which is to the poem as a shadow to the bird. A mediæval Arab would have no desire to see this theory of connection put in practice—no, not even with a poem; for the lines, to win his admiration, would be as a company of stars much more than as a flying bird. Suppose that he produced a poem of a hundred lines, he would perchance make fifty leaps across the universe. But if we frown on such discursiveness, he proudly shows us that the hundred lines are all in rhyme. This Arab and ourselves—we differ so profoundly. "Yet," says he, "if there existed no diversity of sight then would inferior merchandise be left unsold." And when we put his poem into English, we are careless of the hundred rhymes; we paraphrase—"Behold the townsmen," so cried one of the Bedawi, "they have for the desert but a single word, we have a dozen!"—and we reject, as I have done, the quantitative metre, thinking it far preferable if the metre sings itself into an English ear, as much as possible with that effect the poet wants to give; and we oppose ourselves, however unsuccessfully, to his discursiveness by making alterations in the order of the poem. But in this commentary we shall be obliged to leap, like Arabs, from one subject to another. And so let us begin.

With regard to prayer (*quatrain* 1), the Moslem is indifferent as to whether he perform this function in his chamber or the street, considering that every spot is equally pure for the service of God. And yet the Prophet thought that public worship was to be encouraged; it was not a vague opinion, because he knew it was exactly five-and-twenty times more valuable than private prayer. It is related of al-Muzani that when he missed being present in the mosque he repeated his prayers twenty-five times. "He was a diver for subtle ideas," said the biographer Ibn Khallikan. And although our poet, quoting the Carmathians, here deprecates the common worship, he remarks in one of his letters that he would have gone to mosque on Fridays if he had not fallen victim to an unmentionable complaint. . . . The pre-Islamic Arabs were accustomed to sacrifice sheep (*quatrain* 1) and other animals in Mecca and elsewhere, at various stones which were regarded as idols or as altars of the gods.[1] Sometimes they killed a human being, such as the four hundred captive nuns of whom we read that they were sacrificed by al-Mundhir to the goddess Aphrodite. Sheep are offered up to-day in Palestine: for instance, if the first wife of a man is barren and the second wife has children, then the former vows that in return for a son she will give a lamb. Apparently when it was thought desirable to be particularly solemn a horse was sacrificed, and this we hear of with the Persians, Indians, and more western people. White was held to be the favourable colour, so we read in Herodotus (i. 189) that the Persians sacrificed white horses. In Sweden it was thought that a black lamb must be dedicated to the water sprite before he would teach any one to play the harp. As for the subsequent fate of the victim, Burton tells us that the Moslems do not look with favour on its being eaten. Unlike them, Siberian Buriats will sacrifice a sheep and boil the mutton and hoist it on a scaffold for the gods, and chant a song and then consume the meat. So, too, the zealous devil-worshippers of Travancore, whose diet is the putrid flesh of cattle and tigers, together with arrak and toddy and rice, which they have previously offered to their deities.

The words of Abu'l-Ala concerning day and night (*quatrain* 2) may be compared with what he says elsewhere:

These two, young for ever,

Speed into the West—
Our life in their clutches—
And give us no rest.

"Generation goeth and generation cometh," says Ecclesiastes, "while for ever the earth abideth. The sun riseth also and the sun goeth down and cometh panting back to his place where he riseth." . . . The early dawn, the time of scarlet eyes, was also when the caravan would be attacked. However, to this day the rising sun is worshipped by the Bedawi, despite the prohibition of Mahomet and despite the Moslem dictum that the sun rises between the devil's horns. Now the divinity of the stars (*quatrain* 4) had been affirmed by Plato and Aristotle; it was said that in the heavenly bodies dwelt a ruling intelligence superior to man's, and more lasting.[2] And in Islam, whose holy house, the Kaaba, had traditionally been a temple of Saturn, we notice that the rationalists invariably connect their faith with the worship of Venus and other heavenly bodies. We are told by ash-Shahrastani, in his *Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, that the Indians hold Saturn for the greatest luck, on account of his height and the size of his body. But such was not Abu'l-Ala's opinion. "As numb as Saturn," he writes in one of his letters,[3] "and as dumb as a crab has every one been struck by you." Elsewhere he says in verse:

If dark the night, old Saturn is a flash
Of eyes which threaten from a face of ash.

And the worship of Saturn, with other deities, is about a hundred years later resented by Clotilda, says Gregory of Tours, when she is moving Chlodovich her husband to have their son baptized. When the little boy dies soon after baptism, the husband does not fail to draw a moral. But misfortunes, in the language of an Arab poet, cling about the wretched even as a coat of mail (*quatrain* 6) is on the warrior. This image was a favourite among the Arabs, and when Ibn Khallikan wants to praise the verses of one As Suli, he informs us that they have the reputation of delivering from sudden evil any person who recites them frequently. When this evil is complete, with rings strongly riven, it passes away while he thinks that nothing can dispel it. . . . We have mention in this quatrain of a winding-sheet, and that could be of linen or of damask. The Caliph Solaiman was so fond of damask that every one, even the cook, was forced to wear it in his presence, and it clothed him in the grave. Yet he, like other Moslems (*quatrain* 10), would believe that he must undergo the fate recorded in a book. The expression that a man's destiny is written on his forehead, had its origin without a doubt, says Goldziher, in India. We have remarked upon the Indian ideas which had been gathered by Abu'l-Ala at Baghdad. There it was that he enjoyed the opportunity of seeing ships (*quatrain* 11). He spent a portion of his youth beside the sea, at Tripoli. But in the capital were many boats whose fascination he would not resist,— the Chinese junks laboriously dragged up from Bassora, and dainty gondolas of basket-work covered with asphalt.[4] However, though in this place and in others, very frequently, in fact, Abu'l-Ala makes mention of the sea, his fondness of it was, one thinks, for literary purposes. He writes a letter to explain how grieved he is to hear about a friend who purposes to risk himself upon the sea, and he recalls a certain verse: "Surely it is better to drink among the sand-heaps foul water mixed with pure than to venture on the sea." From Baghdad also he would carry home the Zoroastrian view (*quatrain* 14) that night was primordial and the light created. As a contrast with these foreign importations, we have reference (*quatrain* 15) to the lute, which was the finest of Arabian instruments. They said themselves that it was invented by a man who flourished in the year 500 B.C. and added an eighth string to the lyre. Certainly the Arab lute was popular among the Greeks: [Greek: arabion ar' egô kekinêka aulon], says Menander. It was carried to the rest of Europe by crusaders at the beginning of the twelfth century, about which time it first appears in paintings, and its form persisted till about a hundred years ago.[5] But with regard to travels (*quatrain* 18), in the twenty-seventh letter of Abu'l-Ala, "I observe," says he, "that you find fault with travelling. Why so? Ought not a man to be satisfied with following the precedent set by Moses, who, when he turned towards Midyan, said, Maybe the Lord will guide me?" (Koran 28, 21). Should a man be satisfied with what he hears from the philosopher al-Kindi? "In any single existing thing, if it is thoroughly known, we possess," he said, "a mirror in which we may behold the entire scheme of things" (*quatrain* 20). The same philosopher has laid it down that, "Verily there is nothing constant in this world of coming and going (*quatrain* 24), in which we may be deprived at any moment of what we love. Only in the world of reason is stability to be found. If then we desire to see our wishes fulfilled and would not be robbed of what is dear to us, we must turn to the eternal blessings of reason, to the fear of God, to science and to good works. But if we follow merely after material possessions in the belief that we can retain them, we are pursuing an object which does not really exist." . . . And this idea of transitoriness prevails so generally among the Arabs that the salad-seller recommends his transitory wares to pious folk by calling, "God is that which does not pass away!" So, too, the Arab pictures as a bird, a thing of transience, the human soul. In Syria the dove is often carved upon their ancient tombstones. And the Longobards among their graves erected poles in memory of kinsfolk who had died abroad or had been slain in battle; on the summit of the pole was a wooden image of a dove, whose head was pointed in the direction where the loved one lay buried. With us, as with Abu'l-Ala

(*quatrain* 26), the soul may metaphorically be imagined as a bird, but for the European's ancestor it was a thing of sober earnest, as it is to-day to many peoples. Thus the soul of Aristeas was seen to issue from his mouth in the shape of a raven.[6] In Southern Celebes they think that a bridegroom's soul is apt to fly away at marriage, wherefore coloured rice is scattered over him to induce it to remain. And, as a rule, at festivals in South Celebes rice is strewed on the head of the person in whose honour the festival is held, with the object of detaining his soul, which at such times is in especial danger of being lured away by envious demons.[7] . . . This metaphor was used by Abu'l-Ala in the letter which he wrote on the death of his mother: "I say to my soul, 'This is not your nest, fly away.'" And elsewhere (*quatrain* 34) Death is represented as a reaper. Says Francis Thompson:

The goodly grain and the sun-flushed sleeper
The reaper reaps, and Time the reaper.

It is interesting to find Death also called a sower, who disseminates weeds among men: "Dô der Tôt sînen Sâmen under si gesœte."

It was an ancient custom of the Arabs when they took an oath of special significance to plunge their hands into a bowl of perfume and distribute it among those who took part in the ceremony. Of the perfumes, musk (*quatrain* 38) was one which they affected most. Brought commonly from Turkistan, it was, with certain quantities of sandalwood and ambra, made into a perfume. And "the wounds of him who falls in battle and of the martyrs," said Mahomet, "shall on the Day of Judgment be resplendent with vermilion and odorous as musk." This was repeated by Ibnol Faradhi, who in the Kaaba entreated God for martyrdom and, when this prayer was heard, repented having asked. . . . This quatrain goes on to allude to things which can improve by being struck. There is in the third book of a work on cookery (so rare a thing, they tell us, that no MS. of it exists in England or in any other country that can be heard of) an observation by the eighteenth- century editor to the effect that it is a vulgar error to suppose that walnut-trees, like Russian wives, are all the better for a beating; the long poles and stones which are used by boys and others to get the fruit down, for the trees are very high, are used rather out of kindness to themselves than with any regard to the tree that bears it. This valued treatise, we may mention, is ascribed to Cœlius Apicius; its science, learning, and discipline were extremely condemned, and even abhorred by Seneca and the Stoics. . . . Aloes-wood does not emit a perfume until it is burned:

Lo! of hundreds who aspire
Eighties perish—nineties tire!
They who bear up, in spite of wrecks and wracks,
Were season'd by celestial hail of thwacks.

Fortune in this mortal race
Builds on thwackings for its base;
Thus the All-Wise doth make a flail a staff,
And separates his heavenly corn from chaff.[8]

Reward may follow on such absolute obedience (*quatrain* 40). We remember what is said by Fra Giovanni in the prison of Viterbo[9]: "Endurez, souffrez, acceptez, veuillez ce que Dieu veut, et votre volonté sera faite sur la terre comme au ciel." And perhaps the dawn for you may be your camel's dawn (*quatrain* 41); it was usual for Arabs on the point of death to say to their sons: "Bury my steed with me, so that when I rise from the grave I will not have to go on foot." The camel was tied with its head towards its hind legs, a saddle-cloth was wrapped about its neck, and it was left beside the grave until it died. Meanwhile, if the master is a true believer, says Mahomet, his soul has been divided from the body by Azrael, the angel of death. Afterwards the body is commanded to sit upright in the grave, there to be examined by the two black angels, Monkar and Nakyr (*quatrain* 42), with regard to his faith, the unity of God and the mission of Mahomet. If the answers be correct, the body stays in peace and is refreshed by the air of paradise; if incorrect, these angels beat the corpse upon his temples with iron maces, until he roars out for anguish so loudly that he is heard by all from east to west, except by men and jinn. Abu'l-Ala had little confidence in these two angels; he reminds one of St. Catherine of Sienna, a visionary with uncommon sense, who at the age of eight ran off one afternoon to be a hermit. She was careful to provide herself with bread and water, fearing that the angels would forget to bring her food, and at nightfall she ran home again because she was afraid her parents would be anxious. With regard to the angel of death, Avicenna has related that the soul, like a bird, escapes with much trouble from the snares of earth (*quatrain* 43), until this angel delivers it from the last of its fetters. We think of the goddess Rân with her net. Death is imagined (*quatrain* 44) as a fowler or fisher of men, thus: "Dô kam der Tôt als ein diep, und stal dem reinen wîbe daz leben ûz ir lîbe."[10]

On account of its brilliance a weapon's edge (*quatrain* 46) has been compared in Arab poetry with sunlit glass, with the torch of a monk, with the stars and with the flame in a dark night. Nor would an Arab turn to picturesque comparisons in poetry alone. Speaking of a certain letter, Abu'l-Ala assures

the man who wrote it that "it proceeds from the residence of the great doctor who holds the reins of prose and verse" (*quatrain* 50). Now with regard to glass, it was a very ancient industry among the Arabs. In the second century of the Hegira it was so far advanced that they could make enamelled glass and unite in one glass different colours. A certain skilled chemist of the period was not only expert in these processes (*quatrain* 52), but even tried to make of glass false pearls, whereon he published a pamphlet.

Death, from being a silent messenger who punctually fulfilled his duty, became a grasping, greedy foe (*quatrain* 56). In the Psalms (xci. 3-6) he comes as a hunter with snares and arrows. Also "der Tôt wil mit mir ringen."[11] In ancient times Death was not a being that slew, but simply one that fetched away to the underworld, a messenger. So was the soul of the beggar fetched away by angels and carried into Abraham's bosom. An older view was the death-goddess, who receives the dead men in her house and does not fetch them. They are left alone to begin the long and gloomy journey, provided with various things.[12] "Chacun remonte à son tour le calvaire des siècles. Chacun retrouve les peines, chacun retrouve l'espoir désespéré et la folie des siècles. Chacun remet ses pas dans les pas de ceux qui furent, de ceux qui luttèrent avant lui contre la mort, nièrant la mort,—sont morts"[13] (*quatrain* 57). It is the same for men and trees (*quatrain* 59). This vision of Abu'l-Ala's is to be compared with Milton's "men as trees walking," a kind of second sight, a blind man's pageant. In reference to haughty folk, an Arab proverb says that "There is not a poplar which has reached its Lord." But on the other hand, "There are some virtues which dig their own graves,"[14] and with regard to excessive polishing of swords (*quatrain* 60) we have the story of the poet Abu Tammam, related by Ibn Khallikan. He tells us how the poet once recited verses in the presence of some people, and how one of them was a philosopher who said, "This man will not live long, for I have seen in him a sharpness of wit and penetration and intelligence. From this I know that the mind will consume the body, even as a sword of Indian steel eats through its scabbard." Still, in Arabia, where swords were so generally used that a priest would strap one to his belt before he went into the pulpit, there was no unanimous opinion as to the polishing,—which, by the way, was done with wood. A poet boasted that his sword was often or was rarely polished, according as he wished to emphasise the large amount of work accomplished or the excellence of the polishing. Imru'al-Kais says that his sword does not recall the day when it was polished. Another poet says his sword is polished every day and "with a fresh tooth bites off the people's heads."[15] This vigour of expression was not only used for concrete subjects. There exists a poem, dating from a little time before Mahomet, which says that cares (*quatrain* 62) are like the camels, roaming in the daytime on the distant pastures and at night returning to the camp. They would collect as warriors round the flag. It was the custom for each family to have a flag (*quatrain* 65), a cloth fastened to a lance, round which it gathered. Mahomet's big standard was called the Eagle,—and, by the bye, his seven swords had names, such as "possessor of the spine."

With *quatrain* 68 we may compare the verses of a Christian poet, quoted by Tabari:

> And where is now the lord of Hadr, he that built it and laid
> taxes on the land of Tigris?
> A house of marble he established, whereof the covering was
> made of plaster; in the galbes were nests of birds.
> He feared no sorry fate. See, the dominion of him has departed.
> Loneliness is on his threshold.

"Consider how you treat the poor," said Dshafer ben Mahomet, who pilgrimaged from Mecca to Baghdad between fifty and sixty times; "they are the treasures of this world, the keys of the other." Take care lest it befall you as the prince (*quatrain* 69) within whose palace now the wind is reigning. "If a prince would be successful," says Machiavelli, "it is requisite that he should have a spirit capable of turns and variations, in accordance with the variations of the wind." Says an Arab mystic, "The sighing of a poor man for that which he can never reach has more of value than the praying of a rich man through a thousand years." And in connection with this quatrain we may quote Blunt's rendering of Zohair:

> I have learned that he who giveth nothing, deaf to his
> friends' begging,
> loosed shall be to the world's tooth-strokes: fools'
> feet shall tread on him.

As for the power of the weak, we have some instances from Abbaside history. One of the caliphs wanted to do deeds of violence in Baghdad. Scornfully he asked of his opponents if they could prevent him. "Yes," they answered, "we will fight you with the arrows of the night." And he desisted from his plans. Prayers, complaints, and execrations which the guiltless, fighting his oppressor, sends up to heaven are called the arrows of the night and are, the Arabs tell us, invariably successful. This belief may solace you for the foundation of suffering (*quatrain* 71), which, by the way, is also in the

philosophic system of Zeno the Stoic. Taking the four elements of Empedocles, he says that three of them are passive, or suffering, elements while only fire is active, and that not wholly. It was Zeno's opinion that everything must be active or must suffer. . . . An explanation for our suffering is given by Soame Jenyns, who flourished in the days when, as his editor could write, referring to his father Sir Roger Jenyns, "the order of knighthood was received by gentlemen with the profoundest gratitude." Soame's thesis is his "Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil," that human sufferings are compensated by the enjoyment possibly experienced by some higher order of beings which inflict them, is ridiculed by Samuel Johnson. We have Jenyns's assurance that

To all inferior animals 'tis given
To enjoy the state allotted them by Heav'n.

And (*quatrain* 75) we may profitably turn to Coleridge:

Oh, what a wonder seems the fear of death!
Seeing how gladly we all sink to sleep;
Babes, children, youths and men,
Night following night, for threescore years and ten.

We should be reconciled, says Abu'l-Ala (*quatrain* 76), even to the Christian kings of Ghassan, in the Hauran. These were the hereditary enemies of the kings of Hirah. On behalf of the Greek emperors of Constantinople they controlled the Syrian Arabs. But they disappeared before the triumphant Moslems, the last of their kings being Jabalah II., who was dethroned in the year 637. His capital was Bosra, on the road between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean. Nowadays the district is chiefly occupied by nomads; to the Hebrews it was known as Bashan, famous for its flocks and oak plantations. We can still discern the traces of troglodyte dwellings of this epoch. The afore-mentioned Jabalah was a convert to Islam, but, being insulted by a Mahometan, he returned to Christianity and betook himself to Constantinople, where he died. But in the time of Abu'l-Ala, the Ghassanites were again in the exercise of authority. "These were the kings of Ghassan," says Abu'l-Ala, "who followed the course of the dead; each of them is now but a tale that is told, and God knows who is good." A poet is a liar, say the Arabs, and the greatest poet is the greatest liar. But in this case Abu'l-Ala in prose was not so truthful as in poetry; for if Jabalah's house had vanished, the Ghassanites were still a power. The poet, for our consolation, has a simile (*quatrain* 77) that may be put against a passage of Homer:

As with autumnal harvests cover'd o'er,
And thick bestrown, lies Ceres' sacred floor,
When round and round, with never-weary'd pain
The trampling steers beat out th' unnumber'd grain:
So the fierce coursers, as the chariot rolls,
Tread down whole ranks, and crush out heroes' souls.[16]

For everything there is decay, and (*quatrain* 78) for the striped garment of a long cut which now we are unable to identify.

We read in the Wisdom of Solomon: "As when an arrow is shot at a mark, it parteth the air which immediately cometh together again, so that a man cannot know where it went through." In this place (*quatrain* 84), if the weapon's road of air is not in vain it will discover justice in the sky. How much the Arabs were averse from frigid justice is to be observed in the matter of recompense for slaying. There existed a regular tariff—so many camels or dates—but they looked askance upon the person who was willing to accept this and forgo his vengeance. If a man was anxious to accept a gift as satisfaction and at the same time to escape reproach, he shot an arrow into the air. Should it come down unspotted, he was able to accept the gift; if it was bloody, then he was obliged to seek for blood. The Arabs, by the way, had been addicted to an ancient game, but Islam tried to stamp this out, like other joys of life. The players had ten arrows, which they shot into the air; seven of them bestowed a right to the portion of a camel, the other three did not. Abu'l-Ala was fond of using arrows metaphorically. "And if one child," he writes to a distinguished sheikh, "were to ask another in the dead of night in a discussion: 'Who is rewarded for staying at home many times what he would be rewarded for going on either pilgrimage?' and the second lad answered: 'Mahomet, son of Sa'id,' his arrow would have fallen near the mark; for your protection of your subjects (*quatrain* 86) is a greater duty than either pilgrimage." And our poet calls to mind some benefits attached to slavery (*quatrain* 88): for an offence against morals a slave could receive fifty blows, whereas the punishment of a freeman was double. A married person who did not discharge his vows was liable to be stoned to death, whereas a slave in similar circumstances was merely struck a certain number of blows. It was and still is customary, says von Kremer, if anything is broken by a slave, forthwith to curse Satan, who is supposed to concern himself in very trifling matters. The sympathy Abu'l-Ala displays for men of small possessions may be put beside the modicum (*quatrain* 92) he wanted for himself. And these necessaries of Abu'l-Ala, the ascetic, must appeal to us as more

sincerely felt than those of Ibn at-Ta'awizi, who was of opinion that when seven things are collected together in the drinking-room it is not reasonable to stay away. The list is as follows: a melon, honey, roast meat, a young girl, wax lights, a singer, and wine. But Ibn at-Ta'awizi was a literary person, and in Arabic the names of all these objects begin with the same letter. Abu'l-Ala was more inclined to celebrate the wilderness. He has portrayed (*quatrain* 93) a journey in the desert where a caravan, in order to secure itself against surprises, is accustomed to send on a spy, who scours the country from the summit of a hill or rock. Should he perceive a sign of danger, he will wave his hand in warning. From Lebid's picture of another journey—which the pre-Islamic poet undertook to the coast lands of Hajar on the Persian Gulf—we learn that when they entered a village he and his party were greeted by the crowing of cocks and the shaking of wooden rattles (*quatrain* 95), which in the Eastern Christian Churches are substituted for bells. . . . And the mediæval leper, in his grey gown, was obliged to hold a similar object, waving it about and crying as he went: "Unclean! unclean!"

An ambitious man desired, regardless of expense, to hand down his name to posterity (*quatrain* 99). "Write your name in a prayer," said Epictetus, "and it will remain after you." "But I would have a crown of gold," was the reply. "If you have quite made up your mind to have a crown," said Epictetus, "take a crown of roses, for it is more beautiful." In the words of Heredia:

Déjà le Temps brandit l'arme fatale. As-tu
L'espoir d'éterniser le bruit de ta vertu?
Un vil lierre suffit à disjoindre un trophée;

Et seul, aux blocs épars des marbres triomphaux
Où ta gloire en ruine est par l'herbe étouffée,
Quelque faucheur Samnite ébréchera sa faulx.

Would we write our names so that they endure for ever? There was in certain Arab circles a heresy which held that the letters of the alphabet (*quatrain* 101) are metamorphoses of men. And Magaira, who founded a sect, maintained that the letters of the alphabet are like limbs of God. According to him, when God wished to create the world, He wrote with His own hands the deeds of men, both the good and the bad; but, at sight of the sins which men were going to commit, He entered into such a fury that He sweated, and from His sweat two seas were formed, the one of salt water and the other of sweet water. From the first one the infidels were formed, and from the second the Shi'ites. But to this view of the everlasting question you may possibly prefer what is advanced (*quatrains* 103-7) and paraphrased as an episode: Whatever be the wisdom of the worms, we bow before the silence of the rose. As for Abu'l-Ala, we leave him now prostrated (*quatrain* 108) before the silence of the rolling world. It is a splendour that was seen by Alfred de Vigny:

Je roule avec dédain, sans voir et sans entendre,
A côté des fourmis les populations;
Je ne distingue pas leur terrier de leur cendre.
J'ignore en les portant les noms des nations.
On me dit une mère et je suis une tombe.
Mon hiver prend vos morts comme son hécatombe,
Mon printemps n'entend pas vos adorations.

Avant vous j'étais belle et toujours parfumée,
J'abandonnais au vent mes cheveux tout entiers. . . .

Footnotes

[1] *Cf.* Lyall, *Ancient Arabian Poets*.

[2] *Cf.* Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists*.

[3] Of course I use Professor Margoliouth's superb edition of the letters.

[4] *Cf.* Thielmann, *Streifzüge im Kaukasus, etc*.

[5] *Cf.* Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik*, 1862.

[6] *Cf.* Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, vii. 174.

[7] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, vol. i., p. 254.

[8] Meredith, *The Shaving of Shagpat*.

[9] Anatole France, *Le Puits de Sainte Claire*.

[10] Quoted by Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. 2, p. 845.

[11] Stoufenb., 1126.

[12] *Cf*. in Scandinavia the death-goddess Hel.

[13] Romain Rolland, *Jean Christophe*.

[14] Ella d'Arcy, *Modern Instances*.

[15] Dr. Friedrich Wilhelm Schwarzlose, *Die Waffen der alten Araber, aus ihren Dichtern dargestellt*.

[16] Pope, *Iliad*, xx. 577.

THE DIWAN OF ABU'L-ALA

I

Abandon worship in the mosque and shrink
From idle prayer, from sacrificial sheep,
For Destiny will bring the bowl of sleep
Or bowl of tribulation—you shall drink.

II

The scarlet eyes of Morning are pursued
By Night, who growls along the narrow lane;
But as they crash upon our world the twain
Devour us and are strengthened for the feud.

III

Vain are your dreams of marvellous emprise,
Vainly you sail among uncharted spaces,
Vainly seek harbour in this world of faces
If it has been determined otherwise.

IV

Behold, my friends, there is reserved for me
The splendour of our traffic with the sky:
You pay your court to Saturn, whereas I
Am slain by One far mightier than he.

V

You that must travel with a weary load
Along this darkling, labyrinthine street—
Have men with torches at your head and feet
If you would pass the dangers of the road.

VI

So shall you find all armour incomplete
And open to the whips of circumstance,
That so shall you be girdled of mischance
Till you be folded in the winding-sheet.

VII

Have conversation with the wind that goes

Bearing a pack of loveliness and pain:
The golden exultation of the grain
And the last, sacred whisper of the rose

VIII

But if in some enchanted garden bloom
The rose imperial that will not fade,
Ah! shall I go with desecrating spade
And underneath her glories build a tomb?

IX

Shall I that am as dust upon the plain
Think with unloosened hurricanes to fight?
Or shall I that was ravished from the night
Fall on the bosom of the night again?

X

Endure! and if you rashly would unfold
That manuscript whereon our lives are traced,
Recall the stream which carols thro' the waste
And in the dark is rich with alien gold.

XI

Myself did linger by the ragged beach,
Whereat wave after wave did rise and curl;
And as they fell, they fell—I saw them hurl
A message far more eloquent than speech:

XII

We that with song our pilgrimage beguile,
With purple islands which a sunset bore,
We, sunk upon the sacrilegious shore,
May parley with oblivion awhile.

XIII

I would not have you keep nor idly flaunt
What may be gathered from the gracious land,
But I would have you sow with sleepless hand
The virtues that will balance your account.

XIV

The days are dressing all of us in white,
For him who will suspend us in a row.
But for the sun there is no death. I know
The centuries are morsels of the night.

XV

A deed magnanimous, a noble thought
Are as the music singing thro' the years
When surly Time the tyrant domineers
Against the lute whereoutof it was wrought.

XVI

Now to the Master of the World resign
  Whatever touches you, what is prepared,
  For many sons of wisdom are ensnared
And many fools in happiness recline.

XVII

Long have I tarried where the waters roll
  From undeciphered caverns of the main,
  And I have searched, and I have searched in vain,
Where I could drown the sorrows of my soul.

XVIII

If I have harboured love within my breast,
  'Twas for my comrades of the dusty day,
  Who with me watched the loitering stars at play,
Who bore the burden of the same unrest.

XIX

For once the witcheries a maiden flung—
  Then afterwards I knew she was the bride
  Of Death; and as he came, so tender-eyed,
I—I rebuked him roundly, being young.

XX

Yet if all things that vanish in their noon
  Are but the part of some eternal scheme,
  Of what the nightingale may chance to dream
Or what the lotus murmurs to the moon!

XXI

Have I not heard sagacious ones repeat
  An irresistibly grim argument:
  That we for all our blustering content
Are as the silent shadows at our feet.

XXII

Aye, when the torch is low and we prepare
  Beyond the notes of revelry to pass—
  Old Silence will keep watch upon the grass,
The solemn shadows will assemble there.

XXIII

No Sultan at his pleasure shall erect
  A dwelling less obedient to decay
  Than I, whom all the mysteries obey,
Build with the twilight for an architect.

XXIV

Dark leans to dark! the passions of a man
  Are twined about all transitory things,
  For verily the child of wisdom clings
More unto dreamland than Arabistan.

XXV

Death leans to death! nor shall your vigilance
  Prevent him from whate'er he would possess,
  Nor, brother, shall unfilial peevishness
Prevent you from the grand inheritance.

XXVI

Farewell, my soul!—bird in the narrow jail
  Who cannot sing. The door is opened! Fly!
  Ah, soon you stop, and looking down you cry
The saddest song of all, poor nightingale.

XXVII

Our fortune is like mariners to float
  Amid the perils of dim waterways;
  Shall then our seamanship have aught of praise
If the great anchor drags behind the boat?

XXVIII

Ah! let the burial of yesterday,
  Of yesterday be ruthlessly decreed,
  And, if you will, refuse the mourner's reed,
And, if you will, plant cypress in the way.

XXIX

As little shall it serve you in the fight
  If you remonstrate with the storming seas,
  As if you querulously sigh to these
Of some imagined haven of delight.

XXX

Steed of my soul! when you and I were young
  We lived to cleave as arrows thro' the night,—
  Now there is ta'en from me the last of light,
And wheresoe'er I gaze a veil is hung.

XXXI

No longer as a wreck shall I be hurled
  Where beacons lure the fascinated helm,
  For I have been admitted to the realm
Of darkness that encompasses the world.

XXXII

Man has been thought superior to the swarm
  Of ruminating cows, of witless foals
  Who, crouching when the voice of thunder rolls,
Are banqueted upon a thunderstorm.

XXXIII

But shall the fearing eyes of humankind
  Have peeped beyond the curtain and excel
  The boldness of a wondering gazelle
Or of a bird imprisoned in the wind?

XXXIV

Ah! never may we hope to win release
  Before we that unripeness overthrow,—
  So must the corn in agitation grow
Before the sickle sings the songs of peace.

XXXV

Lo! there are many ways and many traps
  And many guides, and which of them is lord?
  For verily Mahomet has the sword,
And he may have the truth—perhaps! *perhaps!*

XXXVI

Now this religion happens to prevail
  Until by that religion overthrown,—
  Because men dare not live with men alone,
But always with another fairy-tale.

XXXVII

Religion is a charming girl, I say;
  But over this poor threshold will not pass,
  For I may not unveil her, and alas!
The bridal gift I can't afford to pay.

XXXVIII

I have imagined that our welfare is
  Required to rise triumphant from defeat;
  And so the musk, which as the more you beat,
Gives ever more delightful fragrancies.

XXXIX

For as a gate of sorrow-land unbars
  The region of unfaltering delight,
  So may you gather from the fields of night
That harvest of diviner thought, the stars.

XL

Send into banishment whatever blows
  Across the waves of your tempestuous heart;
  Let every wish save Allah's wish depart,
And you will have ineffable repose.

XLI

My faith it is that all the wanton pack
  Of living shall be—hush, poor heart!—withdrawn,
  As even to the camel comes a dawn
Without a burden for his wounded back.

XLII

If there should be some truth in what they teach
  Of unrelenting Monkar and Nakyr,
  Before whose throne all buried men appear—
Then give me to the vultures, I beseech.

XLIII

Some yellow sand all hunger shall assuage
  And for my thirst no cloud have need to roll,
  And ah! the drooping bird which is my soul
No longer shall be prisoned in the cage.

XLIV

Life is a flame that flickers in the wind,
  A bird that crouches in the fowler's net—
  Nor may between her flutterings forget
That hour the dreams of youth were unconfined.

XLV

There was a time when I was fain to guess
  The riddles of our life, when I would soar
  Against the cruel secrets of the door,
So that I fell to deeper loneliness.

XLVI

One is behind the draperies of life,
  One who will tear these tanglements away—
  No dark assassin, for the dawn of day
Leaps out, as leapeth laughter, from the knife.

XLVII

If you will do some deed before you die,
  Remember not this caravan of death,
  But have belief that every little breath
Will stay with you for an eternity.

XLVIII

Astrologers!—give ear to what they say!
  "The stars be words; they float on heaven's breath
  And faithfully reveal the days of death,
And surely will reveal that longer day."

XLIX

I shook the trees of knowledge. Ah! the fruit
  Was fair upon the bleakness of the soil.
  I filled a hundred vessels with my spoil,
And then I rested from the grand pursuit.

L

Alas! I took me servants: I was proud
  Of prose and of the neat, the cunning rhyme,
  But all their inclination was the crime
Of scattering my treasure to the crowd.

LI

And yet—and yet this very seed I throw
  May rise aloft, a brother of the bird,
  Uncaring if his melodies are heard—
Or shall I not hear anything below?

LII

The glazier out of sounding Erzerûm,
  Frequented us and softly would conspire
  Upon our broken glass with blue-red fire,
As one might lift a pale thing from the tomb.

LIII

He was the glazier out of Erzerûm,
  Whose wizardry would make the children cry—
  There will be no such wizardry when I
Am broken by the chariot-wheels of Doom.

LIV

The chariot-wheels of Doom! Now, hear them roll
  Across the desert and the noisy mart,
  Across the silent places of your heart—
Smile on the driver you will not cajole.

LV

I never look upon the placid plain
  But I must think of those who lived before
  And gave their quantities of sweat and gore,
And went and will not travel back again.

LVI

Aye! verily, the fields of blandishment
  Where shepherds meditate among their cattle,
  Those are the direst of the fields of battle,
For in the victor's train there is no tent.

LVII

Where are the doctors who were nobly fired
  And loved their toil because we ventured not,
  Who spent their lives in searching for the spot
To which the generations have retired?

LVIII

"Great is your soul,"—these are the words they preach,—
  "It passes from your framework to the frame
  Of others, and upon this road of shame
Turns purer and more pure."—Oh, let them teach!

LIX

I look on men as I would look on trees,
  That may be writing in the purple dome
  Romantic lines of black, and are at home
Where lie the little garden hostelries.

LX

Live well! Be wary of this life, I say;
  Do not o'erload yourself with righteousness.
  Behold! the sword we polish in excess,
We gradually polish it away.

LXI

God who created metal is the same
  Who will devour it. As the warriors ride
  With iron horses and with iron pride—
Come, let us laugh into the merry flame.

LXII

But for the grandest flame our God prepares
  The breast of man, which is the grandest urn;
  Yet is that flame so powerless to burn
Those butterflies, the swarm of little cares.

LXIII

And if you find a solitary sage
  Who teaches what is truth—ah, then you find
  The lord of men, the guardian of the wind,
The victor of all armies and of age.

LXIV

See that procession passing down the street,
  The black and white procession of the days—
  Far better dance along and bawl your praise
Than if you follow with unwilling feet.

LXV

But in the noisy ranks you will forget
  What is the flag. Oh, comrade, fall aside
  And think a little moment of the pride
Of yonder sun, think of the twilight's net.

LXVI

The songs we fashion from our new delight
  Are echoes. When the first of men sang out,
  He shuddered, hearing not alone the shout
Of hills but of the peoples in the night.

LXVII

And all the marvels that our eyes behold
  Are pictures. There has happened some event
  For each of them, and this they represent—
Our lives are like a tale that has been told.

LXVIII

There is a palace, and the ruined wall
  Divides the sand, a very home of tears,
  And where love whispered of a thousand years
The silken-footed caterpillars crawl.

LXIX

And where the Prince commanded, now the shriek
  Of wind is flying through the court of state:
  "Here," it proclaims, "there dwelt a potentate
Who could not hear the sobbing of the weak."

LXX

Beneath our palaces the corner-stone
  Is quaking. What of noble we possess,
  In love or courage or in tenderness,
Can rise from our infirmities alone.

LXXI

We suffer—that we know, and that is all
  Our knowledge. If we recklessly should strain
  To sweep aside the solid rocks of pain,
Then would the domes of love and courage fall.

LXXII

But there is one who trembles at the touch
  Of sorrow less than all of you, for he
  Has got the care of no big treasury,
And with regard to wits not overmuch.

LXXIII

I think our world is not a place of rest,
  But where a man may take his little ease,
  Until the landlord whom he never sees
Gives that apartment to another guest.

LXXIV

Say that you come to life as 'twere a feast,
  Prepared to pay whatever is the bill
  Of death or tears or—surely, friend, you will
Not shrink at death, which is among the least?

LXXV

Rise up against your troubles, cast away
  What is too great for mortal man to bear.
  But seize no foolish arms against the share
Which you the piteous mortal have to pay.

LXXVI

Be gracious to the King. You cannot feign
  That nobody was tyrant, that the sword
  Of justice always gave the just award
Before these Ghassanites began to reign.

LXXVII

You cultivate the ranks of golden grain,
  He cultivates the cavaliers. They go
  With him careering on some other foe,
And your battalions will be staunch again.

LXXVIII

The good law and the bad law disappear
  Below the flood of custom, or they float
  And, like the wonderful Sar'aby coat,
They captivate us for a little year.

LXXIX

God pities him who pities. Ah, pursue
  No longer now the children of the wood;
  Or have you not, poor huntsman, understood
That somebody is overtaking you?

LXXX

God is above. We never shall attain
  Our liberty from hands that overshroud;
  Or can we shake aside this heavy cloud
More than a slave can shake aside the chain?

LXXXI

"There is no God save Allah!"—that is true,
  Nor is there any prophet save the mind
  Of man who wanders through the dark to find
The Paradise that is in me and you.

LXXXII

The rolling, ever-rolling years of time
  Are as a diwan of Arabian song;
  The poet, headstrong and supremely strong,
Refuses to repeat a single rhyme.

LXXXIII

An archer took an arrow in his hand;
  So fair he sent it singing to the sky
  That he brought justice down from—ah, so high!
He was an archer in the morning land.

LXXXIV

The man who shot his arrow from the west
  Made empty roads of air; yet have I thought
  Our life was happier until we brought
This cold one of the skies to rule the nest.

LXXXV

Run! follow, follow happiness, the maid
  Whose laughter is the laughing waterfall;
  Run! call to her—but if no maiden call,
'Tis something to have loved the flying shade.

LXXXVI

You strut in piety the while you take
  That pilgrimage to Mecca. Now beware,
  For starving relatives befoul the air,
And curse, O fool, the threshold you forsake.

LXXXVII

How man is made! He staggers at the voice,
  The little voice that leads you to the land
  Of virtue; but, on hearing the command
To lead a giant army, will rejoice.

LXXXVIII

Behold the cup whereon your slave has trod;
  That is what every cup is falling to.
  Your slave—remember that he lives by you,
While in the form of him we bow to God.

LXXXIX

The lowliest of the people is the lord
  Who knows not where each day to make his bed,
  Whose crown is kept upon the royal head
By that poor naked minister, the sword.

XC

Which is the tyrant? say you. Well, 'tis he
  That has the vine-leaf strewn among his hair
  And will deliver countries to the care
Of courtesans—but I am vague, you see.

XCI

The dwellers of the city will oppress
  Your days: the lion, a fight-thirsty fool,
  The fox who wears the robe of men that rule—
So run with me towards the wilderness.

XCII

Our wilderness will be the laughing land,
  Where nuts are hung for us, where nodding peas
  Are wild enough to press about our knees,
And water fills the hollow of our hand.

XCIII

My village is the loneliness, and I
  Am as the travellers through the Syrian sand,
  That for a moment see the warning hand
Of one who breasted up the rock, their spy.

XCIV

Where is the valiance of the folk who sing
  These valiant stories of the world to come?
  Which they describe, forsooth! as if it swum
In air and anchored with a yard of string.

XCV

Two merchantmen decided they would battle,
  To prove at last who sold the finest wares;
  And while Mahomet shrieked his call to prayers,
The true Messiah waved his wooden rattle.

XCVI

Perchance the world is nothing, is a dream,
  And every noise the dreamland people say
  We sedulously note, and we and they
May be the shadows flung by what we seem.

XCVII

Zohair the poet sang of loveliness
  Which is the flight of things. Oh, meditate
  Upon the sorrows of our earthly state,
For what is lovely we may not possess.

XCVIII

Heigho! the splendid air is full of wings,
  And they will take us to the—friend, be wise
  For if you navigate among the skies
You too may reach the subterranean kings.

XCIX

Now fear the rose! You travel to the gloom
  Of which the roses sing and sing so fair,
  And, but for them, you'd have a certain share
In life: your name be read upon the tomb.

C

There is a tower of silence, and the bell
  Moves up—another man is made to be.
  For certain years they move in company,
But you, when fails your song do fail as well.

CI

No sword will summon Death, and he will stay
  For neither helm nor shield his falling rod.
  We are the crooked alphabet of God,
And He will read us ere he wipes away.

CII

How strange that we, perambulating dust,
  Should be the vessels of eternal fire,
  That such unfading passion of desire
Should be within our fading bodies thrust.

CIII

Deep in a silent chamber of the rose
There was a fattened worm. He looked around,
Espied a relative and spoke at him:
It seems to me this world is very good.

CIV

A most unlovely world, said brother worm,
For all of us are piteous prisoners.
And if, declared the first, your thought is true,
And this a prison be, melikes it well.

CV

So well that I shall weave a song of praise
And thankfulness because the world was wrought
For us and with such providential care—
My brother, I will shame you into singing.

CVI

Then, cried the second, I shall raise a voice
And see what poor apologies are made.
And so they sang, these two, for many days,
And while they sang the rose was beautiful.

CVII

But this affected not the songful ones,
And evermore in beauty lived the rose.
And when the worms were old and wiser too,
They fell to silence and humility.

CVIII

A night of silence! 'Twas the swinging sea
  And this our world of darkness. And the twain
  Rolled on below the stars; they flung a chain
Around the silences which are in me.

CIX

The shadows come, and they will come to bless
  Their brother and his dwelling and his fame,
  When I shall soil no more with any blame
Or any praise the silence I possess.

APPENDIX

ON THE NAME ABU'L-ALA

Arab names have always been a stumbling-block, and centuries ago there was a treatise written which was called "The Tearing of the Veil from before Names and Patronymics." Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Jarit al-Misri is a fair example of the nomenclature; here we have the patronymic (Abu Bakr—father of Bakr), the personal name (Ahmad), the surname (ibn Jarit—son of Jarit), and the ethnic name (al-Misri—native of Egypt). In addition, they made use of fancy names if they were poets (such as Ssorrdorr, the sack of pearls, who died in the year 1072), names connoting kindred, habitation (such as Ahmad al-Maidani, the great collector of proverbs, who lived near the Maidan, the race-course of Naisapur), faith or trade or personal defects (such as a caliph who was called the father of flies, since on account of his offensive breath no fly would rest upon his lip), and finally they gave each other names of honour (such as sword of the empire, helper of the empire, etc.). Then the caliph gave, as a distinction, double titles and, when these became too common, triple titles. ("In this way," says al-Biruni, "the matter is opposed to sense and clumsy to the last degree, so that a man who says the titles is fatigued when he has scarcely started and he runs the risk of being late for prayer.") . . . The patronymic was, of all of these, the most in favour. At first it was assumed when the eldest son was born; when Bakr came into the world his father took the name of Abu Bakr, and acquired a new importance. This was not by any means peculiar to the Arabs: "O Queen," says Das, a king of Indian folk-song, "O Queen, the name of childless has departed from me." When the Arab had no son, he used an honorific patronymic (such as Abu'l-Ala, father of excellence, or Abu'l-Feda, father of redemption). At times this manufactured patronymic was a thing of mockery, more or less gentle (such as a companion of the Prophet who was fond of cats, and was entitled "father of the cat"). The prevalence among the Arabs of the patronymic is immediately noticed, (a camel is the father of Job; a strongly built person is the father of the locust; a licentious person is the father of the night; and there are multitudes of such formations). . . . With regard to surnames, it was not the custom always for them to denote that so-and-so was the son of his father's family. "Who is your father?" says an Arab to the mule, and he replies, "The horse is my maternal uncle." So there are some people who, for shame, prefer that we should think of them as members of their mother's family. . . .

The following additional quatrains may be quoted:

Unasking have we come,—too late, too soon
Unasking from this plot of earth are sent.

But we, the sons of noble discontent,
Use half our lives in asking for the moon.

("We all sorely complain," says Seneca, "of the shortness of time, and yet have much more than we know what to do with. Our lives are either spent in doing nothing at all or in doing nothing to the purpose, or in doing nothing that we ought to do. We are always complaining that our days are few, and acting as though there would be no end of them.")

So then your hand has guarded me! Be blessed,
And, if you like such reading, read, I pray,
Through Moses' book, or credit them who say
That old Isaiah's hand is far the best.

Some day, some day the potter shall return
Into the dust. O potter, will you make
An earth which I would not refuse to take,
Or such unpleasant earth as you would spurn?

Then out of that—men swear with godly skill—
Perchance another potter may devise
Another pot, a piece of merchandise
Which they can love and break, if so they will.

And from a resting-place you may be hurled
And from a score of countries may be thrust—
Poor brother, you the freeman of the dust,
Like any slave are flung about the world.

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