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TRANSLATIONS
OF
ANCIENT ARABIAN POETRY

CHIEFLY PRÆ-ISLAMIC

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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*Wa'inna 'ash'ara baitin 'anta kâ'iluhû
baitun yukâlu, 'idhâ 'anshadtahû,—Sadakâ!*

Of all the verses which thou hast made the fairest in praise
is that whereof, when they hear, men say—'Yes, that is the Truth!'
ZUNAIR.



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XII.

‘ABD-AL-MALIK SON OF ‘ABD-AR-RAHĪM, OF THE BANU-D-DAYYĀN.

When a man stains not his honour by doing a deed of shame,
 whatso be the raiment he wears, fair is it and comely ;
 And if he takes not on his soul the burden of loss and toil,
 there lies not before him any road to praise and glory.
 She cast blame on us that our number was little to count and few :
 I answered her—‘ Yea : the count of noble men is little.
 ‘ But not few canst thou call those whose remnants are like to us
 —young men who vie with the old in the quest of glory.
 ‘ It hurts us nought that we be few, when our friend by us
 is safe, though the friends of most men beside be trampled ;
 ‘ A mountain we have where dwells he whom we shelter there,
 lofty, before whose height the eye falls back blunted :
 ‘ Deep-based is its root below ground, while overhead there soars
 its peak to the stars of heaven whereto no man reaches.
 ‘ A folk are we who deem it no shame to be slain in fight,
 though that be the deeming thereof of Salūl and ‘Āmir ;
 ‘ Our love of death brings near to us our days of doom,
 but their dooms shrink from death and stand far distant.
 ‘ There dies among us no lord a quiet death in his bed,
 and never is blood of us poured forth without vengeance.
 ‘ Our souls stream forth in a flood from the edge of the whetted swords :
 no otherwise than so does our spirit leave its mansion.
 ‘ Pure is our stock, unsullied : fair is it kept and bright
 by mothers whose bed bears well, and fathers mighty.
 ‘ To the best of the Uplands we wend, and when the season comes,
 we travel adown to the best of fruitful valleys.
 ‘ Like rain of the heaven are we : there is not in all our line
 one blunt of heart, nor among us is counted a niggard.

- ' We say nay whenso we will to the words of other men :
 but no man to us says nay when we give sentence.
- ' When passes a lord of our line, in his stead there rises straight
 a lord to say the say and do the deeds of the noble.
- ' Our beacon is never quenched to the wanderer of the night,
 nor has ever a guest blamed us where men meet together.
- ' Our Days are famous among our foemen, of fair report,
 branded and blazed with glory like noble horses.
- ' Our swords have swept throughout all lands both West and East,
 and gathered many a notch from the steel of hauberk-wearers ;
- ' Not used are they when drawn to be laid back in their sheaths
 before that the folk they meet are spoiled and scattered.
- ' If thou knowest not, ask men what they think of us and them :
 —not alike are he that knows and he that knows not.
- ' The children of ad-Dayyân are the shaft of their people's mill :
 around them it turns and whirls, while they stand midmost.'

NOTES.

The metre imitates, though with considerable irregularity, a variety of the *Tawîl* in which the second line of each couplet is catalectic.

The author was one of the noble house of ad-Dayyân, the chief family of the Christian Hârithis of Najrân (see notes to No. V.). Before the days of al-Islâm, the Banu-l-Hârith ibn Ka'b were engaged in constant strife with the Banû 'Âmir ibn Sa'sa'ah, and fought with them many bloody battles: this explains the reference to 'Âmir (to which Salûl was a brother tribe) in line 16. In the ninth year of the Hijrah a deputation from these Christians of Najrân visited the Prophet at al-Madinah, consisting of forty ecclesiastics headed by a bishop, and twenty laymen (among whom were 'Abd-al-Masih and Kais, sons of 'Abd-al-Madân and grandsons of ad-Dayyân). After a lively discussion, of which we have unfortunately only the report from the Muslim side, the Christians obtained from Muḥammad a treaty securing to them, on payment of tribute, the free exercise of their religion. This treaty was renewed by Abû-Bakr after the Prophet's death; but 'Omar, in pursuance of Muḥammad's dying injunction that none but Muslims should be left to dwell in Arabia, removed the Christian Hârithis to Syria, where they received lands near the Jordan in exchange for those they surrendered in Najrân. It was to these emigrants for their faith that the author of the poem given above belonged.



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