ANOTHER WEST-EAST DIVAN.*

BY R. H. STODDARD.

THE first specimen of Eastern poetry in the English language with which I am acquainted was sent in a letter of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's to Pope, in April, 1717. It was a copy of verses from the Turkish and was addressed by its reputed author, Ibrahim Pasha, to the eldest daughter of Acmet III, his contracted wife, whom he was not yet permitted to see without witnesses, though she had gone home to his house. "He is a man of wit and learning," Lady Mary wrote, "and whether or no he is capable of writing good verse, on such an occasion, he would not want the assistance of the best poets in the empire." As I am not writing the history of West-East Divans, I shall only say of this piece that it preserved the sense and spirit of its original in a fashion that must have seemed barbaric to the polished translator of the Iliad. "It is a very pretty poem, Mr. Pope," said the great Bentley, "but you must not call it Homer."

* PEARLS OF THE FAITH; or, Islam's Rosary. Being the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah. With comments in verse from various Oriental sources. By EDWIN ARNOLD, C. S. I., pp. 269. Boston: Roberts Brothers. 1883.

If anything other than the Orientalism by which she was surrounded when she penned this letter led Lady Mary to procure the poem, of which she sent a translation to Pope, it was probably Galland's French paraphrase of "The Thousand and One Nights," which the lovers of Polite Literature, as it was then called, were reading throughout Europe, and which, rendered into other European tongues, has not yet lost its vogue. It was as good a rendering as could have been expected at the beginning of the eighteenth century; quite as good of its kind as Pope's Homer or Dryden's Virgil. Careful students of English letters will readily recall various forms of Orientalism therein at this period, one being the famous "Vision of Mirza," in *The Spectator*, another "The Hermit" of Parnell (which he found in some collection like the Gesta Romanorum, if not the Gesta Romanorum itself), and a third the "Persian Eclogues" of Collins, which are about as absurd as the "Pastorals" of Pope and Philips. To a later date, if my memory is not at fault, belongs the once incomparable "Rasselas," of Dr. Johnson, and to a still later one the various Orientalities of Mr., afterward Sir William Jones, who was not entirely ignorant of the languages that he professed to translate from. Measured by the standards of to-day, he was proficient, rather than profound; the word elegant describes his knowledge and his work. He paraphrased what he called a "Chinese Ode" and a "Turkish Ode"; he Latinized Odes "Sinica," "Persica," and "Arabica"; and he wrote some eight or ten Hindu Hymns, which he, no doubt, thought were inspired by his Sanskrit studies. Everything that we now know to be characteristic of the East, everything that differentiates the East from the West is absent from his fluent pages. His most successful rendering, which he entitled a "Persian Song of Hafiz," is no more like Hafiz than it is like Moore, or his early *alter ego*, Little. It is remembered, however, for one good line, which, by the way, is not in the original:

"Orient pearls at random strung."

It was not, I think, in England, but in Germany, that the true Spirit of the Orient was first felt as an influence and as a permanent element in Literature, in the last quarter of the last century in Lessing's "Nathan the Wise," in the first quarter of the present century in Von Hammer's Eastern Translations, notably his translation of Hafiz, of which Goethe thought so highly, in Goethe's "West-Eastern Divan," and, a little later, in Rückert's "Wisdom of the Brahmin." If there is anything in English literature during this period which can be said in any sense to resemble these productions, I have never seen it and I do not believe that it exists. What the English mind failed to find in the Orient in the days of Collins and Johnson and Sir William Jones, it equally failed to find in the days of Byron and Moore, who perceived only the superficies—Byron in "The Giaour," and "The Bride of Abydos" and Moore in "Lalla Rook." The East of the bazar and the harem is one thing; the East of Mohammed, of Buddha, of Zoroaster is another and a very different thing. It is the home of mysticism and asceticism, the birthplace of religions, the cradle of the race itself.

We are, at last, admitted into the primitive, the generative, East, the admirers of Mr. Edwin Arnold declare, and it is he who has admitted us there. That we are free in that dim Old World now we own; but we deny that our freedom there is at all due to Mr. Arnold or his poetry. The genius of Emerson made us at home there thirty-six years ago, when he published his "Saadi" and his two translations from Hafiz; the genius of Dean Trench welcomed us kindly there, forty years ago, when he published his "Poems from Eastern Sources"; and Leigh Hunt, who must have preceded both in his "Abou Ben-Adhem"—we can never repay that delightful poet for taking his own from the D'Herbelot and the Talmud. As there were great men before Agamemnon, so there were great West-Eastern poets in England before Mr. Arnold, who is the last and the least of that shining choir, singing hoarser songs than theirs, and playing discordantly upon a very imperfect instrument.

Mr. Arnold is better prepared to be the poet of the East than any of his melodious contemporaries; better prepared, that is, in that he is familiar with the portion of it which is embraced in India. He has been principal of the Government Sanskrit College at Poona; he has translated "The Hitopadesa," with vocabulary in Sanskrit, English, and Marathi; he has written several prose works that touch upon Eastern matters, among others one upon education in India; and, lastly, within the last seven years, he has written three different volumes of verse, an "Oriental Trilogy," in which he has striven to interest us in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism: first, "The Indian Song of Songs"; second, "The Light of Asia"; and, third, "The Pearls of the Faith," which are very much at random strung. Of the first two we shall not speak, further than to say that "The Light of Asia" is more readable than "The Indian Song of Songs," and that the interest which it possesses is such as to entitle it to our human, as well as our ethical sympathy. As a narrative poem it has considerable merit.

The opening paragraph of Mr. Arnold's preface states the intention of his book. "It is the custom of many pious Moslems to employ in their devotions a three-stringed chaplet, each string containing thirty-three beads, and each bead representing one of the 'ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah,' whenever this among other religious uses is made of it. The Koran bids them 'celebrate Allah with an abundant celebration,' and on certain occasions, such as during the intervals of the Tárawih night service in Ramadhán, the Faithful pass these ninety-nine beads of the rosary through their fingers, repeating with each 'Name of God,' an ejaculation of praise and worship. Such an exercise is called *Tikr*, or 'remembrance,' and the rosary, *Masba'hah*." Mr. Arnold enumerates these "beautiful names," and, from the point of view of an Indian Mohammedan, illustrates each from some legend, tradition, record, or comment, drawn from diverse Oriental sources, occasionally paraphrasing from the text of the Koran any particular passage containing the Sacred Title or casting light upon it. This is what he has sought to do, and what he has done as well as he could, though not, we are persuaded, as well as he might have done if he had taken more time (it was written, he says, during a brief summer rest from politics and with no library near at hand for reference), and had been a better poet than he is, if he can be said to be a poet, in spite of his forty years' practice in verse. To begin with Mr. Arnold's paraphrases from the Koran, let us see whether they are as close as possible (he, at least, promises that) or whether they are loose and slovenly. Here is his fifty-eighth illustration of a Divine Name (*Ah Muhsi*), "The Accountant."

"When earth shall quake with quaking,
And cast her burden forth
Of corpses—and live men
Shall ask, with terror shaking,
'What aileth Earth?' that day,
She shall reply, and say
That which her Lord commands:
And men shall come in bands,
This side and that side, ranged to show
Their works and the account to know,
And he that wrought of good a red ant's weight
Shall see it writ;
And who did evil, aye! as the skin of a date
Shall witness it."

And here is the original, as translated by that excellent Arabic scholar, Mr. Stanley Lane-Poole, from the ninety-ninth sura or chapter of the Koran:

"When the earth shall quake with her quaking,
And when the earth hath cast forth her burdens,
And man shall say 'What aileth her?'
On that day she shall tell out her tidings,
Because thy Lord doth inspire her.
On that day shall men come in companies to behold their works.
And whosoever hath wrought an ant's weight of good shall behold it,
And whosoever hath wrought an ant's weight of evil shall behold it."

Here is a portion of another of Mr. Arnold's close paraphrases:

"But sweet for him who was faithful, and feared the face of his God,
Are the Gardens of Joy preparing, and the gates of the Golden Abode:
Which bounty of his Lord will he deny?

With leafy, branching fruit trees are set those Gardens twain,
And softly the streamlets warble and lightly the fountains rain:
Which bounty of his Lord will he deny?

And the fruit of the Golden Gardens swings delicate, near to reach.
Where they rest on their broidered couches, hearing delightful speech:
Which bounty of his Lord will they deny?

Therein are the shy-faced maidens, refraining their night-black eyes
From any save that glad lover whose joy is their Paradise:
Which bounty of their Lord will they deny?

From any but that glad lover, that happy lord for whom
Their mouths of pearl rain kisses, their lips of ruby bloom.
Which bounty of their Lord will they deny?

Shall the wages of righteous doing be less than the promise given?
Nay! but by God, the Glorious, the rest shall be be paid in Heaven!
Which bounty of their Lord shall they deny?"

And here is the original from the fifty-fifth chapter of the Koran, or the substance of it; for it hardly seems worth while to repeat the refrain, which is: "*Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye twain deny?*" The twain being mankind and the jinn (or genii).

"But for him who feareth the majesty of his Lord [shall be] two gardens:
With trees branched over:
And therein two flowing wells:
And therein of every fruit two kinds:
Reclining on couches with linings of brocade and the fruit of the gardens to their hand:
Therein the shy-eyed maidens neither man nor jinn hath touched before:
Like rubies and pearls:
Shall the reward of good be aught but good?"

And here is a third paraphrase, which ought to be the best of all, since it professes to represent the famous "Throne Verse" in the second chapter of the Koran.

"Allah! there is none other God but He,
The Living God, the Self-subsistent One;
Weariness cometh not to Him, nor sleep;
And whatso is belongs to Him alone
In heaven and Earth; who is it intercedes
With Him, save if he please? He is aware
What is before them, and what after them,
And they of all His knowledge nothing share
Save what He will vouchsafe. His throne's foundation
Sits splendid, high above the earth and sky,
Which to sustain gives him no meditation:
Mightiest He is, Supreme in Majesty."

As an exercise in verse that is very slovenly, but perhaps it is close to the original. Let us see:

"God! There is no God, but He the Living, the Steadfast. Slumber seizeth Him not, nor sleep. Whatsoever is in the heavens, and whatsoever is in the earth, is His. Who is there shall plead with Him save by His leave? He knoweth what was before them and what shall come after them, and they compass not aught of His knowledge but what He willeth. His throne overspreadeth the heavens and the earth, and the keeping of both is no burden to Him. And He is the High, the Great!"

If the ambition of Mr. Arnold had prompted him to undertake the translation of the most famous Ode of Anacreon, or Horace, with which all his cultured countrymen are supposed to be familiar, he would have taken more pains, I think, than he did with the "Throne Verse," of which he incautiously gives a prose version, which, all things considered, is not so idiomatic as that of Mr. Stanley Lane Poole.

There are, it seems to me, at least two poetic elements in Oriental Literature—the element of ethics, which is its Soul, and the element of story, which is its Body. Mr. Arnold is incapacitated from perceiving the first, though he has an uncertain grasp upon the last. He feels what is material, but he does not feel what is spiritual in Eastern Thought. It follows from this, then, that the poems in his collection which are based upon stories and apologues are better than those which are based upon ethics; and this, I imagine, will probably be the final judgment of Mr. Arnold's fervent admirers. He is a learned, hard-headed Englishman, who wishes to exploit what he knows or thinks he knows about the Orient, and who writes without serious and leisurely preparation. He has several poetic gifts; but he is not, I think, a poet, for, in all his work that I have seen—certainly throughout his Oriental Trilogy — the beautiful thought and the felicitous expression which are the body and soul of poetry are conspicuous by their absence.

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