CHAPTER II

THE MEDITATIONS OF MA'ARRÍ.

ما زلت في الغمارات ليست بخالص
من ملا فاشت علي رجاك أو قط

Hope as thou wilt in heat or cold,
It matters not amidst the surge
Of woes that whelmed thee from of old
And whence thou never canst emerge.

ABU 'L-'ALÁ AL-MA'ARRÍ.

The name of Abu 'l-Álá al-Ma'arri¹ is not one of those which any body of educated Moslems would be likely to receive with placid approbation or polite indifference; and readers of this essay will feel, though less acutely, that the words of the old blind poet, who died in Syria eight hundred and sixty years ago, ring out to-day as a challenge to deep and irreconcilable antagonisms in the nature of mankind. Is life to be desired or death? Is the world good or evil? Shall we enjoy it if we can or spurn it utterly? What is the truth about religion? Does it come to us from God, as the orthodox pretend? Are we to follow authority and tradition or reason and conscience? Such are some of the questions with which Ma'arrf concerns himself. While his reflections—not pursued methodically, but set down piecemeal and at intervals—

¹ The following books and articles may be mentioned in connexion with the subject of this study: A. von Kremer, Die philosophische Gedichte des Abu 'l-'Alä in the Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Wien (Phil.-hist. Classe), vol. 117, 6th Abhandlung (Vienna, 1889); D. S. Margoliouth, The Letters of Abu 'l-'Alä (Oxford, 1898); Abu 'l-'Alä's Correspondence on Vegetarianism in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society for 1902, p. 289 foll.; R. A. Nicholson, The Risdlatu 'l-Ghufrán by Abu 'l-'Alä al-Ma'arrf in the same Journal for 1900, pp. 637-720, and for 1902, pp. 75-101, 337-362, 813-847; Tá-há Husayn, Dhikr Ábi 'l-'Alä (Cairo, 1915). The abbreviation Luzüm refers to the edition of the Luzümü md lâ yalzam published at Cairo in 1891.
might be described as extensive and peculiar, we must not exaggerate their intrinsic value. Von Kremer’s essay, for which in general I have nothing but praise, seems to me to suffer from want of proportion. It hails Ma’arrí as an original thinker, centuries in advance of his age, and discusses his theory and practice as though he were a philosopher writing in verse. Without denying that Ma’arrí was a pioneer of Aufklärung, or that his open-minded and independent way of looking at things led him to conclusions which often agree with those of modern thought, I submit that Von Kremer has put the cart before the horse. Ma’arrí is, first of all and essentially, a poet. His philosophy and ethics are only a background for his poetry. His work is artistic in treatment and execution and should be weighed by the standard which we apply to the Divina Commedia or the Paradise Lost. He sits below Dante and Milton, but he belongs to their school; and if he contemplates life with the profound feeling of Lucretius, he handles his subject with a literary skill as fine as that of Horace. Probably very few Europeans have read these poems, the Luzúmiyyát, from beginning to end. I am sure that any one who has accomplished the feat, or may do so in the future, will acknowledge the author’s mastery of the Arabic language—a mastery which too frequently displays itself in juggling with words—the aptness of his diction, the force and opulence of his imagery, the surprising turns of his fancy, and the charm of a style unmistakably his own, whose melancholy dirge-like cadences blend with sharper notes of wit, satire, and epigram. The matter is almost as remarkable as the style. Ma’arrí aims at telling the truth, although according to Moslem theory poets not only are but ought to be liars. Taking Reason for his guide, he judges men and things with a freedom which must have seemed scandalous to the rulers and privileged classes of the day. Amidst his meditations on the human tragedy a fierce hatred of injustice, hypocrisy, and superstition blazes out. Vice and folly are laid bare in order that virtue and wisdom may be sought. In his poetry we see the age depicted without fear or favour, and—what is more appealing—the artist himself, struggling.
with doubts, yet confident in the power of mind to solve difficulties and give light, if any can be looked for. But (lest I slip after Von Kremer) much of the Luzüm is monotonous; a great deal is trivial and pedantic and to our taste intolerably clever: it moves us to admiration and contempt, it thrills, fatigues, fascinates, and repels; and when all has been said, it remains unique and immortal because it expresses the personality of an extraordinary man.

Abu 'l-'Ala Aḥmad ibn 'Abdallah al-Ma'arri was born in A.D. 973 at Ma'arra (Ma'arratu 'l-Nu'mán), a country-town in the district south of Aleppo. His family might boast of its cadis and poets, but its talents appear to have been more respectable than brilliant. The fact that neither his father nor his cousin nor his maternal uncle ever made the pilgrimage to Mecca is worth recording in view of the importance which he ascribes to example and custom in the formation of religious belief. Ere he was four years old, he suffered the first calamity of his life: an attack of small-pox left him partially, and soon completely, blind. After his father's death—he was then about fourteen—he devoted himself to study, visiting Aleppo, Antioch, and other Syrian towns, learning by heart the manuscripts preserved in their libraries, and attending the lectures of many celebrated scholars. As Professor Margoliouth remarks, his memory was prodigious. We can hardly conceive how one who so early lost his sight should have been able to compose letters and treatises thickly sown with quotations which, although they are sometimes inaccurate, show a knowledge of Arabic poetry and philology such as the most industrious grammarians seldom possessed. Having finished his studies, he returned in A.D. 993 to Ma’arra, perhaps with the intention of becoming a professional poet, that is to say, a writer of panegyrics for which he might reckon upon being paid handsomely. This

1 Abu 'l-'Alá is his "name of honour" (kunya), Ahmad what we should call his "Christian name," and 'Abdallah the name of his father.

2 I have compiled this sketch from the biography given by Professor Margoliouth in his introduction to the Letters of Abu 'l-'Alá, which supplies full information concerning the poet's life together with many details of historical and literary interest.
was no career for a man of spirit and honour to embark on. If it tempted him, he soon put it aside: in the preface to his first collection of poems he says that he never wrote encomia for money, but only because he wished to gain practice in the art. During the next fifteen years (A.D. 993–1008) his whole income was a pension of about 30 dinárs which his blindness compelled him to share with a servant; possibly he may have earned a little more by teaching. Meanwhile he was making a reputation beyond the borders of his native town, and his thoughts turned to Baghádád, "the great field of genius and exertion, where talents of every kind had the fullest scope and the highest encouragement." In 1008 he set out from Aleppo, travelling down the Euphrates in a boat provided by his uncle. It seems clear that he hoped to establish himself permanently in the capital; and he ought to have counted the cost of his refusal to live by belauding the great. "I found Baghádád," he says, "like a pie's wing—fair, but carrying nothing." While his reception by the savants and academicians whom he met there was flattering enough to console him for occasional slights, and perhaps friendly enough to procure him the means of livelihood, he felt that his prospects were uncertain. According to Professor Margoliouth, an indignity put upon him by the brother of the Sharíf al-Rádí was the last straw. Anyhow, eighteen months after entering Baghádád he started on his way home. He took this step reluctantly and always writes of it with unfeigned regret, as in the following lines:

يا ليف نفسى على أن ترجبِ إلى
هندي البلد ولم اهلُك ببغدادًا
اذ رأيت أمورًا لا توافقني
قلت الإياب إلى الأوطان أدّى ذا

How sad that I returned, how sad,
Instead of dying at Bagdad!
I say, when'er things fall amiss,
"My coming home hath brought me this." 4

1 Boswell's Life of Johnson, ch. 3.
2 The Letters of Abu 'l'-Alá, p. 37.
3 He himself said afterwards that he left Baghádád for two reasons: his poverty and the illness of his mother. Her death, which took place before he reached Ma'arra, was a heavy blow to him. 4 Luzúm, l. 303, 5.
The sense of disillusion and failure with which he quitted Bagh ð ad appears in a letter addressed to the people of Ma'arra shortly before his arrival amongst them. He declares that he has now ended his youth and bidden farewell to his spring-time, and that he finds the best course for him to pursue is to go into retreat.

"My soul did not consent to my returning till I had promised it three things—seclusion as complete as that of (the star) al-Fanîq in the constellation of the Bull; separation from the world like that of the egg-shell from the chick; and to remain in the city even though the inhabitants fled through fear of the Greeks.... What I wanted was to stay in a place of learning: and I found out the most precious of spots, but fate did not allow me to stay there, and only a fool will quarrel with destiny."  

Here is pessimism, asceticism, fatalism—the stuff of which his later poems are made. It would be curious if their rationalism, another prime ingredient, owed nothing to the "intellectuals" of Bagh ð ad. Considered broadly in relation to the poet's development, these two years (1008–9) were decisive. The change of scene, the sudden plunge into metropolitan society, the literary discussions, the conversations with men of all races and creeds, the conflict of old dogmas and new ideas, then the wreck of his hopes and the burial of his ambitions in silence and solitude—need we ask whether such an experience did not stimulate his genius and alter the bent of his mind? From this standpoint the episode was entirely fortunate. Had he not gone to Bagh ð ad, probably the Luzûmiyyât would never have been written, and (in Europe at any rate) his fame as a poet would be very different from what it is.

Ma'arrî lived in retirement until his death in A.D. 1058, fifty years later. Proud, sensitive, and suspicious, doubly imprisoned by blindness and seclusion, a misanthropic and world-weary old man—that is the character which his poems

1 Margoliouth, op. cit. p. 43 fol.
2 He refers to himself as "the twice-bound captive" (rahnu 'l-mah-basayn). See The Letters of Abu 'l-'Ald, p. 1.
give of him; but a true portrait shows light as well as shade. To quote Professor Margoliouth,

the result of his visit to Baghdád, where the leading writers of the time had treated him as one of themselves, became apparent as soon as he came back. Disciples began to flock to Ma'arra from all quarters to hear his lectures on the grammar, poetry, and antiquities of the Arabs. The house or cave which he inhabited became the chief sight in Ma'arra, and he himself the most important inhabitant. . . . The letters, most of which were written after the return from Baghdád, exhibit the author as anything but a hermit; he appears rather as a man of many friends, who takes a kindly interest both in men and things.

Besides teaching, he occupied his mind with composing the Luzúmiyydt and dictating to his amanuenses a large number of philological and other works of which, for the most part, the titles alone have been preserved.

The poetry of Ma'arrí recalls a long-drawn controversy, which has never wholly died out, between two schools of Islamic criticism. One party maintained that with the coming of Islam the golden age of Arabic poetry had gone for ever. A poet's rank was decided by his date. To have lived in that age, to have spoken the pure Bedouin idiom uncontaminated by foreign conquests, to have practised the traditional virtues and to have been inspired by the chivalrous ideals of heathendom conferred a superiority outweighing every other consideration. In the eyes of early Mohammedan philologists and antiquarians—whose authority rested securely on the universal respect for learning and was but little diminished by their incompetence in matters of taste—the pagan odes fixed an unapproachable standard by which all Moslem poets should be judged; so that an imitation of them, good or bad, was more highly esteemed than any original work of genius. Pedantry, no doubt; but in justice to those old scholars we ought to reflect that they were concerned with one particular type of poetry, the Ode (gaşıda), which was the product of Arabian antiquity and corresponded in its characteristic features to conditions
of life that actually existed in the pre-Islamic period. When these conditions vanished, the *qaṣida* became an anachronism but continued to be the chief medium of poetical expression, since none of the minor types was capable of filling its place. Failing the invention of a new form of equal dignity, the *qaṣida* held the field. What was a modern poet to do? Was he to assume the consecrated pose of bidding his two comrades halt awhile and weep with him over a certain camping-ground, desolate now, but still haunted by dear and regretful memories? And was he to describe the hardships, which he had never known, of a journey across the desert, and pretend to be as intimately acquainted with camels, horses, wild asses, antelopes, and lizards as he truly was with the rhymed *loci classicī* in which the habits of these animals are so well delineated? If, on the other hand, like Mutanabbī and Maʿarır, he made fun of the obsolete fashions and re-shaped them to suit the facts of his time, academic persons might (and did) protest that his more or less novel adaptation was not poetry at all. It appears to me that those who championed the ancients were both right and wrong. They were right in preferring the model to the copy. They were wrong when they set it up as a test of all poetic values and declared it to be so perfect that nothing of a different kind could bear comparison with it. To assert that since A.D. 622 there has been no Arabic poet of the first class is ridiculous; and though more great poets lived in the century before Islam than in any subsequent period of the same duration, I think it may reasonably be questioned whether Imraʿuʾ ʿl-ʿQays and his fellows are superior in genius to Abū Nuwās, Mutanabbī, and others who flourished under the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate. If some cannot admire the ancients without depreciating the moderns, not a few will justify the proud boast of Maʿarır—

وَإِنْ تَكُنْ الْأَخْبَرُ زَمَانَ يَلَّاتٌ بِهَا لَمْ تَنطَعُ الأَوَّلُ

And I, albeit I come in Time's late hour,

Achieve what lay not in the ancients' power.

1 What follows refers to the Arabic *qaṣida*, not to the Persian type which has been described and illustrated in Chap. i.

2 Cf. Nöldeke's judgment concerning Abū Nuwās (*Beiträge zur Kenntniss der Poesie der alten Araber*, p. 3).

3 *Saqṣaʾ ʿl-Zand* (Būlāq, A.H. 1286), i. 110, 20.

N. S.
For my part, when I turn from the authors of the *Mu'allaqát* to the great Islamic poets, I do not miss what I do not expect to find; and I find beauties enough in both to compensate me for the deficiencies of either. Thanks mainly to Rückert and Sir Charles Lyall, the worth of old Arabian poetry is now understood everywhere. Let us hope the day is coming when it will be possible to make that statement as regards Arabic poetry in general.

What has been said of Coleridge, that "his poems lie as it were in two strata," is also true of Ma'arrí. Those of his first manner, the odes comprised in the *Saqtu 'l-Zand* and mostly written before the age of thirty-five, show the influence of his admiration for Mutanabbi and in comparison with the *Luzümiiyydt* are nearly as conventional as the poems written by Coleridge before 1797. They include some fine panegyrics and elegies but have small interest for us. In the East, however, the *Saqtu 'l-Zand* has always been more popular than the *Luzüm*, which Mohammedans usually dislike on account of the opinions put forth in it, while neither its form nor its character accords with their notion of what poetry ought to be. As we have seen, the regular type of Arabic poetry is the ode; but in the *Luzüm* Ma'arrí discards this time-honoured model, substituting for it an informal composition which may contain any number of verses from two or three to eighty or ninety. How these poems strike the average Moslem we can learn from the apology which Ma'arrí thinks it necessary to make for them. He says in effect:

"I have not sought to embellish my verse by means of fiction or fill my pages with love idylls, battle-scenes, descriptions of wine-parties and the like. My aim is to speak the truth. Now, the proper end of poetry is not truth, but falsehood, and in proportion as it is diverted from its proper end its perfection is impaired. Therefore I must crave the indulgence of my readers for this book of *moral* poetry."

1 Preface to the *Luzüm*, pp. 9 and 42.
2 "Usu receptum est in poesi ignaum se fortum iactare, castor sectatoris multorum uestes inuere, et debilem se ornare cultu uiri acris atque audaci" (from the preface to the *Saqtu 'l-Zand*, translated by Rieu, *De Abul-Alae uita et carminibus*, p. 36). Cf. the current saying, "The most agreeable poetry is the most false" (أعزب الشعراء كذبهم). Ma'arrí quotes
In other words, Ma'arri holds that truth—he means moral and philosophical truth—so far from being the standard of poetical merit, is positively injurious to it. He does not imply that the best poetry is untrue to life, but rather that it is false because it follows human life and nature, which belong to the vanities of this world and are themselves radically false. He knows that he cannot compete with his "profane" brethren who are free to employ all the resources of invention and imagination; and foreseeing that his readers will be disappointed, he hastens to assure them that the fault lies in the subject, not in the poet. A Mohammedan scholar, who in his recently published memoir of Ma'arri has made a valuable contribution to learning, cites this passage as evidence that the Luzûm is really "a volume of philosophy." If that were so, we might ask why the author not only composed it in verse but adopted an almost incredibly difficult form of rhyme, the explanation of which gives his preface the appearance of a treatise on prosody. But I need not argue the point further. Ma'arri says that the Luzûm is "diction devoid of falsehood" (قول عرى من الجيّن), i.e., poetry of an inferior kind.

from al-Âsma'i "Poetry is one of the gates (categories) of vanity," and he might have added that poets were called liars by Mohammed (Koran, 26, 226). The following extracts from Şuyûtî's Mushir (Bûlûq, A.H. 1282, vol. II, p. 234 fol.; Thornton's Arabic Series: Second Reading Book, Cambridge, 1909, p. 21 fol.) show the view of many good Moslems on this subject: "There are certain conditions which must be fulfilled before any one is called a poet. If his object were to speak the truth without exaggerating or going beyond the mark or lying or relating things absolutely impossible, although his work might be faultless in metre, it would have no value (as poetry), and the name of poet would not be given to him. It was said by a man of acute mind that gay poetry raises a laugh, while grave poetry is fiction; therefore the poet has no choice but to tell lies or to make people laugh; and such being the case, Allah has preserved His Prophet from these two qualities (i.e. Mohammed was not a poet, as his enemies alleged) and from everything ignoble....Some one may observe that now and then wisdom is found in poetry, according to the Prophet's saying, 'Truly, there is in eloquence a magic and in poetry a wisdom.' I reply, 'For the reason which we have mentioned, Allah preserved him from poetising; and as for wisdom, Allah has bestowed on him the largest and amplest portion thereof in the Koran and the Sunna.'"

1 Dhikrâ Abî 'l-'Alâ, by Dr Tâ-hâ Husayn (Cairo, 1915), p. 284.
We who dissent from his theory judge otherwise of his work. Although moral, religious, and philosophical ideas are not the essence of poetry, they have inspired the greatest poets, and where genius is equal they will turn the scale. Whether and to what extent they enhance the merit of a poem depends on the author's power to give them artistic and original expression: the most striking doctrines and speculations may have less value for this purpose than thoughts and feelings with which everyone is familiar. Von Kremer's view of Ma'arrî led him to ignore the latter element; hence the passages which he translated stand somewhat apart, so to speak, from the main themes. These are simple and even commonplace: the pain of life, the peace of death, the wickedness and folly of mankind, the might of Fate and the march of Time, the emptiness of ambition, the duty of renunciation, the longing for solitude and then—to rest in the grave. The pessimism of the Luzûm wears the form of an intense pervading darkness, stamping itself on the mind and deeply affecting the imagination. It is an old philosophy and its poets have been many, but I can think of none who in sincerity, individuality, and eloquence has surpassed Abu 'l-'Alâ al-Ma'arrî. The book derives its title from a "troublesome bondage" (to borrow Milton's phrase) voluntarily imposed on himself by the author in regard to the rhyme. Although the nature of this cannot be explained properly without using technical

1 His pessimism as regards his contemporaries is not absolute, for the succeeding age will be worse (Luzûm, ii. 171, 17). He admits that life on the balance may be neither gain nor loss (i. 230, 10), but from all his experience of the world he can produce, so far as I remember, only one verse which is positively optimistic (ii. 245, 8): "If this year bestow the minimum of comfort, I hope for its maximum next year."

2 Ma'arrî has been compared with his celebrated predecessor Abu 'l-'Atâhiya (see my Literary History of the Arabs, p. 296 foll.). Since both preach asceticism, their poems naturally have much in common, but Abu 'l-'Atâhiya writes in a relatively orthodox religious spirit which quite lacks the breadth and freedom of Ma'arrî's philosophical outlook. The one is a Moslem, the other a citizen of the world. And the style of the Luzûm, though less easy, is far superior in force and originality.

3 The words Luzûmu md 1d yalzam signify "The obligation of that which is not obligatory."
terms which I wish to avoid, the so-called "rich rhymes" of French versification are a close parallel and will serve to illustrate what is meant. Conceive a French poem of ten, fifteen, or twenty verses, every verse having not only the same rhyme but the same consonant preceding the rhyme-vowel, e.g., plume, allume, enclume; Mirage, enrage, ouvrage, parage; further, conceive hundreds of poems rhymed throughout in this manner and arranged according to the alphabetical sequence of the final consonant, so that those with the rhyme lume are placed under m, those with the rhyme rage under g, and so on—the analogy, such as it is, may help readers ignorant of Arabic to measure the enormous labour which the composition of the Luzumiyyát must have entailed. There is nothing like it, of course, in any European language; even in Arabic, a language that seems to have been made for virtuosity, we find only a few brief and isolated specimens to set beside it. Were Ma'arrí a minor poet, the Luzúm would be a senseless tour de force. Some of it is not very remote from that description, and the tyranny of the rhyme exacts a crushing toll of repetition, monotony, banality, obscurity, and affectation. Still, take it all in all, the work is shaped by the artist, not by the mould which it fills slowly and reluctantly. I do not think so poorly of his powers as to believe, with some Mohammedan and European critics, that the difficulty of the form compelled him to say what he never would have said if he had been his own master. No doubt, he is apt to be dragged down by his chains, but often he can move in them with such dexterity and ease that they appear rather an ornament than a hindrance.

The Luzúm contains 1592 poems amounting, I suppose, to between twelve and thirteen thousand verses altogether. When the author declares that they glorify God, exhort the heedless, and warn against the vanity and wickedness of the

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1 Ma'arrí did not invent this form of versification; it was used by the Umayyad poet Kuthayyir (ob. A.D. 723) in the first ten verses of an ode (Aghdîn, 8, 39). He describes himself as an imitator of Kuthayyir. Cf. Luzúm, II. 265, penult., where he says, ﻘَﻀَّرِاٰنَا ﻓِي ﻢَرْفَى.
world\(^1\), he does not indicate either the range of their topics or the variety of their style. He was interested in many things besides asceticism: he was a keen student of passing events, he professed to know his contemporaries by heart\(^2\), and we shall see how political and social phenomena reflect themselves in his meditations. Recalling his avowed intention to tell the truth, one may find there the best commentary on his way of telling it. For him Truth was a mystery—

And Falsehood like a star all naked stands,
But Truth still hides her face 'neath hood and veil\(^3\).

By hard living and thinking he strove to lift that veil, and the laboured utterance, the dark hints and metaphors—in short, the oracular quality of his verse—are only in keeping with the physical and mental strain which he had undergone. Closer acquaintance with the \textit{Luzúm} has persuaded me that its obscurity is more natural and less deliberate than I once imagined. Ma‘arrí had good reason to cloak some of his opinions, and being a sensible as well as a cautious man, he did not court persecution, though in fact the most heretical passages of his work are by no means the most obscure. Apart from special causes his style, as I said before, is the expression of a strange untempered personality\(^4\), while in the

\(^1\) Preface, p. 9:

\(^2\) \textit{Luzúm}, i. 230, penult.

\(^3\) \textit{Luzúm}, i. 358, 2. In this verse, however, the words "truth" and "falsehood" are synonymous with "right" and "wrong." Cf. i. 339. 9: 

"As for Right (\textit{hudd}), I have found it a secret amongst us, but Wrong (\textit{dád}) is openly seen."

\(^4\) Writing to his uncle, Abu 'l-Qásim, he says: "As you know, though born a man, I am like a wild animal in character" (\textit{مُحَفِّظَةُ الغَرِيْزَةُ ٱلسَّٰنِي})
second place it is the product of a poet who seldom allows us
to forget that he was also a very learned scholar. His love of
grammar, prosody, rhetoric, and belles-lettres asserts itself
extravagantly; some poems are mere strings of word-plays.
This feature spoils many pages for us, but it is not invariable,
as will be acknowledged by those who read the Arabic text
of the poems translated below. These, though representative
as regards the author's ideas, are comparatively plain in style
and include no example of what he could do when he ran to
the opposite extreme.

Following Sir Charles Lyall, a master in the art, I have
sometimes tried to imitate the original metres without the
monorhyme, which in a language like ours lays too heavy a
burden upon the translator. Arabic metres being quantita-
tive, their equivalents in a modern European tongue are
necessarily imperfect. It is not possible to reproduce the
movement and cadence of the Luzûmiyydt except in the same
way as the movement and cadence of the Iliad are repro-
duced, or rather suggested, by a version in English hexa-
meters; yet, shadowy as the resemblance is, it conveys some-
thing of real value, which is more easily felt than described.
Like the broken vase in Moore's song, these Oriental rhythms
have a perfume that "clings to them still." More than that
we dare not hope for: even when transplanted by skilful
hands they lose the best of their beauty and never become
quite acclimatised.

I have thought it well to give the names and schemes of
the four principal metres for the sake of those who do not
know them already, together with specimens in Arabic,
Latin, and English. It will be observed that the Latin render-
ings are weightier than the English, because (coinciding in
this respect with the originals) they are based on quantity
instead of accent. Besides weight, however, Arabic has a
peculiar sonority which Latin does not possess in the same
degree and which is greatly increased by the recurring mono-
rhyme.
I. *Tawil* (the Long Metre).

Scheme: \( \circ - \approx | \circ - \approx | \circ - \approx | \circ - \circ \)

\[ \text{yadullu} \ 'alá faḍli \ 'l-mamáti \ wa-kawníti} \]
\[ \text{iráḥata} \ jism\textsuperscript{m} \ 'anna \ maslakahú \ ša'bu.} \]
\[ \text{'alam} \ tara \ 'anna \ 'l-majda \ talqáka \ dúnahú} \]
\[ \text{shaḍ'ídu} \ min \ 'amthálíhá \ wajábá \ 'l-ru'bu\textsuperscript{1}.} \]

Bono qui negat summo frui nisi mortuos habet testimonium hoc: iter mortis arduum est.

Uides ut priusquam uir sibi uindicauerit honorem, pati casus timendos oporteat.

That Death is a good supreme and gives to the body peace From all sorrow—prove it thus: the way thereunto is hard.

For seest thou not, before success in a high emprise, What sore straits encounter thee, what perils thou needs must fear?

Here the Latin and English versions exhibit the usual form of the *Tawil* metre, while the Arabic lines are a less common variation, in which \( \circ - \circ \) is substituted for \( \circ - \circ \) in the last foot of the verse, *i.e.*, the foot containing the rhyme\textsuperscript{2}. Another variety shortens the same foot by omitting the final syllable, thus:

Bono qui negat summo frui nisi mortuos habet testimonium hoc: iter mortis atrox.

Uides ut pati casus timendos oporteat, honorem priusquam uir sibi uindicárit.

That Death is a good supreme and gives to the body peace From all sorrow—here is proof: the hardness of dying.

For seest thou not, before success in a high emprise, What perils thou needs must fear, what sore straits encounter?

\[ \text{1 *Luzūm*, I. 79, 7.} \]

\[ \text{2 The Arabic "verse" (bayt) consists of two hemistichs. In the passage} \]

\[ \text{transliterated above there are two verses, ending with the rhyme-words} \]

\[ \text{ša'bu and ru'bu.} \]
2. **Basit (the Wide Metre).**

   Scheme: \( \sim - \sim - | \sim - \sim - | \sim - \sim - | \sim - \sim - \)

   \( 'ammd 'idhd mâ dá'a 'l-dâ'i li-makrumat\textsuperscript{in} fa-hum gãli\textsuperscript{in} wa-lákin fî 'l-'adhá ãushudu\textsuperscript{1}. \)

   quos si ioucaueris ad praeclera, conueniunt rari, sed injuriæ ergo tota gens properat.

   As often as they are called to do a kindness, they come
   By twos and threes; but to work despite they muster in crowds.

   \( 'údá li-maw'úḏ in fî hâli maw'idiáhá \)

   \( zulm\textsuperscript{an} fa-layta 'abáâha 'l-fazziá maw'údú\textsuperscript{2}. \)

   beata quam sepeliuit filiam genitor
   uiuam; atque sic utinam sepultus ipse foret!

   Oh, happy she that was tombed alive the hour she was born,
   And would that he had been tombed, her ruthless sire, at his birth!

3. **Wáfir (the Ample Metre).**

   Scheme: \( \sim - \sim - | \sim - \sim - | \sim - \sim - \)

   \( wa-lâm 'aridi 'l-maniyyata bi-'khtiyári \)

   \( wa-lákin 'awshaka 'l-fatayáni sahbi\textsuperscript{3}. \)

   et haud equidem uolens Acheronta adiui:
   ephebi me truces duo ui trahebant.

   Not willingly went I down to the fated waters:
   The two strong youths\textsuperscript{4} by force haled me between them.

4. **Kámil (the Perfect Metre).**

   Scheme: \( \nsim - \sim - | \nsim - \sim - | \nsim - \sim - \)

   \( dunyáka dár\textsuperscript{an} 'in yakun shuhháduhá \)

   \( 'uqald'a lá yakbú 'alá ghuyyábiáhá\textsuperscript{5}. \)

   hic mundus est tibi tale deuersorium malesanus ut sit qui profectos lugeat.

   This world is such an abode that if those present here
   Have their wits entire, they will never weep for the absent ones.

\textsuperscript{1} Luzûm, i. 248, 3. \textsuperscript{2} Ibid. i. 254, 6. \textsuperscript{3} Ibid. i. 136, 8. \textsuperscript{4} Day and Night. \textsuperscript{5} Luzûm, i. 142, last line.
Notwithstanding that a single poem may touch upon many topics, it seemed convenient to group the translations as far as possible under the following general heads:

I. Life and Death.
II. Human Society.
III. Asceticism.
IV. Philosophy and Religion.

This arrangement has the advantage of distributing the contents of the work in something like their due order and proportion, and of helping the reader to judge it as a whole more fairly than from the extracts published by Von Kremer, which are not so numerous or representative as mine; but I confess that I have with difficulty resisted the temptation to show how fine and original a poet Ma'arrí is by gathering his best pieces into one garland. The poems in the first three sections offer a wide survey of his theory, practice, and experience of life. While their figurative language may sometimes require explanation, I do not think they call for a preliminary statement of the philosophical ideas which lie beneath. We can understand and enjoy them without knowing how Ma'arrí conceived of God, fate, time, space, spirit, and matter. What he has to say about these and other subjects—the influence of the stars, the immortality of the soul, the doctrine of transmigration, the nature of religion, etc.—particularly excites our curiosity, and many will consider that it is the quintessence of his poetry; as a rule, however, it occurs only in brief passages which must be taken out of their context and examined side by side before we can draw any sure evidence from them. That is the task I have attempted in the fourth section, where the author's philosophy and his attitude towards positive religion will be discussed.
I.  

LIFE AND DEATH.

(1)

In the casket of the Hours  
Events deep-hid  
Wait on their guardian Powers  
To raise the lid.  

And the Maker infinite,  
Whose poem is Time,  
He need not weave in it  
A forced stale rhyme.  

The Nights pass so,  
Voices dumb,  
Without sense quick or slow  
Of what shall come1.

* * * * *

By Allah's will preserving  
From misflight,  
The barbs of Time unswerving  
On us alight.

A loan is all he gives  
And takes again;  
With his gift happy lives  
The folly of men2.

(2)

(Metre: Tawil, with variations.)

Would that a lad had died in the very hour of birth  
And never sucked, as she lay in childbed, his mother's breast!  
Her babe, it says to her or ever its tongue can speak,  
"Nothing thou gett'st of me but sorrow and bitter pain."3

1 Time is not a conscious agent which can be described as moving quickly or slowly: it is the passive environment in which events appear. Cf. No. 225 and Luzûm, ii. 273, 9: "Time is silent, but its events interpret it aloud, so that it seems to speak."

2 i. 67, 4.

3 i. 63, 6.
This world, O my friend, is like a carcase unsepulchred,
And we are the dogs that yelp around it on every side.
A loser is he, whoso advances to eat thereof;
A gainer is he, whoso returns from it hungry still.
If any be not waylaid by calamities in the night,
Some ill hap of Time is sure to meet him at morningtide.

The soul feels a shock of pain, when Time's thunderbolt o'erwhelms
With ruin; a thrill of joy, when softly he sings to her;
And whence are the paths for us prepared that our feet may fall,
She knows not, or where the beds ordained that we lay our sides.
These Hours, they seem as snakes of black and of white colure,
So deadly, the fingers lack all boldness in touching them.
Mankind are the breaths, I ween, of Earth: one is upward borne
To us, whilst in ebbing wave another returns to dust.
I drank it, my forty years' existence, and gulped it down,
But ah, what a bitter draught! and nowise it did me good.
We live ignorant and die in errancy as we lived:
Besotted with wickedness, a man turns not back again.

Ye stand still beneath Heaven
Whose wheels by Force are driven;
And choose in freedom while
The Fates look on and smile.

They mustered for setting out, 'twas a morn of promise:
"Now surely," they said, "a rain on the land is fallen."
Mayhap those weather-wise who observe the lightning

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1 I. 224, 10.
2 Cf. I. 205, last line: "The deceiving World sang to thee, and thy love of her was a lute in her hand."
3 Time with its nights and days is represented as a serpent having alternate bands of black and white. Cf. No. 24, last verse, and No. 84, verse 3.
4 II. 77, 10.
5 I. 332, 3.
The Meditations of Ma‘arrí

Shall perish before they win of it any bounty.  
The folk ofttimes are saved in a land of famine,  
The fruitful and rich champaign may destroy its people.

(7)

(Metre: Tawil, with variations.)

'Tis God's will a man should live in torment and tribulation,  
Until those that know him cry, "He hath paid now the lifelong debt."

Give joy to his next of kin on the day of his departure,  
For they gain a heritage of riches, and he of peace.

(8)

(Metre: Tawil.)

The greatest of all the gifts of Time is to give up all:  
Whate'er he bestows on thee, his hand is outstretched to seize.

More excellence hath a life of want than a life of wealth,  
And better than monarch’s fine apparel the hermit’s garb.

I doubt not but Time one day will raise an event of power  
To scatter from Night’s swart brow her clustering Pleiades.

Ere Noah and Adam, he the twins of the Lesser Bear  
Unveiled: they are called not yet amongst bears grown grey and old.

Let others run deep in talk, preferring this creed or that,  
But mine is a creed of use: to hold me aloof from men.

Methinks, on the Hours we ride to foray as cavaliers:  
They speed us along like mares of tall make and big of bone.

What most wears Life's vesture out is grief which a soul endures,  
Unable to bring once back a happiness past and gone.

(9)

O Death! be thou my guest: I am tired of living,  
And I have tried both sorts in joy and sorrow.

My morrow shall be my yesterday, none doubts it;  
My yesterday nevermore shall be my morrow.

1 I. 93, 2.  
2 I. 60, penult.  
3 I. 123, 10.  
4 I. 286, penult.
Perish this world! I should not joy to be
Its Caliph or Maḥmūd.1
My fate I know not, save that I in turn
Am treading the same path to the same bourne
As old 'Ād and Thamūd.2
The mountains ('tis averred) shall melt, the seas
Surely shall freeze;
And the great dome of Heaven, whose poles
Have ever awed men's souls,
Some argue for its ruin, some maintain
Its immortality—in vain?3
The scattered boulders of the lava waste,
Shall e'er they mingle into one massed ore?4
If sheer catastrophe shall fling in haste
The Pleiad luminaries asunder,
Well may be quenched the fiery brand of Mars;
And if decay smites Indian scimitars,
Survival of their sheaths would be a wonder!5

(Metre: Wāfir.)
O child of a tender mother—and surely Allah
Is able to bring to pass whatsoever He pleaseth—
Thou after thy death, destroyed by the hap most hateful,
Yet speakest and warmest us with a voice of wisdom.
"Unwilling" (thou sayst) "in this world I alighted
And lived; and how oft was medicined, how oft was potioned!
A year, month after month, I made by climbing—
And would I had never climbed on the new moons' ladder!
And when I was called away and my hour of weaning6
Drew nigh, Death sought me out and I found no warder.

1 Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna died in A.D. 1030, twenty-eight years before the death of Ma'arri.
2 Extinct aboriginal tribes: the legend of their destruction is told in the Koran.
3 Cf. No. 220.
4 Literally, "Shall silver (fādāt) one day be made to prevail over lava (fādāt), so that the stones of the latter shall become like an ingot?"
5 i. 262, 3. The "scimitars" represent the stars and planets, which are "sheathed" by the celestial spheres.
6 Separation from the world.
Life's house I abandoned, empty, to other tenants,
And wretched I must have been had I still remained there.
I went forth pure, unsoiled: had my lease of living
Been long, I had soilure ta'en and had lost my pureness.
Oh, why dost thou weep? It may be that I am chosen
To dwell with the blessed souls in the state hereafter.
'Gainst evil the women charmed me, but when my day dawned,
It left me as though I ne'er had been charmed by charmers.
Suppose I had lived as long as the vulture, only
To meet Death at the last: I had either suffered
The poor man's wrong, oppressed without fear of Allah,
Or else I had been a ruler of men who feared me.
'Tis one of the boons my Lord hath bestowed upon me,
That hastily I departed and did not tarry."

(Metre: Tawil.)

The sage looketh in the glass of Reason, but he that makes
His brethren his looking-glass will see truth, mayhap, or lies. And I, shall I fear the pain of Allah, when He is just,
And though I have lived the life of one wronged and racked with pain?
Yes: each hath his portioned lot; but men in their ignorance
Would mend here the things they loathe that never can mended be.

Nor birth I chose nor old age nor to live:
What the Past grudged me shall the Present give?
Here must I stay, by Doom's both hands constrained,
Nor go until my going is ordained.
You who would guide me out of dark illusion,
You lie—your story does but make confusion.
For can you alter that you brand with shame,
Or is it not unalterably the same?

1 i. 168, 9.
2 Cf. i. 383, 15:
The mirrors of the eye show nothing true: Make for thyself a mirror of clear thought.
3 i. 120, last line.
4 i. 322, 4.
(14)
Leisurely through life's long gloom
I have journeyed to my tomb;
Now that I am come so near,
Needs my soul must quake with fear.

What are we? what all that stirs
In this teeming universe
To a Power which, unspent,
Swallows the whole firmament?

Thunder roared: methought it was
A fell lion from whose jaws
Full in front of him there hung
Lolling many a lightning-tongue.

(Metre: Basît.)

(15)
'Tis want of wit to disdain good counsel frankly bestowed
And still desire that the Days make right the wrong that they do.
Let Time alone and its folk to mind their business themselves;
Live thou in doubt of the world, mistrusting all of its kind.
Youth rode away: not a word of news about him have we,
Nor us revisits of him a wraith to gladden our eyes.
Ah, had we won to a land where Youth is, how should we grudge
Our camels' due—saddles wrought of fragrant Indian wood?
A man grows older and leaves his prime in pawn to Decay,
Then gets a new gaberdine of hoariness to put on;
And live he never so long, repentance tarries behind
Until the Dooms on him fall ere any vow he hath ta'en.
Fate's equinoctial line sprang from a marvellous point,
That into nothingness shot lines, pens, and writers and all!

(16)

This folk, I know not what befools them,
And worse their fathers sinned, maybe;
Their senseless prayers for him who rules them
The pulpit almost weeps to see.

1 II. 81, last line.
2 l. 106, 9.
3 Since Fate decides all, it is folly to pray for the reigning prince. Von Kremer (op. cit. p. 67) thinks that these lines are aimed at the Fâtimid conquerors of Syria and imply that the people had no choice but to submit.
Loth came we and reluctant go
And forced endure the time between.
Allah, to whom our praises flow,
Beside His might grand words are mean.

Life seems the vision of one sleeping
Which contraries interpret after:
'Tis joy whenever thou art weeping,
Thy smiles are tears, and sobs thy laughter;
And Man, exulting in his breath,
A prisoner kept in chains for death.

(17)

From Doom, determined that no state shall stand,
Nor gift nor guard can save the tyrant king,
Not though the planet Mars were in his hand
A shaft, and Jupiter a target-ring.

(18)

Plague on this body, full of dole,
Thy fated thoroughfare, O soul!
And may this soul accursed be,
O body, whilst it fares through thee!

Ye twain were wedded and made one,
And by your wedlock was begun
The birth of portents which unbind
Havoc and ruin to mankind.

(Metre: Tawil.)

Shall ever the dead man's soul return after he is gone,
To render his kin the meed of thanks for their flowing tears?
The hearse-bearers' necks and hands conveyed him—a change of state

From when to and fro he fared in palanquins all of gold;

1 I. 325, 13. Cf. I. 328, 5-9 (a remarkably close parallel) and II. 305, 2:
"This life is a dream: if a vision of evil occurs in it, expect the vision to be fortunate. When a man slumbers, he may dream that he is weeping and wake with a new feeling of joy in which there is no pain." Cf. also II. 126, 6:
"They have asserted that the miserable man is he who gained prosperity in the world, and that the true happiness belongs to the most miserable. If such be the fact, then the world is a dream that makes censure a farce."

2 II. 23, 6.

3 II. 149, 13.

N. S.
And liefer had he alive been trodden below their feet
Than high they had lifted up his corpse on their shoulders borne.
O levelling Death! to thee a rich man is like a poor,
Thou car'st not that one hath hit the right way, another missed.
The knight's coat of mail thou deem'st in softness a maiden's shift,
And frail as the spider's house the domed halls of Chosroes.
To earth came he down unhorsed when Death in the saddle sate,
Tho' aye 'mongst his clan was he the noblest of them that ride.
A bier is but like a ship: it casteth its wrecked away
To drown in a sea of death where wave ever mounts on wave

(20)

Ah, let us go, whom nature gave firm minds and courage fast,
To meet the Fates pursuing us, that we may die at last.
The draught of Life, to me it seems the bitterest thing to drain,
And lo, in bitter sooth we all must spew it out again

(21)

World-wide seems to spread a fragrance
From the sweetness of the flowers.
All praise Him, the All-sustainer,
Clouds and plants and rocks and water.
We—we burden Earth so sorely
That she well-nigh sinks beneath us

(22)

I charged my soul and fondly counselled her,
But she would not comply.
My sins in number as the sands—no care
To count them up have I.
My daily lot comes, be my hand remiss,
Or near to it, or far
As Pleiades and Spica Virginis
And Sirius' twofold star

1 I. 123, 2. 2 I. 54, 9. 3 I. 323, 2. 4 I. 66, 3.
Life ends, and no jar for us who thirst was bled of its wine,
Nor cupped thro' long years of drought our camel aged and worn.1
And so we part, nothing won whereby we plainly should know
What purpose touching the earth's inhabitants was designed.
This knowledge neither do tales tradition-borne to us give
Nor any star that is watched by patient eyes on the earth.
Time fades away with us, bleaching all the green of our leaf;
No sooner each crop anew springs up than lo, it is mown2.

In these thy days the learned are extinct,
O'er them night darkens, and our human swarms
Roam guideless since the black mare lost her blaze.3
All masculines are servants of the Lord,
All feminines His handmaids. The moon, now thin
Riding on high, now full, the Lesser Bear.
Water and clay, the Pleiads and the sun,
Earth, sky, and morning—are not all these His?
No sage will chide thee for confessing that.
O brother, let me pray God to forgive me,
For but a gasp of breath in me remains.
"The noble"? Ay, we talk of them. Our age
Hath only persons, names, tales long ago
For gain invented and by fools re-told.
Yonder bright stars to my true fancy seem
Nets which the hunter Time flings o'er his prey.
How wondrously is mortal fate fulfilled!
And seeing Death at work—the husband's kin
And wife's consumed together and none spared—
Wise men towards submission shape their will.

1 In seasons of famine the pre-Islamic Arabs made use of camel's blood which they put into a gut and broiled.
2 R. 253, last line.
3 The commentator supposes the meaning to be "since the world was deprived of those most conspicuous for learning and wisdom." According to Von Kremer (op. cit. p. 70), "the black mare" refers to the 'Abbásid dynasty, which adopted black as its official colour; and this is probably the correct interpretation.
Ever since falsehood was, it ruled the world,
And sages died in anger. O Asmá,
Look for a certain day to find thee out,
Wert thou a chamois on a peak unclimbed.
If the four enemy humours in man's body
Concordant mix, he thrives; else tirelessly
They sow disease and swooning. I have found
The world a ruffian brute, exempt from law—
"Wounds by a brute inflicted go scot-free"—¹
A thing of nights and days; in the which aspect
Life's black and white bespeckled snake creeps on².

(Metre: *Basit.*)

Were I sent out to explore this world of thine by a band
Migrating hither, from me no liar's tale would they hear,
But words like these: "'Tis a land whose herbs are sickness and
plague,
Its sweetest water distils a bane for generous souls.
Oh, 'tis the torment of Hell! Make haste, up, saddle and ride
To any region but that! Avoid it, camp ye not there!
Abominations it hath; no day or part of a day
Is pure and clean. Travel on, spur fast and faster the steeds!
I tell you that which is known for sure, not tangled in doubt;
None drawn with cords of untruth inveigle I to his harm."³

(Metre: *Wáfìr.*)

Commandments there be which some minds reckon lightly,
Yet no man knoweth whom shall befall perdition.
The Book of Mohammed, ay, and the Book of Moses,
The Gospel of Mary's son and the Psalms of David,
Their bans no nation heeded, their wisdom perished
In vain—and like to perish are all the people.

¹ In Mohammedan law no penalty can be exacted for wounds inflicted
by animals.
² I. 57, 9.
³ I. 107, 7.
Two homes hath a man to dwell in, and Life resembles
A bridge that is travelled over in ceaseless passage\(^1\).
Behold an abode deserted, a tomb frequented!
Nor houses nor tombs at last shall remain in being\(^2\).

(Metre: \textit{Tawil.})

Whenever a babe first cries, its parents and kinsfolk say
(Tho' mutely), "The darts of Change will fall thick and fast:
endure!
The world made us miserable, albeit we loved it long:
Now try it and pass, thou too, thy lifetime in misery.
And show not as if to thee 'twere nothing, for each of us
Bears witness that in his heart it wakens a fierce desire."\(^3\)

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotetext{1} Cf. I. 308, 12:
Life is a bridge between two deaths—'tis crossed.
That moment when the man to life is lost.

\footnotetext{2} I. 324, 11.

\footnotetext{3} II. 129, 4.

\footnotetext{4} II. 120, 1. Chosroes (\textit{Kisrd}) is the Persian and Caesar (\textit{Qay\={s}ar}) the Byzantine emperor.

\footnotetext{5} II. 59, 3.
\end{footnotesize}
(Metre: Tawil.)

It may be the stars of Night are setting their thought to work
To make known a mystery, and all eyes shall then behold.
I came into this abode reluctantly and depart
Elsewhither against my will: God witnesseth it is so.
And now in the space 'tween past and future am I compelled
To action? or have I power and freedom to do my best?
O World, may I get well rid of thee! for thy folk's one voice
Is folly, and Moslems match in wickedness those they rule;
And one puts himself to shame, disclosing his inmost mind,
And one hides his carnal thoughts—a zealot and bigot he!
The greybeard is but a child in purpose; the aged crone
Desires to enjoy her life like any full-bosomed maid.
Alas, strange it is how run we after a liar's tales
And leave what we plainly see of foolishness in ourselves.
These mortals are lost to truth: ascetic there never was
Amongst them, and ne'er shall be, until from the dead they rise.

(Metre: Tawil.)

'Tis sorrow enough for man that after he roamed at will,
The Days beckon him and say, "Begone, enter now a grave!"
How many a time our feet have trodden beneath the dust
A brow of the arrogant, a skull of the debonair!

The world's best moment is a calm hour passed
In listening to a friend who can talk well.
How wonderful is Life from first to last!
Old Time keeps ever young of tooth. There fell
His ruin upon the nations: in each clime
Their graves were dug—no grave was digged for Time.

(Metre: Tawil.)

To live is the common hope; yet never thou putt'st to proof
The terrors of Time but when thou verily livest.
If scattered in disarray the limbs of my body lie,
In summer let woe betide or winter, I care not.
Do thou feather, if thou canst, the nest of a needy wight,
And brag not abroad that thou hast feathered it finely;
And though unto men thy wealth and opulence overflow,
Be sure thou shalt sink, O sea, howe'er high thou surgest!¹

(Metre: Kāmil)
I welcome Death in his onset and the return thereof,
That he may cover me with his garment's redundancy.
This world is such an abode that if those present here
Have their wits entire, they will never weep for the absent ones.
Calamities exceeding count hath it brought to light;
Beneath its arm and embosomed close how many more!
It cleaves us all with its swords asunder and smites us down
With its spears and finds us out, right home, with its sure-winged shafts.
Its prize-winners, who won the power and the wealth of it,
Are but little distant in plight from those who lost its prize.

* * * * *
And a strange thing 'tis, how lovingly doth every man
Desire the Mother of stench the while he rails at her².

(Metre: Tawil)
Softly, my fellow-men! for look, if I blame your ways,
I needs must, no help for it, begin with my mortal self.
Oh, when shall Time cease—the power of Allah is over all—
And we be at rest in earth, hushed everlastingly?
This body and soul have housed together a period,
And ever my soul thereby was anguish'd, her brightness dimmed³.

(Metre: Basit)
Sick men, if guided aright, themselves will physic their pain.
The wise could heal, were they found, or else thou seekest in vain.
We flee from Death's bitter cup: he follows, loving and fain⁴.

¹ I. 175, 6.
² I. 142, penult. "The Mother of stench" (Umm dafr) is a "name of honour" which Ma'arri frequently bestows on the World.
³ I. 48, 7.
⁴ I. 50, 4.
(Metre: Basīṭ.)

(37)

For him whose hour is come low in the tomb to be laid
A house of wood they have reed, a house nor lofty nor wide.
O ye that mourn, let him be, with Earth alone for his friend:
No strangeness knows he with her: of comrades trustiest she.
Earthen the body, and rain the best of gifts to the earth—
Pray ye the bountiful clouds to keep well-watered his limbs!
Be youth's cheek never so bright, a strip of dust shall he make,
And fear surpriseth him when his face grows haggard and wan.
Whomso the morrow of death from heavy straitness hath freed
No better fares than a skin dragged to and fro in carouse.
Beware of laughter and shun to live familiar with it:
Seest not the cloud, when 'twas moved to laugh, how hoarsely it wailed?

(Metre: Kāmil.)

(38)

O shapes of men dark-looming under the battle-dust,
Dyeing red the sword and spurring horses lithe and lean,
And plunging into the deeps of pitchiest dead of night,
And ever cleaving through the measureless waste of sand—
Their hope a little water, that they may lick it up—
What bitterness do they drain, and all for a boon so cheap!

When spirit journeys away from body, its dwelling-place,
Then hath body naught to do but sink and be seen no more.

(Metre: Wáfīr.)

(39)

'Tis hateful that wail be heard of a weeping mourner
When cometh mine hour to die and fulfil my doomsday.
Not willingly went I down to the fated waters:
The two strong youths by force haled me between them.
If choice of my lot were granted, I ne'er had moved house
To dwell in a place of narrowness after wideness.

1 Meaning that the winds will blow his dust hither and thither.
2 I. 106, 2. The cloud's "laughter" is lightning, its "wailing" thunder.
3 I. 112, 1.
4 Day and Night.
I found all creatures riddled and strung together
By deathbolts rushing hard on the heels of deathbolts.
"Think lightly of this our life" is the charge I give you,
For soon shall I tread the footmarks of my comrades.

(40)

Death, an thou wilt come anear me,
Not unwelcome is thy nearing—
Safest, mightiest of strongholds,
Once I pass the grave's portcullis.
Whoso meets thee shall not spy on
Peril or forebode affliction.

I am like a camel-owner
Handling all day long the scabbed ones,
Or a wild-bull seeking thistles
Far and wide in wildernesses.
If I fall back to my first source,
'Tis an ill tomb I must lie in.
Every moment as it fleeteth
One more knot of Life unravels.
Who but dreads a doom approaching?
Ay, and who shall fail to drink it?
Well they guard against the sword-edge
Lest their skins should feel its sharpness;
But the agony of deathbed,
Sorer 'tis than thousand stabbings.
Reason wars in us with nature,
Nature makes a hard resistance.

O grave-dweller, thou instruct me
Touching Death and his devices;
Be not niggard, for 'tis certain
I therein am all unpractised.
Wheeling, down on men he swoopeth
As a hawk that hunts a covey,
Or as grim wolf striding swiftly
For a night-raid on the sheepfold.

1 l. 136, 7.
Ruin spares not any creature
In the fold or on the field-track,
Nor 'tis my belief the Dooms pass
Idly o'er a star-sown region:
They shall seize on Lyra, Virgo,
On Arcturus and his consort.
Every soul do they search after
In the wide world east and westward,
Visit ruthlessly of human
Kind the alien and the Arab.

Not a lightning-gleam but somewhere
Wakes a thrill of joy or sorrow.
Fancy hath enslaved the freeman
From her toils to flee unwilling.
Those that seek me shall not find me,
Far away my camping-places.
On our crowns erewhile the locks lay
Jet as 'twere the raven's plumage;
Then the mirk cleared and we marvelled
How the pitch-black changed to milk-white.
When my belly a little dwindles\(^1\),
I shall count upon God's favour,
Though provided for the night-march
Only with a skin of water\(^2\).

(Metre: \textit{Tawil}.) \hspace{1cm} (41)

If no elder shall be left behind me to feel himself
Undone by my loss, nor child, for what am I living?
And Life is a malady whose one medicine is Death,
So quietly let me go the way to my purpose\(^3\).

(Metre: \textit{Basit}.) \hspace{1cm} (42)

Better for Adam and all who issued forth from his loins
That he and they, yet unborn, created never had been!
For whilst his body was dust and rotten bones in the earth,
Ah, did he feel what his children saw and suffered of woe?

\(^1\) \textit{i.e.} in consequence of fasting. \hspace{1cm} \(^2\) \textit{i. 115, 13.} \hspace{1cm} \(^3\) \textit{i. 182, 2.}
What wouldest thou with a house that ne'er is thine to possess, Whence, after dwelling a little space, thou goest again? Thou leav'st it sullenly, not with sound of praise in thine ears, And in thy heart the desire thereof—a passionate love.

* * * * *

The spirit's vesture art thou, which afterwards it puts off— And vesture moulders away, ay, even armour and mail. The Nights, renewing themselves, outwear it: still do they show In ever wearing it out the same old treacherous grain. But men are different sorts, and he that speaks to them truth Is paid with hatred, and he that lies and flatters, with gold. Who dirhems hath but a few to falsehood hasteneth soon, The tales he feigns but a few to falsehood hasteneth soon, And oftentimes will a man upbraid himself for his true And honest speech, when he sees the luck of fellows that lie.

(43)

The World, oh, fie upon her! Umm Dafr her name of honour— Mother of stink, not scent. The dove amongst the sprays there, Warbling so well his lays there, Hath voice more eloquent (Sages opine) than any That preach in pulpit, when he Vows that Time's gifts are many And all with poison blent.

(Metre: Tawil.)

(44)

Of each day I take adieu, aware that the like of it, Once gone from the like of me, will never return more. Ill-starred are the easy ways of life where the careless stroll, Howbeit they deem their lot auspicious and happy.

1 II. 120, last line.  
2 See note 2, p. 71 supra.  
3 I. 136, 2. Cf. I. 81, 8: "I attributed the notes of the dove to the more proper cause, for I did not say, 'It sings,' but I said, 'It weeps and moans.' And this is because happenings are many, and the greater part of them are rough, not kindly."
For me, 'tis as though I ride an old jaded beast, what time 
Outstretched on a bough the lizard basks in the noon-blaze. 
Death journeys amid the night when all friends and foemen sleep, 
And ever afoot is he whilst we are reclining¹.

(Metre: Ṭāfir.)
O purblind men, is none clear-eyed amongst you? 
Alas, have ye none to guide you towards the summit? 
We people the world in youthtide and in greyness 
Of eld, and in woe we sleep and in woe we waken; 
And all lands we inhabit at every season, 
And find earth's hills the same as we found its valleys. 
A bed is made smooth and soft for the rich man's slumber— 
Oh, gladder for him a grave than a couch to lie on! 
Whenever a soul is joined to a living body, 
Between them is war of Moslem and unbeliever².

(Metre: Tawil.)
In pleasures is no stay: their sweets beguile 
At first, but ah the bitter after-while! 
Time vowed we all to dust should surely come, 
And sent, to search us out, the messengers of doom. 
Man, once enriched by Death, wants nothing more; 
A child receives Life's breath, and he is poor³.

Had men followed me—confound them!—well had I guided them 
To Truth or to some plain track by which they might soon arrive. 
For here have I lived until of Time I am tired, and it 
Of me; and my heart hath known the cream of experience.

* * * * *

What choice hath a man except seclusion and loneliness, 
When Destiny grants him not the gaining of that he craves? 
Make peace, if thou wilt, or war: the Days with indifferent hand 
Their measure mete out alike to warrior and friend of peace⁴.

¹ I. 245, 14. ² I. 292, 5. ³ I. 319, 10. ⁴ I. 121, last line.
The wants of my soul keep house, close-curtained, like modest wives,
While other men's wants run loose, like women sent back divorced.
A steed when the bit chafes sore can nowise for all his wrath
Prevail over it except he champ on the iron curb;
And never doth man attain to swim on a full-borne tide
Of glory but after he was sunken in miseries.
It hindereth not my mind from sure expectation of
A mortal event, that I am mortal and mortal's son.
I swerve and they miss their mark, the arrows Life aims at me,
But sped they from bows of Death, not thus would they see me swerve.
The strange camels jealously are driven from the waterside,
But no hand may reach so far to drive from the pond of Death.
I vow, ne'er my watcher watched the storm where should burst its flood,
Nor searched after meadows dim with rain-clouds my pioneer
And how should I hope of Time advantage and increment,
Since even as the branches he destroyed he hath rased the root?

Sore, sore the barren one's grief: no child conceived she and bare;
Yet that is better for her, with right thought were she but blest.
Death taketh naught from a lonely soul excepting itself,
Whenas he musters his might and of a sudden waylays.
Alas, the crier of good—no ear inclineth to him:
Good, since the world was, hath been a lost thing ever unsought.

Each time had its turn of me—a morning, an eve, a night—
And over me passed To-day, To-morrow, and Yesterday.
In splendid up springs a day, then blindingly creeps a mirk,
A moon rises full and sets, then followeth it a sun.

1 I.e. I never sought riches. The metaphor is one of many which remind us that in the Arabian deserts not only wealth, but the existence of man and beast depends on anxiously prognosticated showers of rain.
2 1. 277, 10.
3 1. 271, 8.
I go from the world, farewell unspoken, without a word
Of peace on my lips, for oh, its happenings are hunger-pangs.
Abstainer in two respects am I, never having touched
A woman of swelling breast or kissed pilgrim-wise the Stone.

And now I have lived to cross the border of fifty years,
Albeit enough for me in hardship were ten or five.
And if as a shadow they are gone, yet they also seem
Like heaped spoils, whereof no fifth for Allah was set apart.
The bale must on camel’s back be cored, the world be loathed,
The body be laid in earth, the trace and the track be lost.
Make haste, O my heart, make haste, repenting, to do the deeds
Of righteousness—know’st thou not the grave is my journey’s end?
And sometimes I speak out loud and sometimes I whisper low:
In sight of the One ’tis all the same, whether low or loud.
And still with adventurous soul I dive in the sea of Change,
But only to drown, alas, or ever I clutch its pearl1.

( 51 )
'Tis pain to live and pain to die,
Oh, would that far-off fate were nigh!
An empty hand, a palate dry,
A craving soul, a staring eye.

Who kindles fires in the night
For glory’s sake he shows a light;
But man, to live, needs little wealth—
A shirt, a bellyful, and health.

Clasped in the tomb, he careth not
For anything he gave or got;
Silken touch and iron thrust
Are one to him that now is dust.

We smile on happy friends awhile,
Though nothing here is worth a smile.
Give joy to those, more blest than I,
Who gained their dearest wish—to die2!

1 II. 2, 3.  
2 L. 77, 3.
So soon as they put me out of sight, I shall reckon no more
When over me sweeps in gusts a northwind or southwind.
Time’s ruinous strokes will fall: I cannot preserve my bones
By getting myself a chest of cypress or pine-wood.
I wonder, will frightful hordes of Ethiops and Nubians
Because of the wrongs I did been seen at my rest-place?
Will colour of sin endow the white-gleaming dust above
With that noble wannish hue of piety’s champions?
“‘How many a pillowing skull of mortals and cradling side,’”
Says Earth, “‘turned to rottenness and crumbled beneath me!’”
And lo, though I wrought no good to speak of, I surely hope
My drouth will be quenched at last in ampest of buckets.

If Time aids thee to victory, he will aid
Thy foe anon to take a full revenge.
The Days’ meridian heats bear off as spoil
That which was shed from the moist dawns gone by.

Earth’s lap me rids in any case
Of all the ills upon her face,
And equally ‘twixt lord and slave
Divides the portion of the grave.

A long, long time have I lived through,
And never by experience knew
That we can hear the step so light
Of angel or demonic sprite.
To God the kingdom over all;
For they, the greater as the small—
The living as the dead—remain,
And nothing perishes in vain.
Lo, if a body dies, in store
This earth will keep it evermore;
And at a sign of parting given
The soul already is in heaven.

1 l. 127, last line.  
2 l. 413, 3.  
3 n. 158, 9.
Upon the hazard of Life doth man come into the world
Against his will, and departs a loser chafed and chagrined.
He seweth, stitch after stitch, his sins to clothe him withal,
As though the crown of his head were ne'er with hoariness sown.

A bird darted on my left, but augury I practise not,
Howbeit its flight may send me somewhat of evil chance.
I see that from every race continually mounteth up
A babble of delirium, both the long and the short of it;
That piecemeal and limb by limb the body returns to earth,
But as for the spirit, none well knows whither that is gone.
And surely one day shall we, of utter necessity,
Set out on a hateful road at morning or eventide.
If base souls were reconciled with noble, their common wounds
Forgiveness had healed, not law that punishes like with like.

Consider every moment past
A thread from Life's frayed mantle cast.
Bear with the world that shakes thy breast
And live serene as though at rest.
How often did a coal of fire
Blaze up awhile, sink low, expire!
O captain, with calm mind lead on,
Where rolls the dust of war: 'tis none
Of thine, the cause that's lost or won.
Time, who gave thee so scant a dole,
He takes of human lives large toll.
Spare us more wounds: enough we owe
A fate enamoured of our woe.

1 ii. 70, penult.
2 i. 225, 5. Ma'arri condemns the Mohammedan law of retaliation
(qisds). Cf. i. 47, 8; 386, 4-5 (where دَيْتُ is a mistake for دَيْتَ);
ii. 236, penult.
3 Cf. i. 60, 3.
The Meditations of Ma'arri

Aid him that weeps and pining sighs,
And ask the laughter why he joys,
When our most perfect sage seems yet
A schoolboy at his alphabet¹.

(Metre: Wāfīr.)

Aweary am I of living in town and village—
And oh, to be camped alone in a desert region,
Revived by the scent of lavender when I hunger
And scooping into my palm, if I thirst, well-water!
Meseemeth, the Days are dromedaries lean and jaded
That bear on their backs humanity travelling onward;
They shrink not in dread from any portentous nightmare,
Nor quail at the noise of shouting and rush of panic,
But journey along for ever with those they carry;
Until at the last they kneel by the dug-out houses.
No need, when in earth the maid rests covered over,
No need for her locks of hair to be loosed and plaited;
The young man parts from her, and his tears are flowing—
Even thus do the favours flow of disgusting Fortune².

The nature mingled with the souls of men
Against their reason fights, and breaks it so
That now its lustre seems of no avail,
A sun palled o'er with clouds and shadows dark,
Until, when death approaches, they perceive
That all they wrought is foolishness and vain.

A knave may go abroad and seal his fate,
As when the viper sallies from its hole;
Or stay at home to die by slow degrees,
Like meagre wolf that in the covert hides.
The soul is Life's familiar: at the thought
Of parting burst, in torrent gush, her tears.

¹ I. 223, 4. ² I. 387, 6.

N. S.
And well I know, ungrieving for aught past,
My time's least portion is this present last.
The righteous seek what Law forbears to ban,
But I have found no law permitting—Man.

(60)

A mighty God, men evil-handed,
The dogmas of free-will and fate;
Day and Night with falsehood branded,
Woes that ne'er had or have a date.

(Metre: Wáfir.)

To live we desire because of exceeding folly,
Albeit to lose our life were a lot desired.
Tho' lion and hare complain of their evil fortune,
Nor hoarse growls mercy win nor feeble squeakings.
The while I was there, I nothing could see that liked me,
And wished to be gone—oh, when shall I go for ever?

(61)

The Imam, he knows—'tis no ill thought of mine—
The missionaries work for place and power.
In the air a myriad floating atoms shine,
But sink to rest in the passing of an hour.
There lives no man distinct from his fellows: all
One general kind, their bodies to earth akin;
And sure the hidden savour of honey is gall—
Confound thee! how thy fool tongue licks it in!

(62)

Thronged cities shall turn to desolate sands again
And the vast wilderness be choked with men.

1 II. 183, 4.
2 II. 180, 12.
3 i. 93, 6.
4 The Imam is the leader of a religious sect or community, while the missionaries (dd'I, plural du'di) are those who carry on propaganda and endeavour to increase the number of his adherents. Professor Browne (Literary History of Persia, vol. i. p. 410 foll.) gives an interesting account of the methods employed by the Ismá'íli dd'Is, to whom Ma'arri is referring here.
5 i. 94, 5.
Nay, tremble not, O my limbs, because of your mouldering
When earth shall be cast upon the grave that is dug for you.
For reason it thus: if now this body is surely vile
Before dissolution, worse and viler the coward's act.
I ride on the shoulders of mine hours, and fain would I
Have tarried, but never Time's departure is tarrying.
May God punish Day and Night! They hold me in dire suspense:
By two threads I seem to hang—the threads of a thing of naught.
My life, when it comes to birth and hastens towards decay,
Methinks, 'tis but as a lad who frolics and plays with dust.

Thou campest, O son of Adam, the while thou marchest,
And sleep'st in thy fold, and thou on a night-long journey.
Whoso in this world abides hath hope of profit,
Howbeit a living man is for aye a loser.
The blind folk everywhere, eastward and westward,
Have numbered amongst their riches the staves they lean on.

Oh, many a soul had won a pleasant life
Had she not stood in danger from her fates.
Things here are but a line writ by the pen
Of Doom; and love of them begins the line.

The youth goes on wearing out his garment of Yemen stuff
A certain season until he wears the garment of eld.
And that indeed is a robe, when any one puts it on,
Excludes delight evermore, casts joy like spittle away.
Inhabitants of the earth! full many a rider have I
Asked how ye fare, for I know no news of you, not a word.
Change now hath ceased, hardships now are unremembered: 'tis thus
The aged camel forgets, when quit of service, his gall.

* * * * *

1 I. 199, 5.  2 I. 396, 11.  3 I. 382, 15.
The city's leading divine went forth to bury his friend,
And seest not thou that he brought no lesson back from the grave?
The present hour, it is thine; the past a babble of dream;
And nothing sweet hath in store for thee the rest that remains.

(Metre: *Tawil.*)

Tho' doubtlessly long ago the genie of Youth is dead,
The devils that haunt the heart scorn aught but rebellion.
She teemeth, the noisome world, with sour milk; or be it sweet,
How many a one she spurns who came for refreshment!
A cool draught I drank that left no fire of thirst behind,
And flung from my shoulders off the fairest of mantles.

(Metre: *Tawil.*)

Men are as fire: a spark it throws,
Which, being kindled, spreads and grows.
Both swallow-wort and palm to-day
Earth breeds, and neither lasts for aye.
Had men wit, happy would they call
The kinsfolk at the funeral;
Nor messengers would run with joy
To greet the birthday of a boy.

(Metre: *Tawil.*)

O company of the dead, request ye the last-comers
To give you the news, for they are highest the knowledge.
They'll tell you the lands are still unchanged from the state ye knew
Aforetime—all keeps the same in highland and lowland.
The world hath not ceased to make a dupe of its bosom-friend
And leave him awake instead of closing his eyelids,
And guilefully show the dark in semblance of light to him,
And feed him with gall the while he thinks it is honey;
And lo, on a bier hath laid him out—him that many a night
Rode forth on a hard camel or mounted a courser.
It left no device untried to fool him, no effort he
To love it with all his heart in utter devotion.

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1. i. 359, 5.  
2. i. 280, 13.  
3. i. 317, 4.  
4. i. 268, 15.
The holy fights by Moslem heroes fought,
The saintly works by Christian hermits wrought
And those of Jewry or of Sabian creed—
Their valour reaches not the Indian's deed
Whom zeal and awe religiously inspire
To cast his body on the flaming pyre.
Yet is man's death a long, long sleep of lead
And all his life a waking. O'er our dead
The prayers are chanted, hopeless farewells ta'en;
And there we lie, never to stir again.
Shall I so fear in mother earth to rest?
How soft a cradle is thy mother's breast!
When once the viewless spirit from me is gone,
By rains unfreshened let my bones rot on!

(Metre: Tawil.)
The righteous are in a sea, albeit on land they dwell:
Wherever they find the good, the evil is not to seek.
This world am I owing aught of kindness, when that which grieves
The soul here is many times the double of that which glads?
The comrade of Life stands face to face still with that he loathes,
Ay, were it no more than heats of midday and frosts of night.

Winter is come upon us, to its sway
Subduing naked poor and mantled prince;
And Fortune on her favourite bestows
A people's food, whilst one more needy starves.
Had this world been a bride, thou wouldst have found
The husband-murderess unmated yet.
Bend thy right hand to drink in purity,
Loathly for drinking is the ivory cup.

1 The connexion of ideas seems to be this: "I admire the courage of the Indian ascetic who cremates himself, but death, after all, is not such a terrible thing: it is only a falling asleep."
2 I. 260, 6.
3 I. 353, 5.
Mankind are on a journey: let us make
Provision for the farthest that may fall.
Admire none safe from trouble—safe, forsooth!
Plunged in the swoll'n tide of a wave-tossed sea;
A pioneer exploring for his tribe,
Who midst the dark descries a lightning-gleam,
And did not God avert, would meet such woe
As monarchs crowned have met and noteless men.

(73)

(Metre: *Tawil.*

Our souls with each other vie in snatching the spoils of Life
Unguarded awhile: thou too surprise, if thou canst, the foe.
My stay in the world heaps loss upon me—and seem not I
Already departed hence, albeit I here remain?
No sooner a man is born than straightway his death becomes,
What fortune soe'er he gain, the grandest of gifts to him.
The world’s age hath mounted up: so old ‘tis, that yonder stars
Methinks are the hair of Night with hoariness glistening.

* * * * *

The union of all mankind in error, from East to West,
Amongst them was made complete by difference of rite and creed.
O short-stepping slow-paced Hours! and natheless I know full well
They swifter pass than steeds that move with a raking stride.

(74)

Now sleeps the sufferer, but never sleeps
Thy sentry-star, O Night, in mirkest hours.
If yonder heaven unfading verdure keeps,
Perchance the shining stars may be its flowers.

Men are as plants upspringing after rain,
Which, springing up, even then begin to die—
Poppies and cowslips: one herd doth profane
Their bloom, another feeds on low and high.

1 i. 204, 2.  
2 i. 126, 5.  
3 In Arabic and Persian poetry the sky is either blue or green. The words denoting these colours take a wide range and are sometimes applied to objects which we should rather describe as grey, tawny, or black.
The bastard and the child of wedlock show
Outwardly like: no eye discerns the stain,
Ignorance rules, and only this we know,
That we shall pass and One Lord shall remain.¹

(Metre: Tawil.)
He gave to himself the name of Joy—fool and liar he!²
May earth stop his mouth! In Time is anything joyful?
Yes: one part of good is there in many a thousand parts,
And when we have found it, those that follow are evil.
Our riches and poverty, precaution and heedlessness
And glory and shame—'tis all a cheat and illusion.
Encompassed are we by Space, which cannot remove from us,
And Time, which doth ever pass away with his people.
So charge, as thou wilt, the foe, or skulk on the battle-field:
The Nights charge at thee and wheel again to the onset.³

(Metre: Tawil.)
It angers thee—does it not?—that base thou art called and vile,
And yet thou art base enough, for Time is thy father.
The fool took his world to wife: he recked not, and surely she
Hath plagued and defied him after seizing the dowry.⁴
By quitting her ways of guile and torment go, purge thyself!
This harlot makes good her plea of purity never.
My lifetime I spent in breaths, dividing therewith the days
At first, then the months which follow each after other;
And little by little thus crept on, as a wayfarer
Whose sides spasms heave—for him his comrades must tarry:
Like ants ever climbing up the ridge of a sandy dune,
Not staying their march until the ridge is behind them.⁵

¹ I. 338, penult.
² Ma'arrī ridicules the inappropriateness of personal names, e.g., when a coward is known as Asad (Leo), of honorific titles that should be reserved for God alone, such as Muqtadir and Qahir, and of kunyas given to children (I. 147, 8; 225, 12–13; 366, 9–10; II. 95, 7). His own true name, he says, is not Abu 'l-'Ala (father of eminence) but Abu 'l-Nuzul, i.e. father of degradation (II. 232, 6).
³ I. 315, 2.
⁴ According to Moslem law, the dowry is paid by the husband to the wife.
⁵ I. 309, 13.
Your fortunes are as lamps that guide by night,  
Make haste ere they be spent. Even as a fire's  
Own flames consume it and do quench its light,  
So by repeated breaths our life expires.

How many a speaker, many a hearer slept  
'Neath earth as though they ne'er could speak or hear!  
Dark clouds unsmiling o'er them long had wept—  
Their hands no bounty shed, their eyes no tear¹.  

(Metre: Wāfir.)

Our bodies of dust, they quake with a doubt uneasy  
When, ceasing from all unrest, long-wandering mortals  
Are ware of return to Earth, who of kin is nearest—  
Best healer of pain, tho' sound as a crow's their health be.  
For lo, to the clouds they soar in a vain ambition,  
And tumble with souls athrill to the chase of honour,  
And spears in the clash are shivered and swords are dunted.  
For dross they would die; yet he that complains of hunger,  
He wants but a little food; or of thirst, but water.  
Nobility's nature base blood hath corrupted:  
Cross-breeding will mar the stock of a noble stallion.  
And kings in their wealth deep wallow, but comes a suitor  
Their bounty to taste, they prove a mirage deluding;  
And sometimes ravin goads from his lair the lion  
To prowl all night in sheepcote and camel-shelter.  
If Fate's stern hand on high ne'er trembles, surely  
Thy trembling in hope or fear will avail thee nothing².

(Metre: Mutaqdrib. Scheme: \( \diamond - \approx | \diamond - \approx | \diamond - \approx | \diamond - \).)  
By night, while the foe slept, we journeyed in flight,  
And praised in the morning our journey by night.  
The sons of old Adam seek wealth to enjoy  
Below in the earth and above in the sky.

¹ II. 78, 3. In this translation one verse of the original has been omitted.  
² I. 90, 2.
A man guides the plough and a man wields the sword,
And both on the morrow have got their reward.
The soldier with glory returns home again,
The labourer comes laden with trouble and pain.\(^1\)

(Metre: \(\text{Tawil}\).)  
I linger behind, alas, and know not the things unseen;  
Perchance he that passes on is nearer to God than I.
The soul, fearing death, loves life, but long life is poison sure,  
And all come to die, alike householder and wanderer.
The earth seeketh, even as we, its livelihood day by day  
Apportioned: it eats and drinks of this human flesh and blood.  
They slandered the sun himself, pretending he will not rise  
When called at his hour except he suffer despite and blows\(^2\).
Meseemeth, a crescent moon that shines in the firmament  
Is Death's curvèd spear, its point well-sharpened to thrust at them;  
And splendour of breaking day a sabre unsheathed by Dawn  
Against them, whose edge is steeped in venom of mortal dooms\(^3\).

Nor glory nor dishonour sundereth  
Moses and Pharaoh in the hour of death—  
Death, like a shivering crone who feeds a flame  
With lote and laurel, for 'tis all the same;  
A lioness that drags into her cave  
Her slaughtered prey, the freeman and the slave,  
Launching them piecemeal both with tongue and paw  
Into wide-opened all-devouring maw.\(^4\).

\(^1\) I. 72, 8. The literal translation of the last couplet is: "This one returns with (the letters) ʼayn and ʼzd (= 'izz, glory), and that one with (the letters) ʼdd and ʼrd (= ʼurr, pain).

\(^2\) This refers to the well-known verses by Umayya b. Abi 'l-Salt (ed. by Schulthess, No. 25, vv. 46-47): "And at the end of every night the sun rises red, his colour turning to rose. He does not rise for them willingly, but only when he is chastised and beaten."

The next verse was evidently suggested by a verse of Umayya which is quoted in the \(\text{Lisdn}\), vi. 50, 18.

\(^3\) I. 82, 6. Cf. with the last four lines II. 332, 6-8.

\(^4\) I. 385, penult.
Man wishes that Life were incorruptible and that ne'er
Would perish and come to naught the woe of existence.
Even so is the ostrich of the desert in fear of death,
For all that its two sole foods are flint-stones and gourd-seeds¹.

Untruth ran from sire to son amongst them: the sage alone
According to knowledge speaks, not after the ancients.
The world's children I have known and yet have I sued to them,
As though were unquenched my hope by knowing them inly.
Original wickedness is struggled against in vain,
What Nature hath moulded ill can never be mended.
The Book do ye read for truth and righteousness' sake? Not so:
Your piety only serves your pride and ambition.

And Life is a she-camel that bears far across the sands
An emigrant weeping sore for that which he suffers;
With travel I milked her strength remaining, until at last
I left her exhausted, no more milk in her udder;
And now, after being mauled, her old savageness is dead
And buried, except that still the tomb is her hāma².

I see but a single part of sweet in the many sour,
And Wisdom that cries, "Beget no children, if thou art wise³";
Religion diseased: whoso is healthy and hopes to cure
Its sickness, he labours long and meanwhile himself falls sick;

¹ I. 246, 5.
² I. 305, 11. The pre-Islamic Arabs believed that the ghost or wraith of the dead man hovered over his grave in the shape of an owl (hāma). Here the poet's meaning seems to be that he has rid himself of ignorance and superstition except in one particular: his life is still haunted by the fear of death.
³ Literally, "let her (thy wife) be barren."
A dawn and a dark that seem—what signify else their hues
Alternate?—as stripes of white and black on a venomed snake;
And Time's universal voice commanding that they sit down
Who stood on their feet, and those who sate, that they now up-
stand.
Methinks, happiness and joy of heart is a fault in man:
Whenever it shows itself, 'tis punished with hate and wrath.

(85)

My God, oh, when shall I go hence? I have stayed too long and
tarry still.
I know not what my star may be, but ever it hath brought me ill.
From me no friend hath hope of boon, no enemy hath fear of bane.
Life is a painful malady, and Death—he comes to cure its pain.
The tomb receiveth me and them, and none was seen to rise again.

(Metre: Ṭawīl.)

(86)

What! shall a house be drest in glittering gold, and then
Its owner abandon it and presently go his way?
I see in the body a brand of fire: Death puts it out,
And lo, all the while thou liv'st it burns with a ceaseless flame.

(Metre: Wā fir.)

(87)

A man drew nigh a wife for a fated purpose,
To bring by his act a third life into being.
Without rest she the sore load bears, and only
'Tis laid down when the tale of her months is reckoned;
And she to her source returns—ay, all things living
Trace back to the ancient Four their common lineage.

(Metre: Ṭawīl.)

(88)

I travelled and got no good of body or soul thereby,
And naught was my turning home but folly and weakness.
Who feareth his Lord alone, him never His gifts will fail,
Albeit at praying-time he faces the sunrise.

1 II. 295, II.
2 I. 83, 2.
3 II. 324, 3.
4 I. 91, 5.
I see how the living things of earth dread their doom: to them Despair with the thunder comes and hope with the lightning. Feel safe and secure, O bird! and thou fear not, O gazelle, I'll harm thee: in fortune we are one, undivided.

(89)
The star-chart thou unrollest, to unravel Life's knots; and flying Time bids thee make haste. The world is never lavish of its honey Till bitter mingles with the sweet we taste.

(90)
Pay ye no honour to my limbs when death Descends on me: the body merits none. 'Tis like a mantle by the wearer prized, Which he holds cheap when its new gloss is gone.

(Metre: Tawil.)
The first-born of Time enjoyed his young lusty strength, but we Came weak, after he was old and fallen into dotage. And would that a man were like the full-moon which lives anew And rises a crescent moon when each month is vanished!

(92)
When I would string the pearls of my desire, Alas, Life's too short thread denies them room. Vast folios cannot yet contain entire Man's hope; his life is a compendium.

(93)
My body a herb of earth, my head grown hoary— The glistening flower is the herb's last glory. When ships on high adventure sail with thee, What rivers bear not rides upon the sea.

(94)
Though falcon-like Man peers at things, A dark cloud to his mind's eye clings. I say not foul is mixed with fair; No, 'tis all foulness, I declare.

1 ii. 116, 9. 2 i. 213, 5. 3 i. 299, 12. 4 i. 307, 13. 5 i. 317, 15. 6 i. 319, 16. 7 i. 347, 16.
(95)

There's no good in thy treating maladies
And agues after fifty years are past.
A man may live so long, they say on his decease
Not "He is dead," but "Now he lives at last."  

(96)

O'er many a race the sun's bright net was spread
And loosed their pearls nor left them even a thread.
This dire World delights us, though all sup,
All whom she mothers, from one mortal cup.
A choice of ills: which rather of the twain
Wilt thou?—to perish or to live in pain?  

(97)

I will do good the while I can—to-day;
O'er me, when I am dead, ye need not pray.
Though all your saints should bless me, will it win
A clear way out from that which shuts me in?  

(98)

The stars we ought to glorify,
Which God hath honoured and set high
For all the world. And Life, how be
It ne'er so fondly loved by thee,
Is like a chain of pearls ill-strung,
That chafed the neck on which it hung.

(99)

(Metre: Mutaqârib. Scheme: \( \circ - \times | \circ - \times | \circ - \).)

I trespass, do evil—and He,
My Lord, knoweth well what I be.
O help me! for waking I seem
To live all the while in a dream.

1 II. 48, 3.  
2 II. 149, 2.  
3 II. 149, penult.  
4 II. 275, 12.  
5 II. 277, penult.
'Tis plain what way I follow and what rule,
For am not I like all the rest a fool?
I too a creature of the world was made
And like the others lived and worked and played.
I came by fate divine and shall depart
(Hear my confession!) with God-fearing heart.
Not vain am I of any good I wrought;
Nay, by a sore dread are my wits distraught.

I conclude this section with a few short pieces which
might be called elegiac epigrams if their purpose were not
rather to warn and exhort than to mourn or commemorate.

Earth covered many a fresh young maid, alas,
Who Pleiad-like in glorious beauty shone;
Yet so self-pleased would look into her glass,
I sent no word of greeting but rode on.

Death came to visit him: he knit his brows
And frowned on Death—and never frowned again.
They gave him store of balm to join his folk,
But earth is balm enow for buried men.
Propped on his side, whilst in the tomb he lay,
To us he seemed a preacher risen to pray.

He boasts no diadem, having in the tomb
A prouder fate—the friend whom thou dost mourn.
A king wants thousands to defend him; Death
Stands not in need of any creature born.

As on her month's first night the crescent moon,
So came the youth and so departed soon.
Peace he hath won, from life untimely ta'en,
Who, had he lived, had suffered lifelong pain.

1 II. 395, last line.
2 l. 140, penult.
3 l. II4, II.
4 I. 215, 3.
5 I. 400, 12.
They robed the Christian's daughter,
From high embowered room
In dusky robe they brought her
Down, down into a tomb—
And oh, her dress had often been
Gay as a peacock's plume.

II.
HUMAN SOCIETY.

"It may be thou wilt abide in Paradise hereafter; at any rate in quitting this world thou hast escaped from Hell." Would the poet have found life so painful if he had not been blind, poor, and disappointed in his hopes, and if the conditions of the age had been less deplorable than they were? Possibly; for we know that pessimism may spring from temperament or from philosophical reflection, and that a man's state of mind and feeling need not depend at all on the circumstances in which he lives. To grant this, however, is far from justifying the inference that Ma'arri's private misfortunes and his consciousness of public ills had nothing to do with his philosophy of life. The former, culminating in his failure at Baghdád, caused him to feel that solitude was the only tolerable alternative to non-existence, while the latter confirmed him in the belief that all mankind are fools, knaves, liars, and hypocrites, or vented itself in denunciation of particular classes and professions. His contemporaries were not so uniformly black as he painted them, but since understanding comes before criticism, let us consider for a moment what was the general situation of the Moslem empire and especially of Syria during the last quarter of the tenth and the first half of the eleventh century A.D.

1 Luzum, ii. 42, ii. 2 Ibid. ii. 322, 8; cf. i. 317, ii; ii. 68, 4; 324, ii.
3 During the earlier part of his life. In the period following his return from Baghdád he seems to have been comparatively well off. Cf. the last paragraph of this section.
The 'Abbásid Caliphs had long ceased to govern, though their spiritual authority was acknowledged by most of the independent princes who supplanted them. In Baghdaţ the Buwayhids, a Persian dynasty, held absolute sway; and while they extended their power over western and southern Persia, another Persian house, the Sámánids, maintained themselves in Khurásán and Transoxania until they were dispossessed by the Turkish Ghaznevids. Ma‘arrí did not live to see the western advance of the Seljuqs, who had occupied Baghdaţ in A.D. 1055, three years before his death; Aleppo and Damascus fell into their hands about fifty years later. For him the political storm-centre was Cairo, which since its foundation in A.D. 969 had been the capital of the Fáţimid dynasty. The Fáţimids, according to their own story, stood in the direct line of descent from the Prophet through his daughter Fátima; consequently they regarded the 'Abbásid Caliphs (who descended from the Prophet's uncle) as usurpers and claimed the title and prerogatives of the Caliphate by right divine. Their real ancestor was 'Abdulláh ibn Maymún al-Qaddáh, the son of a Persian oculist. He belonged to the Ismá‘îlî sect, a branch of the Shi‘ites which recognises seven Imáms, or pontiffs, of the Prophet's House, the last of these being Muḥammad ibn Ismá‘îl (ob. circa A.D. 770). Exploiting the Shi‘ite belief that the Imám, although he may vanish and remain hidden for a time, will one day return to fill the earth with justice, 'Abdulláh set a vast conspiracy in train. His methods of propaganda have been described as grotesque, audacious, and satanic; but whatever we think of their morality, we must be profoundly impressed by the genius displayed in them. In A.D. 909, thirty-four years after the death of 'Abdulláh ibn Maymún, his grandson appeared amongst the Berbers of North Africa, announcing himself under the name of 'Ubaydulláh as the promised Mahdí and giving out that he was a descendant of the Imám Muḥammad

1 Cf. Luzím, i. 131, 6: "The state of Islam is so contemptible that its chief (the 'Abbásid Caliph) is become a falcon for falconers or a dog for huntsmen."

2 See Professor Browne's Literary History of Persia, vol. i. p. 394 fol. and 410 foll.
ibn Ismá’īl. This ‘Ubaydulláh founded the Fāṭimid dynasty in Tunis, and his successors, advancing eastward, conquered Egypt and Syria as far as Damascus (A.D. 969–70). If the rule of the Fāṭimids “was on the whole, despite occasional acts of cruelty and violence inevitable in that time and place, liberal, beneficent, and favourable to learning,” the Ismá’īlī doctrines bore other fruit which was deadly enough to excuse the worst construction that could be put upon them. I refer to the Carmathians and the so-called Assassins. During the tenth century the Carmathians (Qardmíta)—originally the followers of an Ismá’īlī missionary, Ḥamdán Qarmat—ravaged, plundered, and massacred in many lands of Islam; in A.D. 930 they even sacked Mecca and carried off the Black Stone from the Ka’ba. They paid a somewhat inconstant homage to the Fatimid Caliphs, whose secret diplomacy used them for its own ends and directed their operations, though the alliance was disavowed officially.

At the date of Ma‘arrí’s birth northern Syria, including Aleppo and Ma‘arra, was held by a successor of the famous Ḥamdánid prince, Sayfu ’l-Dawla; but the Fāṭimids were already beginning to threaten it from the south. The struggle went on with varying fortune for about ninety years. It raged most fiercely round Aleppo, which passed to and fro from the Ḥamdánids to the Fāṭimids and from the Fāṭimids to a Bedouin dynasty, the Banú Mirdás. On one occasion the Ḥamdánid Abu ’l-Faḍá‘īl “endeavoured to obtain the help of the Greek emperor against the Egyptian invaders, and such help was readily given, since the maintenance of Antioch in Christian hands depended on the possibility of playing off one Moslem power against the other. Aleppo after a siege of thirteen months by ‘Azíz’s general was set free by the timely aid of the Emperor Basil.” Thus Ma‘arrí lived all his life in the shadow of war and was familiar with its horrors and miseries. Once at least he came forward as peace-maker.

The historian al-Qiftí relates that in A.D. 1027, when Šāliḥ ibn Mirdás, the governor of Aleppo, besieged Ma‘arra and

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1 See Professor Browne’s Literary History of Persia, vol. 1. p. 399.
2 Prof. D. S. Margoliouth, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Damascus, p. 27 fol.

N. S.
bombarded it with a catapult (manjaniq), the terrified inhabitants implored Ma'arri to intercede with him. "Abu 'l-'Alá went forth, leaning on a guide. Şálih was told that the gate of the town had been thrown open and that a blind man was being led out. He gave orders to cease fighting. 'It is Abu 'l-'Alá,' said he: 'let us see what he wants.' He received the poet courteously, granted his request, and asked him to recite some poetry. Abu 'l-'Alá improvised a few verses which occur in the Luzumiyyá1."

Another version of the incident is not so picturesque but seems more probable. Şálih had arrested seventy notables of Ma'arra, and Abu 'l-'Alá was sent to plead for their release, a task which he successfully accomplished2.

The prevailing anarchy fostered social and economic disorders of the gravest kind, and these in turn provoked fresh outbreaks of lawlessness. Here are some extracts from the annals of this period: they may help the reader to imagine what it was like.

Anno 982–3: It is said that on account of the civil wars between the 'Abbásid and the Fátimid Caliphs no one made the pilgrimage from 'Iráq (to Mecca) during the years 982–90. There were no pilgrims from 'Iráq in the years 1002, 1008, 1010, 1017–21, etc., etc. Bands of Carmathians and Bedouins infested the caravan routes, robbing travellers or levying

1 Dhikrā Abî 'l-'Alâ, p. 66. The verses referred to (Luzûm, i. 302, 3) are not complimentary either to Şálih or to the people of Ma'arra:

I remained in seclusion a long while, unblamed and unenvied.

When all but the least part of my life had passed, and my soul was doomed to quit the body (soon),

I was sent as an intercessor to Şálih—and the plan of my fellow-townsmen was a bad one;

For he heard from me the cooing of a dove, and I heard from him the roaring of a lion.

Let me not be pleased with this hypocrisy: how often does an hour of tribulation make dear what was cheap before! (i.e. if my fellow-citizens honoured me, it was only from self-interest: they thought I could serve them in a crisis).

2 The events which caused Ma'arri to undertake this mission are related by Professor Margoliouth in his Introduction to the Letters of Abu 'l-'Alâd, p. 33; cf. Luzûm, i. 355, 14 foll. If Şálih really besieged Ma'arra, we must suppose that the town had revolted against him in consequence of his tyrannical act. The Luzûm makes no allusion to a siege.
blackmail. A certain Badr ibn Ḥasanawayh paid 5000 dinárs every year to the brigand al-Uṣayfir "as compensation for what he used to take from the pilgrims." In 998 the caravan from 'Irāq was intercepted by Abu 'l-Jarráh al-Ṭá'i, who demanded 9000 dinárs from Raḍí and Murtaḍá, the Sharifs of Baghdád, before he would allow it to proceed.1

Anno 983–4: The price of wheat in 'Irāq rose to an enormous figure, and "a great number of people died of hunger on the road." In 992 at Baghdád a pound of bread cost 40 dirhems, and a walnut 1 dirhem. In 1047 Mosul, Mesopotamia, and Baghdád were devastated by famine and pestilence: the number of dead reached 300,000. In 1056 (a year or two before Maʿarri's death) "plague and famine spread over Baghdád, Syria, and Egypt and the whole world, and the people were eating their dead."2

Anno 1009: Abū 'Abdallah al-Qummi al-Miṣrī the cloth-merchant died, leaving a fortune of one million dinárs, exclusive of goods, merchandise, and jewels.3

Anno 1002–3: An earthquake destroyed multitudes in the 'Awásim (the province to which Maʿarra belonged) and the frontier lands of Syria. In 1033–4 a third part of Ramla was demolished by an earthquake: "the sea ebbed to a distance of three farsakhs (about nine miles), and the people went down to fish; then it rolled back upon them and all who could not swim were drowned." During Maʿarri's lifetime there were similar disasters at Dínawar, Tabriz, Tadmor, and Baalbec.4

It would be tedious to lengthen this list by giving details, for example, of the bloody religious conflicts in Baghdád and 'Irāq, where authority was divided between a Sunnite Pope and a Shiʿite Emperor. Of course, such records mean little unless we can regard them as typical. The present case, I think, fulfils that condition in the sense that the symptoms noted above were not isolated or sporadic but continually recurred and affected the welfare of whole provinces and populations. Concerning the deeper causes of the disease—

3 Ibid. p. 106.
slavery, polygamy, the decay of religion, the unequal distribution of wealth, etc.—we learn more from Ma‘arrí than from the Moslem chronicles.

Literature does not always flourish under a strong central government or languish under a weak one. The damage inflicted by the break-up of the ‘Abbásid Caliphate was to a great extent repaired by the dynasties which succeeded it. The courts of Aleppo, Bukhará, Ghazna, and other cities became rival seats of literary culture. Every prince gathered poets and scholars around him, if not for love of learning—and this was no rarity—then in order to gratify his self-esteem and assure his prestige. Islamic literature, hitherto confined to the language of the Koran, was enriched by Persians writing in their own tongue. It is true that as science and philosophy developed, poetry and literature declined: the genius of the age was constructive rather than creative, and the materials with which its writers worked were largely foreign. From that standpoint we may call it decadent if we please; but though it lacked the brilliance of the epoch which expired with Sayfū ‘l-Dawla seven years before Ma‘arrí was born, it produced many authors of distinction and some of world-wide fame. Our poet numbered among his contemporaries Firdawsí and Avicenna; Běrúní, the historian of India, ‘Utbí, the biographer of Sultan Maḥmúd, and Bādí‘u ‘l-Zamán al-Hamadhání, inventor of a new form of romance which was brought to perfection by Ḥarírí; the scholastic theologians Bāqilání and Ibn Ḥazm, the critic Ibn Rashíq, the anthologist Tha‘álíbí, and the defender of orthodox Súfism Abu ‘l-Qásim al-Qushayrí.

The Luzúm contains several references to political affairs in Syria and elsewhere. In the following poem Ma‘arrí laments the fatal blow dealt to the house of ‘Abbás by the Buwayhid occupation of Baghdád (A.D. 945–1055).

(106)

Shun mankind and live alone, so wilt thou neither do injustice nor suffer it.

Thou wilt find that even though Fortune be favourable, there is no escape from her all-destroying onslaught.
The Meditations of Ma'arrí

Were al-Manṣūr raised from the dead, he would cry, "No peace unto thee, O City of peace!"

The sons of Hāshim dwell in the desert, and their empire has passed to the Daylamites.

If I had known that they would come to this at last, I would not have killed Abū Muslim.

He had been a loyal servant of my dynasty, and it robed him in the dark raiment.

Another poem describes the defeat of the Fāṭimids by Śāliḥ ibn Mirdās and his Bedouin allies.

I see that Śāliḥ has got possession of Aleppo, and Sinān has attacked Damascus,

While Hassán, leading the two clans of Tayyí', bends his course from Ghazza on a piebald steed.

When their horsemen saw the dust-clouds grey as thaghám hanging over their host,

They threw themselves on the mosque of Ramla, which suffered outrage and was smeared with blood.

And it boots not the damsel taken captive that skulls were split on a keen sword-blade (for her sake).

Many a victim fell unavenged and forgotten; many a prisoner was shackled and never set free.

How many a one did they leave lonely, bereft of wife and child!

How many a rich man did they leave poor!

He goes amongst the tribe, inquiring after his property; but what avails talking about a bird that is flown?

Although Ma'arrí sympathised with the 'Abbásids and disliked the Fāṭimids, prudence as well as inclination de-

1 Baghdád, founded by al-Manṣūr, the second 'Abbásid Caliph, in A.D. 762.
2 "The sons of Hāshim" are the 'Abbásids; the Daylamites are the Buwayhids.
3 See my Literary History of the Arabs, p. 251 fol.
4 Luzím, II. 316, 3. "The dark raiment" probably refers to the official costume of the 'Abbásids, which was black; not, as Von Kremer thinks, to the shroud.
5 Probably a kind of feathery grass (see Sir C. Lyall's translation of the Mufaddalíyát, p. 62, and Index under Hair).
6 II. 133, 10.
7 Cf. I. 71, 2–3, "A proud and mighty dynasty came o'er them and they were made captive in its error. They supposed that some persons (the Imáms) are immaculate, but I swear they are not pure."
tached him from the political and religious controversies of his time, so that he was able to keep on friendly terms with moderate men in either camp. Naturally, this does not prevent him from criticising the doctrine of the extreme Shi'ites, especially their veneration of the Imáms and their expectation of a Mahdí. He also ridicules their claim to possess an apocalyptic book.

(108)
The dead monarch will return if his grandfather, Ma'add, shall return to you, or his father, Nizar.

No intelligent man believes that there is at Kúfán (Kúfa) a tomb of the Imáam which pilgrims visit (in the hope of witnessing his resurrection).

The truly religious is he that hates evil and girds his loins with a band and waist-cloth of innocence.

(109)
Ye have gotten a long, long shrift, O kings and tyrants, And still ye work injustice hour by hour. What ails you that ye tread no path of glory? A man may take the field, tho' he love the bower.

But some hope an Imám with voice prophetic Will rise amidst the silent ranks agaze. An idle thought! There's no Imám but Reason To point the morning and the evening ways.

(Metre: Tawil.)

Astrologers still go on foretelling a prince of faith Amidst the enshrouding mirk to rise like a lonely star; For none shall unite the state disjointed, except a man Made perfect, who beats red-hot the cold iron, bar on bar.

1 E.g. he dedicated some of his works to the Fátimid governors of Aleppo (Letters of Abu 'l-'Ald, Introd., p. 31).  
2 Luzûm, I. 390, 13.  
4 Mu'izz Abú Tamîm Ma'add (ob. A.D. 975).  
5 'Azîz Abú Ma'nûr Nîzar (ob. A.D. 996).  
6 Cf. the verses of the Shi'ite poet, Di'îlî b. 'All, cited by Mas'ûdí (Murûju 'l-Dhakab, ed. Barbier de Meynard, vol. vi. p. 195).  
7 Luzûm, I. 315, 10.  
8 I. 65, 4.  
9 I. 278, 12.
Von Kremer (op. cit., p. 60) misunderstands this passage and attributes to Ma'arri the belief in a man of blood and iron, who alone could re-establish order and security ("in einem Manne, der mit 'Blut und Eisen' wieder die Ordnung herstellt"). The second couplet certainly expresses such a belief, but it forms part of the prediction which Ma'arri means to discredit. The world-saviour, the man of the mailed fist, is the Carmathian Imám—the last person our poet expected or desired to see, though the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in A.D. 1047 raised high hopes of his advent. Let me quote a parallel passage:

(III)

And there shall rise amongst mankind a king
Like to an angel that torments the wicked,
His hands cunning to slaughter: he shall smite
With the cold iron adversaries all.
They said, "A just Imám shall come to rule us
And shoot our enemies with a piercing shaft."
This earth, the home of mischief and despite,
Did never yield a single day's delight.

There speaks the pessimist, taught by hard experience that "Man never is, but always to be, blest."

While Ma'arri has nothing to say either for or against the Fátimid government as such, he denounces fanaticism wherever he finds it; and in his country and age it was rampant everywhere—"men (he observes) take the opposite direction to Right: they are extreme Shífîtes or bigoted Sunnîs." Alluding to the Caliph Hákim, who pretended to be an incarnation of God, he declares that the worst of mankind is a monarch who wishes his subjects to worship him. The Carmathians are bitterly attacked for their impiety and im-

1 That the poet refers to the Carmathians is made clear by the mention of Saturn in the following verse (Luzûm, i. 278, 14). Cf. i. 279, 12: "If they (the Carmathians) revere Saturn, I revere One of whom Saturn is the most ancient worshipper."
2 Luzûm, i. 296, 8.
3 Luzûm, i. 279, 12.
4 Luzûm, i. 296, 8.
5 Luzûm, i. 279, 12.
6 Luzûm, i. 279, 12.
morality. We do not know how far Ma‘arri’s description of their tenets is trustworthy: in the *Risālatu l-Ghfrān*, where he relates many anecdotes concerning this detested sect, he mentions that his information was partly derived from those who had travelled in districts under Carmathian rule.

(II2)

Will not ye fear God, O partisans of (one like) Musaylima? for ye have transgressed in obedience to your lusts. Do not follow in the footsteps of Satan—and how many a one amongst you is a follower of footsteps!

Ye adopted the opinions of the Dualists (Zoroastrians) after the sweetness of Unity (Islam) had flowed on your palates; And in resistance to the creed which ye promulgated, the spears were dyed (with gore) and the blood of the horsemen was blown to and fro in the gusts of wind.

Even the brute beasts did not approve the crimes committed by you on your mothers and mothers-in-law.

The least (most venial) thing that ye hallowed is the throat of a wineskin which makes the whole pack of you drunk and tipsy.

Ye took ‘Alí as a shield (to justify yourselves), though he always punished (his subjects) for drinking wine, even in sips.

We questioned some Magians as to the real nature of their religion. They replied, “Yes: we do not wed our sisters. That, indeed, was originally permitted in Magianism, but we count it an error.

We reject abominable things and love to adore the light of the sun at morning.”

1 *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for 1902, p. 338 foll.
2 The text has “Musallam” or “Musallim.” I read “Musaylim,” an abbreviation of Musaylima, the false prophet, whose doctrines resembled those which are here ascribed to the Carmathians. The curtailed form of his name occurs in a Persian poem by ‘Unṣurf (Dawlatsháh, *Tadhkiratu sh-Shu’ard*, ed. by E. G. Browne, p. 46, l. 8).
3 *I.e.* an imitator of others. According to Ma‘arri, the mass of mankind are enslaved by habit and tradition.
4 For an explanation of this statement see *al-Farq bayna l-firaq* (Cairo, 1910), p. 269 foll. and p. 277.
5 *I.e.* the slaughter was so great that the blood lay on the ground in pools.
6 Which proves that it is better to be a Zoroastrian than a Carmathian.
Ye treated the Koran with contempt when it came to you, and paid no heed to the Fast and the canonical prayers.
Ye expected an Imám, a misguided one, to appear at the conjunction of the planets; and when it passed, ye said, "(His coming is put off) for a few years."

There is no evidence that Ma'arri was acquainted with the higher teaching of the Ismá'ílís; and although it has been called "une espèce de culte de la raison," we can feel sure that, so far as it preserved any positive character, it would have been entirely repugnant to him. Most of the poems in which they are mentioned lay stress on their violations of law and religion, but he also charges them with revolutionary aims—"the desire, namely, to destroy the power of the Arabs and the religion of Islam whence that power was derived."

Whenever ye see a band of Hajarites, their advice to the people is, "Forsake the mosques!"
Time hides a secret which (when it is disclosed) will suddenly put to sleep all who are awake or arouse all who slumber.
They say that the influence of the conjunction of the planets will ruin the religious institutions established by the noblest leaders of men,
And that, when the heavenly fate descends, the spear of the armed champion (of Islam) will produce no more effect (on his enemies) than motes in a sunbeam.
If Islam has been overtaken by calamities which lowered its prestige, yet none ever saw the like of it.
And if they revere Saturn, I revere One of whom Saturn is the most ancient worshipper.

1 Luzum, i. 182, 5. For some time before A.D. 1047 it was proclaimed that the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in that year would mark the final triumph of the Fátimids over the ‘Abbásids. Cf. Luzum, ii. 129, 8–9 translated in my Lit. Hist. of the Arabs, p. 322).  
2 By De Goeje, Mémoire sur les Carmathes du Bahrain et les Fatimides, p. 163.  
4 Hajar in Bahrayn was the Carmathian capital.  
5 These are the words of a patriotic Moslem. Von Kremer's rendering, "none ever saw a calamity like this (Carmathian) one" (ZDMG. vol. 38, p. 500) seems inadmissible.  
6 Luzum, i. 279, 7.
(114)
The religions of every people have come down to us after a system which they themselves contrived.
And some of them altered the doctrines of others, and intelligent minds perceived the falsity of that which they affirmed to be true.
Do not rejoice when thou art honoured amongst them, for oft have they exalted a base man and held him in honour.
The external rites of Islam have been changed by a sect who sought to wound it and lopped away its branches.
And what they have spoken is (only) the prelude to a great event, as poets begin their encomia with love-songs;
For it is rumoured that on a certain day they that lie buried in the earth shall arise.

With one exception, which will be noticed presently, our author's general views on government are quite orthodox.

(115)
Fear kings and willingly yield obedience to them, for the king is a rain-cloud that waters the earth.
If they are unjust, yet they are of great use to society: how often have they defended thee with infantry and cavalry!
And did the emperors of Persia and the princes of Ghassán abstain from tyranny and oppression aforetime?
Horses set free to graze go their own way: nothing holds them in check but bridles, which gall them, and reins.

(116)
Sovereignty is fire: beneficial, if moderate, but harmful and consuming, if it transgress.
And nearness to it is the sea: if it bring thee gain, yet there is danger of death by drowning.

It is not remarkable that an Oriental writer should plead for just and rational government or point out that kings have duties as well as rights; but unless I am mistaken,

1 ii. 404, 2. Cf. ii. 427, 3: "They expected that an Imám would arise to abrogate the law laid down by the Prophet."
2 ii. 371, 1. 3 ii. 121, 12. 4 Cf. ii. 21, 4.
Ma'arri is alone in anticipating the modern democratic theory that the heads of the state are its paid servants.

(My stay (in the world) is weartisome: how long shall I associate with a people whose princes command what is not good for it? They wronged their subjects and allowed themselves to deceive them and neglected their interests, although they are their hirelings).

(Metre: Tawil.)

If well we consider things, they surely disclose to us

Their secret: the people's prince is servant of those he rules.

(Leave mankind to do as they please, for if thou look'st, (thou wilt see that) their king resembles a hired slave, who returned (from his work) in the evening.

The shade of acacia-trees whither thou resortest for shelter makes thee independent of him that asks gold in payment of the house (thou dwellest in) and the stones (with which it is built).

In two of these passages (Nos. 118 and 119) the maxim rex servus populi is used as an argument for asceticism. The poor hermit enjoys greater happiness and freedom than the most powerful monarch.

Ma'arri spares none of the ruling classes, and we cannot but wonder how such a contemptuous and outspoken critic escaped punishment. His lash falls cuttingly on princes and military governors, but with particular severity on the 'ulamā, that is to say, on those who represent the legal and religious authority in the Moslem state.

(They guide affairs the way of fools;
Their power ends, another rules.
Oh, fie on life and fie on me
And this ignoble sovereignty!)

1 I. 55, 6. 2 II. 260, 10. 3 I. 384, 11. 4 II. 23, 9.
'Tis sadness enough that all the righteous are gone together and that we are left alone to inhabit the earth. Truly, for a long while 'Irāq and Syria have been two ciphers: the king's power in them is an empty name.\(^1\)

The people are ruled by devils invested with absolute authority: in every land there is a devil in the shape of a governor—One who does not care though all the folk starve, if he can pass the night drinking wine with his belly full.\(^2\)

(122)

Never the cup rested idle in the cupbearer's hand,
But when thy bloated paunch was threatening to burst.
In the morning ankle-wise juts out thy belly,
Drink-swollen, thy head with riot split like a mazard.\(^3\)

(Metre: *Tawil.*)

Cleave thou to the act and deed of virtue, were all it brings
Of vantage to thee at last its fair sound in ears of men.
So sure as thou liv' st, there's none that flees from the world in sooth,
Not even the eremites of Christendom in their cells.
The princes of humankind are worser than all the rest,
When like unto hovering hawks they swoop down and snatch their prey.
A ruler in every land: if one by God's help goes straight,
Another perverts the course of justice to vilest ends.
The property he by fraud removes from its rightful hands—Then burst forth in overflow the waters of weeping eyes;
Around him a legal crew with visages bleak as crags
Which never were softer made by plenteously-gushing rains.\(^4\)

Ma'arri's opinion of the 'ulamá (Moslem divines) is briefly expressed in the verse—

With wakeful grief the pondering mind must scan
Religion made to serve the pelf of Man—\(^5\)

---

\(^1\) "The king" referred to is the 'Abbásid Caliph.

\(^2\) *Luzúm,* p. 335, 5.  \(^8\) I. 87, 9.

\(^3\) *Luzúm,* p. 335, 5.

\(^4\) II. 90, 4.

\(^5\) II. 129, 10:

مَدَافِبِ جَعِلَهَا مِنْ مَعَايِشَهُ ﻣِنْ يُؤْجِلُ الْفَکَّرُ فِيهَا تُؤْجِلُ الْأَرْزَاقَ
and is best illustrated by the poems which give us his views on that subject. Meanwhile a few specimens may find a place here.

(124)
I take God to witness that the souls of men are without intelligence, like the souls of moths. They said, “A divine!” but the divine is an untruthful disputatious person, and words are wounds.

(125)
There are robbers in the desert, camel-rivers, Robbers too in mosque and market may be seen; And the name of these is notary and merchant, While the others bear the name of “Bedaween.”

(126)
What man was ever found to be a cadi and to refrain from giving judgments like the judgment of Sadûm? Things insensible bear no burden of calamity: does it trouble rocks that they are hewn with an adze?

(Metre: Ṭawîl.)

(127)
Who knows? Some that fill the mosque with terror whene’er they preach
No better may be than some that drink to a tavern-tune.
If God’s public worship serve them only to engine fraud, Then nearer to Him are those forsaking it purposely.
Let none vaunt himself who soon returns to an element Of clay which the potter takes and cunningly moulds for use.
A vessel, if so it hap, anon will be made of him,
From whence any common churl at pleasure may eat and drink; And he, unaware the while, transported from land to land—
O sorrow for him! his bones have crumbled, he wanders on.

1 II. 262, last line.
2 1. 87, last line. Cf. II. 90, io.
3 The name Sadûm (Sodom) is applied by Moslems both to the city and to its wicked judge.
4 Luzûm, II. 297, 6. In these poems Ma’arrî often says that he longs for anaesthesia to relieve him of the pain of life. Cf. Luzûm, I. 295, 7–8 (translated in my Lit. Hist. of the Arabs, p. 323); II. 123, i foll.; 130, penult.
5 i. 81, 12.
For his own sordid ends
The pulpit he ascends,
And though he disbelieves in resurrection,
Makes all his hearers quail
Whilst he unfolds a tale
Of Last Day scenes that stun the recollection\(^1\).

They recite their sacred books, although the fact informs me that
these are a fiction from first to last.
O Reason, thou (alone) speakest the truth. Then perish the fools
who forged the (religious) traditions or interpreted them!
A Rabbi\(^2\) is no heretic\(^3\) amongst his disciples, if he sets a high
price on stories which he invented.
He only desired to marry women and amass riches by his lies\(^4\).

Softly! thou hast been deceived, honest man as thou art, by a
cunning knave who preaches to the women.
Amongst you in the morning he says that wine is forbidden, but
he makes a point of drinking it himself in the evening\(^5\).

The lay professions are not forgotten. At the head of
those who prey on human folly and superstition come the
astrologers; and of them Ma'arrí speaks with an indignation
concerning to the almost universal faith in their pred-
dictions and to the very important part which they played
in Moslem life, both public and private\(^6\).

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\(^1\) ii. 202, 2. Cf. Koran, 22, 2: "(on the Last Day) every woman who
giveth suck shall forget the infant which she suckleth." Ma'arrí describes
the popular preachers (qussds) as corruptors of the true religion and demands
that stern measures should be taken to suppress them (ii. 77, 5 foll.).

\(^2\) With manifest irony the poet uses here the word \textit{habr}, which properly
denotes a non-Moslem doctor of divinity.

\(^3\) \textit{i.e.} he does nothing new or extraordinary.

\(^4\) Luzim, ii. 196, 3.

\(^5\) i. 61, 11.

\(^6\) See the \textit{Chahâr Maqâla} of Niżámî ‘Arúdí, translated by Prof. E. G.
Browne, p. 88 foll.; and cf. the remarks of De Goeje, \textit{Mémoire sur les Car-
nathes}, p. 119 foll.
The Meditations of Ma`arri

Could I command obedience, never in life
Astrologer had shamed the causeway's crown.
Be he blind churl or keen-eyed reprobate,
From him pours falsehood without stint or stay.
He with his arrows gets to work betimes
And turns his astrolabe and tells a fortune.
The foolish woman stopped, and 'twas as though,
Stopping, she rushed into a lion's den.
She asks him questions—of a husband changed
Towards her: he starts writing with *riqán*
In characters distinct. "Thy name?" quoth he,
"Ay, and thy mother's? Verily, I can
Expound by cogitation things unseen."
He swears the genies do frequent his house,
Submissive one and all, whether they speak
Clear Arabic or barbarous gibberish.
This fellow plies his craft in many a land,
The while at home his wife eats food she loathes.
What! hath a man no means of livelihood
Except the morsels thrown him by the stars?
To pelt o'er deserts with a caravan
Is trade more honourable than gains like these
Of one who, were he stoned, would justly die.
Ah me, the thoughts that boil within my breast!
I keep them close and simmering under lid.
'Tis marvellous, when the rack has done its worst,
The miscreant with drawn and tongueless mouth
Recants not ever. What escape for us?
Earth is a raging sea, the sky o'erflowing
With cloudbursts of calamity, the time
Corrupt: nor truth puts out a first spring-leaf
Amongst mankind, nor error fades away.
Saddle and bridle, that thou quick mayst flee:
They all are saddled and bridled for thine harm.
And bright is Good, but thither hasteneth none;
And dark is Ill, and thence doth none retire.
They smile upon thee if thou bring'st them lies;

---

1 Arrows were used in playing games of hazard.
2 Henna or saffron.
Speak truth and lo, they furiously fling stones.
Thy sourness unto them defends thee from them:
Whene'er thou art sweet, they run at thee to bite.

(132)
She is gone out early in her boots and mantle to consult the blind astrologer;
But he cannot tell her what she wants to know, for he is ignorant, nor has he wit enough to make a guess.
"To-morrow," says he, "or afterwards there will be a steady fall of rain: if it pour abundantly, it will be a great help."
He induces the blockheads of the quarter to believe that he can read the secrets of the unseen world,
Although, if they asked him about something on his own breast,
he would answer falsely or mutter in silence.

(133)
She questioned her astrologer about
The child in cradle—"How long will it live?"
"A hundred years," cries he, to earn a drachma,
And death came to her boy within the month.
Changed times! when fair young women seek a husband,
Offering high sums to furnish his due dower.

* * * * *
The fool dislikes his daughters, though his son
Brings worse destruction than his son-in-law.
I view as man's most bitter enemy
A son, the proper issue of his loins,
Howbeit in his folly he believes
The mares outmatched in racing by his colt.

Astrology, of course, ranked as a science and was often practised by celebrated Moslem astronomers, but the "astrologers" to whom Ma'arrî refers are evidently vulgar fortune-tellers and impostors of evil reputation, who seem to have found their clientèle chiefly in the more credulous sex. The type is familiar and not without variety.

1 Luzûm, ii. 269, 5.
2 Cf. ii. 97, 8: They tell our fortunes by the stars, but ask them Where settles on themselves a gnat—they know not.
3 II. 284, 2. 6 See p. 87, note 4.
4 II. 399, 16. 6 Cf. ii. 415, 8-9.
All of us know the astrologer, all of us know the physician:
One hath his almanack still, and the other his pharmacopoeia;
Flattering our troubles away—and who doesn't want to be
flattered?
Laying a snare for the prodigal youth or e'er he grow wiser.¹

Over the earth from land to land you drifted,
Some yielding more of bounty's rain, some less;
Against the yelping curs your staff you lifted,
Amazed were they at your stout-heartedness.
You dearly wished for each man's wealth and fortune,
And none so base to wish for yours was found;
You stopped at every doorway to importune,
Till Abú Dábit² drove you—underground.³

You cross the desert, a good chance sends you diet;
You roam around, and so your living's made;
You beg your bread in the name of "holy quiet,"
But more devout is he that plies his trade.
Abandon flesh for the oil of olive-trees,
And fare on wild-figs, not to rob the bees!⁴

Thy thought kindled a fire that showed beside thee
A path whilst thou wert seeking light to guide thee.
Stargazers, charmers, soothsayers are cheats,
All of that sort a cunning greed dissemble:
Howbeit the aged beggar's hand may tremble,
It none the less lies open for receipts.⁵

¹ II. 48, last line.
² Death. This kunya, which has the force of an epithet and signifies one
who lays violent hands on his victims and holds them fast, is said (according
to the commentator here) to be "a name for Death in the language of the
Abyssinians." Mr McLean, however, writes to me: "Ethiopic has the verb
\( \text{a} \text{nm} \) (= خيط) in the sense of ' take firm hold of,' 'seize.'...But I cannot find
trace of any compound with \( \text{a} \text{ba} \) ('father of') similar to the one you cite in
Arabic. Such expressions are comparatively uncommon in Ethiopian."
³ Luzum, II. 73, 5.
⁴ II. 99, 3.
⁵ II. 51, 3.

N. S.
The poets are stigmatised as frivolous and immoral; and Ma'arif austerely dissociates himself from them.

(138)

O sons of Learning, ever were ye lured
By rhetoric empty as the buzz of flies.
Your poets are very wolves—the robber’s way
They take in panegyric and love-song,
Doing their friends worse injury than foes;
And when they verses write, out-thieve the rat.
I lend you praise repaid with praise as false,
Whence ’tis as though between us taunts had passed.
Shall I let run to waste my time of eld
Amongst you, squandered like my days of youth?

Fine eloquence I do cast off from my tongue,
Resigning to the Arabs who have wit
Base occupations uncommendable,
Whereof the whole return is utter loss.
Leave me, that I may babble in vain no more
But, waiting Death, close on myself my door.

The Luzum throws many a side-light on the state of contemporary Moslem society. Granted that the author is an ascetic as well as a pessimist, the corruption which he describes was real and deeply rooted, though less extensive than his poems suggest. Wine-drinking and female luxury are favourite topics. He condemns polygamy as being an injustice to the wives and is fully aware of the evils which flow from it. Family life was embittered. Harems filled with foreign slaves produced a hybrid race, adding new vices to the old. The Arabs no longer ruled, the Arabic language had

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1 Cf. I. 55, last line and fol.
2 I. 137, 7.
3 I. 125, 5; I 144, 6; I 146, 3; I 195, 9; 299, 9; 340, 6; II. 299, I. IO; 312, 14; 344, 9; 361, I I, etc.
4 See especially two long poems in which Ma’arif sets forth his views on the education, marriage, and morals of women (I. 163, 2–168, 4 and 188, 2–194, last line).
5 I. 377, 2.
6 II. 4, last line.
The Meditations of Ma'arri

become debased; the influence of Jews and Christians was such that often a Moslem would place himself under their protection. As for religion, even its outward forms had fallen into contempt. References to some of these points are given below, while others are illustrated by the following poems or the parts of them printed in italics.

(139)

Live a miser like the rest of us in these degenerate days,
And pretend to be a churl, for lo, the world hath churlish ways.
A people of iniquity; sons against fathers rub,
And the fierce cub rends the lion and the lion eats his cub.
Wouldst thou fain bestow a kindness on any gentle man,
Be thyself the first one chosen out to profit by the plan.

(140)

Refrain from tears at parting, and desire
The tears, the blessed tears, by hermits shed,
Whereof a single drop puts out Hell-fire;
So by report of ear, not eye, 'tis said.

Fear thou thy God and still beware of men
Garbed not as those who for religion fight.
They eat up all; in song and dance they then
Get drunk and with the loveling take delight.

Old bonds are broke: how many a Moslem strives
An alien's intercession to obtain!
Time, ever dealing out to human lives
Justice unjust, makes all our labour vain.
One watches through the night and ne'er arrives
At the same goal which some, unwatching, gain.

1 I. 132, penult.; II. 335, 9; 338, last line: "To-day correct pronunciation is a solecism."
2 II. 207, 4.
3 An allusion to the lawless and dissolute dervishes who wandered in troops from place to place, calling themselves Sâfts.
4 Mu'âhid, here rendered by "alien," properly denotes a non-Moslem whose security is guaranteed on condition of his paying a poll-tax.
5 Luzûm, I. 295, II.
Wealth hushes Truth and swells loud Error's voice,
To do it homage all the sects rejoice.
The Moslem got his tax-money no more,
And left his mosque to find a church next door.

Ah, woe is me for night and day whereof the months are moulded,
Twin elements of Time who ne'er his mystery hath unfolded.
Religion now is naught, its signs effaced by ages blasting:
No prayers, no ablutions pure, no alms-giving, no fasting;
And some take women dowerless in lieu of marriage lasting.

Leaving particular instances, let us see what is the poet's judgment on society as a whole.

Had Time in his course spoken, he would have reckoned every one of us as dirt.
He would have said, "Lo, I repair to Allah, and ye are the foulest obscenity.
Once I coughed you out by mistake—will ye excuse me for coughing?"

The world's abounding filth is shot
O'er all its creatures, all its kinds;
The evil taint even she hath got
Whose loom for her a living finds,
And tyrant-ridden peoples moan
No worse injustice than their own.

The staff in a blind man's hand that guides him along his way
Is more kind to him than all companions and bosom-friends.
Give thou to the sons of Eve a wide room apart from thee,
For lo, 'tis an open road of unfaith they journey in.

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1 II. 78, penult.
2 I. 322, 14.
3 I.e. "I acknowledge Allah, to whom I am subject."
4 Luzum, I. 202, 8.
5 II. 41, 13.
Their features if sin shall mar, then sure on the Judgment Day
Thou'lt see none but all his face is haggard and black of hue.
As often as Reason points the right course, their nature pulls
Them wrong-ward with grip intense, like one that would drag a
load\(^1\).

(Metre: \textit{Basit}.)

If men but knew what their sons bring with them—were there to
sell
A thousand such for a copper piece, no mortal would buy.
Woe, woe to them! for within their arms they foster and rear
An evil brood, which is guile, envy, and cankering hate.

* * * * *

And ever thus have they been, Earth's people, since they were
made:
Let none in ignorance say, "Degenerate they have grown."\(^2\)

(Metre: \textit{Tawil}.)

Nowhere we sojourned but amongst the nation
We found all sorts of men cursing their neighbours,
Stabbing and stabbed in every congregation—
Although, maybe, they combat not with sabres.
Happy the infant that set forth to leave them
And took farewell ere yet it could perceive them!\(^3\)

I see that the doom of Allah first bade His creatures be,
And then turned in power back upon them with nay for yea.
And o'er living men doth rule their passion in every clime,
Tho' noble they be as hawks of mettle and strong to rule.
They run yelping, cur at cur, and all for a carcase' sake—
Vile pack! and I count myself the sorriest cur of them.
We hug in our bosoms guile; yet comes not the good reward
Of Allah but unto few, the purest of us in heart.
And what son of Time deserves the praise of the eloquent?
The more they are put to proof, the larger their due of blame\(^4\).

\(^1\) II. 121, 9. \(^2\) II. 251, 2. \(^3\) II. 342, 5. \(^4\) I. 99, penult.
The soul her centre hath in the highest sphere,
Unsown with bodies are the fields of air.
From one foul root our human branches strike,
And all, to eyes discerning, are alike:
Adam their ancestor, their bourne the mould,
Tho' creeds and heresies be manifold.

Mind makes the only difference in men,
Birds vary from the eagle to the wren.

(Metre: Tawil.)

"Good morrow!" he cries aloud, professing his love to thee,
Tho' better than he a lion tawny and stout of neck.
By neighbouring with thy friend some profit thou hop'st to gain;
Thy farness from him is in reality gainfuller.
Unless from mankind thou flee, acknowledge that one and all
Are wolves howling after prey or foxes with bark malign.
No cure for thy suffering but patience! If they commit
Iniquity, is not worse iniquity wrought by thee?
Thou early and late dost run to folly unconscionable:
The evening beholds thy sin, the morning thy wickedness.
The world's woes are like a sea: whoso from excess of thirst
Shall die, even he amidst the waters is cast to swim.

From north or south may blow the changing wind,
But where Sin leads thou never lagg'st behind.
Well, go thy way! If thirty years be spent
Without repentance, when shall man repent?

(Metre: Basil.)

If men were passed thro' a sieve to purge them all of their dross,
No residue would at last be left behind in the sieve;
Or were the fire bidden fall upon the guilty alone,
The robes they wear 'twould refuse to touch, but feast on their limbs.

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1 II. 82, 7.  
2 I. 224, 3.  
3 I. 92, 8.
To Him the glory! for He filled all the races of men
With inspiration that leads straightway to frenzy and woe—
With sidelong looks of the eye and vain desires of the soul
And eager rush of the lips to kiss and kiss yet again.¹

Reason set out by hook or crook to reform the world,
But lo, mankind were past all reformation.
Whoe'er would cleanse the crow, in hope to see the sheen
Of a white wing, on him falls tribulation.²

If sweet is falsehood in your mouths,
Sweeter is truth in mine.
Man's nature to refine I sought,
Which nothing could refine.³

One living person looks unlike another,
But let them die, there's not a hair between them.
Time and his children's havour whoso searches
Will deem the wide world, east and west, blameworthy;
Will find their speech a lie, their love a hatred,
Their good an ill, their benefit an insult,
Their cheerfulness a cheat, their want a plenty,
Their knowledge ignorance and their wisdom cunning.

Towards the farthest goal of their ambition
They pierce a way with lances through your breast-bones;
If ye are tamarisk leaves, they launch to strip you
A devastating locust-swarm of arrows.
O Grief, my nightly guest, wilt thou excuse me
Whenas thou find'st in me no strength to journey?
I cannot get me water for my thirst's ease,
Or live unless I quaff it foul and muddy.
Men are as high-peaked mountains, and as valleys
Below the sand-dunes and the pebbly ridges:
One, crazed, would fain be charmed and offers money;
Another, sober-minded, scorns the charmer.⁴

¹ II. 224, 9. ² I. 95, 1. ³ I. 95, 5. ⁴ II. 126, 17.
(Metre: Tawil.)

Ay, whether I slumber sound or keep vigil in the dark,
'Tis all one to me if I my Maker obey not.
And even such are men: the sword that smites them will naught avail,
Tho' cuts of the whip serve well thy wicked old camel.

Glory to God! how men with passion fond
Or fall below the mean or run beyond!
Ears love as madly rings and drops of pearl
As wrists the bracelets that about them curl.
Some seek from sword and lance on fields hard-fought
Fortune which others from the scalpel sought.
In charity, whence grace to thee redounds,
Give, were it but a little. Pence make pounds.

(Metre: Tawil.)

To Allah complain I of a soul that obeys me not,
And then of a wicked world where no man is righteous:
Intelligence mouldering in dust, as an empty house,
But ignorance stuccoed o'er—a mansion with tenants.

The sons of Adam are fair to see,
But each and all to taste unsweet.
Their charity and piety
Draw to themselves a benefit.
A rock the best of them outvies:
It does no wrong, it tells no lies.

He knows us well, the God most high;
Our minds have long been forced to lie.
We speak in metaphor and wot
That as we say it is 'tis not.

1 ii. 90, last line.  2 ii. 71, 8.  3 i. 246, penult.
4 i. 95, 10.  5 ii. 179, 10.
A man's tongue is called a spear awhile and a scimitar,
And oft by a single word were necks cloven asunder.
Of mortals a multitude have gone down to drink of Life
Before us, and left but mud behind them and staleness.
A black head of hair soon Time will bleach, or the launderer
A garment—but what e'er cleansed a nature of evil?¹

Body, we know, feels naught when spirit is flown:
Shall spirit feel, unbodied and alone?
And nature to disgrace swoops eager down,
But must be dragged with halters to renown.
With evil dispositions here we came:
Wicked and envious, are we then to blame?
Before your time were Earth's folk ill-behaved?
Or have their characters become depraved?²

Ne'er wilt thou meet a friend but vexes thee
And troubles all thy days
And counts thy being here calamity:
Well, such are this world's ways³.

O children of Earth, there's not a man blest with righteousness
Below ground nor any save a rascal above it.
Was Adam, your ancestor, so noble in what he wrought,
Yet look ye for nobleness amongst his descendants?
The grave-dwellers, send they not a message to us, although
The words of the messengers ye hear not, unheeding?⁴

The purblind traveller's feet were saved from fear
Of stumbling, once they mounted on the bier.
Admire the stricken elder how he stands
Hunched o'er a staff that trembles in his hands!
When called to prayers, he must at home remain—
But walks in deserts to increase his gain⁵.

¹ II. 126, 10. ² I. 285, 8. ³ II. 275, 9. ⁴ II. 209, 14. ⁵ II. 49, 11.
We gather from these passages that Ma'arri not only regarded human nature as evil but mankind in the mass as incorrigible and incapable of practising the virtues on which the utility of social intercourse depends. "You must choose," he says, "either a solitude like death or the company of hypocrites." He himself fell far short of the complete seclusion advertised in his letter to the people of Ma'arra, and it is interesting to come across poems which tell us what his neighbours thought of him and he of them, how he disliked mutual compliments, how he talked to his visitors from Persia and Arabia, and so forth. He confesses that the truth cannot be spoken in society without giving offence and that he felt obliged to behave as every one else did.

(Metre: Tawil.)

I simulate unto thee—may Allah forgive my fault!
The whole world's religion too is but simulation.
And often a man belies the thought of his dearest friend,
Tho' fair his demeanour be, his countenance comely.
If Allah they worship not—my people—with faith entire,
Him only, I cut myself clean off from my people.

I play the hypocrite with men. Truly, they are an affliction to me,
and would that my deliverance from them were near at hand!
He that lives without flattering those in his company is a bad companion to his friends and intimates.
How many a friend would wish to hear the news of my death, yet
if I am ailing, he will show regard for me and exclaim "May
I be thy ransom!"

1 II. 118, 8:

111

2 See p. 47, supra.
3 Luzûm, i. 66, 1; II. 139, 4.
4 I. 47, 10.
5 II. 372, 3.
The sage and the fool, what time you observe them shrewdly,
They stand but as far as kinsman apart from kinsman.
Whenever my fate shall light on me in my homeland,
Cry over my corpse and call me by name "the stranger."
Whomso I encounter, warily I address him
And show him my teeth, for none is of my persuasion¹.

I mark the false smiles they deliver
To me o'erwhelmed with Fate's whole quiver.
Neighbours, not friends; like Z and D,
Which never meet in symphony².

Who'll rescue me from living in a town
Where I am spoken of with praise unfit?
Rich, pious, learned: such is my renown,
But many a barrier stands 'twixt me and it.

I owned to ignorance, yet wise was thought
By some—and is not ours a wondrous case?
For verily we all are good-for-naught:
I am not noble nor are they not base.

My body in Life's strait grip scarce bears the strain—
How shall I move Decay to clasp it round?
O the large gifts of Death! Ease after pain
He brings to us, and silence after sound³.

I praised thee, and thou delighted repliedst with fair words
In payment of mine, and I was in turn delighted.
If downright give-and-take cannot be, then better
Between us vituperation than adulation⁴.

¹ I. 149, penult.
² I. 53, 8. The letters ḏḥḏ and ẓḏ do not occur together in Arabic.
³ I. 97, 5.
⁴ I. 222, 7.
Whenever a man extols me for any virtue
That I am without, his eulogy satirises.
And justly am I displeased with his false invention:
'Twould show meanness of nature to be rejoicing.

What is it in my society men seek?
I would be silent, they would have me speak.
Far must we travel ere we come in line;
They on their path are set, and I on mine.

All the world visits me: this one's native land is Yemen, this one's home is Tabas.
They said, "We heard talk of thee." I rejoined, "Accursed above all are they that cloak their real object."
They desire of me a fiction which I cannot invent, and if I tell the truth, their faces darken with frowns.
God help us! Every one meets with anxiety in making his livelihood. Pour over us, O sky!
What do ye want? I have neither money for you to beg nor learning for you to borrow.
Will ye ask an ignoramus to instruct you? Will ye milk a camel whose udder is dry?
I am miserable because I am unable to give you any assistance, but the times are hard.

In his later years Ma'arrî suffered from the reputation of being rich. No doubt he deserved it, for he must have

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2 I. 187, 9.
3 A Persian town situated about 200 miles south of Nishápûr on the eastern border of the Great Desert.
4 This adage (cf. Freytag, Arabum proverbia, vol. I. p. 475) is here equivalent to defunde pleno, Copia, cornu!
5 Cf. Luzzûm, II. 24, 4 foll.
6 II. 15, 2.
7 Cf. No. 170, supra. The Persian traveller and poet, Nâşir-i Khusraw, who passed through Ma'arra in A.D. 1047, describes Abu 'l-'Alá as a man of great wealth, having many slaves and other persons employed in working for him. This, though probably an exaggeration, is more credible than the same writer's statement that the affairs of the town were administered by Abu 'l-'Alá and his agents.
received considerable fees from the students who came in crowds to hear him, and his letters show him "in the character of a liberal man, helping persons of his own rank with gifts." When he speaks of himself as poor and lets us know that in spite of his poverty he had often declined the presents which his friends offered to him, that is only the pessimist's self-indulgence and the ascetic's self-denial. We can believe that the demands made upon his charity justified him in protesting that he was not what rumour declared him to be.

III.

ASCETICISM.

Ma'arri's "confinement to his house" was his revenge upon a world which rejected him. It was not a spontaneous act of virtue: Fortune held up to his lips no enticing cup that he might thrust it away. When he said, "I'll play no more," he knew that he had already lost the game.

What choice hath a man except seclusion and loneliness,
When Destiny grants him not the gaining of that he craves?
He is honest enough to disclaim the merit of renunciation.

Men of acute mind call me an ascetic, but they are wrong in their diagnosis. Although I disciplined my desires, I only abandoned worldly pleasures because the best of these withdrew themselves from me.

This, however, is not the whole truth. Other motives springing from his character and his experience of life contributed to the decision. The blind scholar and pensioner had little cause to love society and much time to meditate on its rottenness: long before visiting Baghdád he must have formed an opinion of his fellow-men which (we may presume)
accorded pretty well with what he afterwards wrote. In the hour of disillusion this moral current was undammed and gave irresistible force to the feeling that he would now close accounts with them for good and all.

I was made an abstainer from mankind by my acquaintance with them and my knowledge that created beings are dust.1

His asceticism, though leavened by a religious element, is really the negative and individualistic side of his ethics. By abandoning an evil world he sought virtue and inward peace—solitudinem fecit, pacem appellavit.2 That is the note struck in the opening verse of the Luzum:

The virtuous are strangers in their native land, they are left alone and forsaken by their kin.3

Society demoralises. No one can live by the law of reason amongst those whom he loves or hates; no one can fear God while pursuing objects of earthly ambition.4 So far as the poet's ideal of asceticism includes active virtue, it will be examined in the final section. We are here concerned with his world-flight, i.e., such topics as the vanity of pleasure, the need for seclusion and the happiness procured by it, the excellence of poverty, contentment, humility, and patience. Some peculiar theories and practices are inculcated. Of these the most remarkable is his belief—a thoroughly rational one from the standpoint of pessimism—that procreation is a sin against the child.

(175)

If humankind are distinguished by moral dispositions with which they live, yet in badness of nature all are alike.

'Twere well if every son of Eve resembled me, for what a wicked brood did Eve bring into the world!5

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1 I. 44, penult.  
2 Cf. II. 176, 12: "In solitude is the greatest peace."  
3 I. 43. 9:  
4 I. 184, 5-6.  
5 I.e. it would be a good thing if all men were hermits like me.
My separation from men is a convalescence from their malady, inasmuch as association with them is a disease which infects conscience and religion. So a verse, when it is single, cannot suffer from any fault of rhyme.1

(Metre: Tawil.)

To neighbour with men meseems a sickness perpetual; I wished, when it wore me thin, for fever that comes and goes. By effort and self-constraint they compassed a little good; Whatever they wrought of ill, 'twas nature that prompted it. Oh, where are the gushing streams and oceans of bounty now? Are those of the lion's brood that Time spared hyenas all? Their wood in the burning yields a perfume of frankincense, But tried on the teeth of sore necessity, proves flint-hard.2

An open road to Truth lies here,
As neither slave nor lord saith nay:
Flee far from men; for com'st thou near,
'Tis like a dragged full skin which they
Use to refresh theirselves withal,
Then empty 'mongst their feet let fall.3

Some Power troubled our affairs—and we
Had fondly wished them from his troubling free. Blessed are birds that pick up scattered grain,
Or wild-kine seeking green sands after rain;
Strangers to man: nor they the high-born know
Nor mounts to them the infection of the low.
War's fire raise not thou to burst ablaze,
For soon in ashes sink the hands that raise.4

1 i. 50, 8. He specifies three irregularities which make the rhyme defective—iyd, sind, and iqwd. See Wright's Arabic Grammar, vol. ii. p. 356 fol.
2 ii. 86, 5.
3 i. 95, penult.
4 i. 152, 9.
The blind male viper hath the house he dwells in,
No more, and during life makes earth his victual.
Were a lion eyeless, ne'er he sheep at pasture
Had scared, forth-springing, or a herd of wild-kine;
Bereaved of light, never had 'Amr and 'Ámir
Lifted a lance or stood on field of battle.
They ask me, "Why attend you not on Fridays
The prayers whence hope we Allah's grace and pardon?"
And get I any good when I rub shoulders
With folk whose best are but as mangy camels?
Arabs and aliens have I met full many:
Nor Arab found I worth my praise nor alien.
Death's cup how loathes the soul to drink! yet nothing
Can hinder but that some day we shall drink it.
Fortunate here are those brave lads that perish
In war amidst the thrusting and the smiting,
For 'tis a shame if the clan's chosen chieftain
Lie on his bed bewailing the sore burden.
I choke with Doom: no journey will relieve me,
Whether I take an eastern road or western.
He hunted Persia's emperors in their palace;
Reached, over broad sea and strait pass, the Caesar.

(Metre: Tawil.)

And oh, would that I had ne'er been born in a race of men
Or, being of them, had lived a savage in some bare waste!
The spring flowers he may smell for pastime and need not fear
Society's wickedness whilst all round is parching sand.

(Metre: Tawil.)

So soon as my day shall come, oh, let me be laid to rest
In some corner of the earth where none ever dug a grave!
Mankind—well, if God reward them duly for what they aimed
To do, He will ne'er bestow His mercy on dull or wise.

1 'Amr b. Ma'dikarib and 'Ámir b. al-Tufayl, famous pre-Islamic knights.
2 I. 100, 5. "The Caesar" is the Byzantine Emperor.
Whoso reads their inmost thoughts, perdition he deemeth it
To neighbour with any man alive or with any dead.
Ah, never may I attend amongst them the grand assize
When all shall be raised together, dusty, their heads unkempt!
When full broad and long unto the eye seems my resting-place,
Vouchsafe me of room—so guide thee Allah!—another span.1
And touching my creed if men shall ask, 'tis but fear devout
Of Allah: nor freedom I uphold nor necessity.2

(Metre: Ṭawīl.)

Howbeit we all are pent in cities, I seem to roam
In deserts of dusty hue, bare waterless levels.
Whene'er I a poem make and sin not therein, I turn
As turns one towards his God, repentant, Labīd-like.3

(Metre: Bastī.)

Oh, shake thyself clear and clean of love and knowledge of me!
My person—'tis but as motes that dance in beams of the morn.
Some dry stuff here have I thrown on embers just dying out,
And if in them be a spark, my hand will rouse them to flame.
From me the truth thou hast heard full oft, a measureless tale:
Let not thine ear cast away my counsel into the sands!4

(Metre: Ṭawīl.)

With darkness of sight there comes a darkness of faith and truth:
My far-overspreading night hath three nights within it.
And ne'er did I gnaw my hand for pleasures that stab as thorns,
Or shorten with draughts of wine my long gloomful hours.
Whenever we meet, it wakes the sad thought, "Alas, how vain
A friendship that prophesies, 'Ye meet to be parted!'"

* * * * *

1 Cf. II. 320, 9: "I am afraid ye will assign my grave to a false infidel
or a Moslem: if (on the day of Judgment) he complain of me for squeezing
him, I shall say, 'It was their (the gravediggers') fault; I knew nothing
about it.'"
2 I. 350, 10.
3 I. 281, 10. Labīd, the famous pre-Islamic poet, was a man of strong
religious feeling and became a Moslem before he died. See Sir Charles
Lyall's Ancient Arabian Poetry, p. 90 foll.
4 I. 134, 5.
Tho' Change took so much away, it lightens my load of griefs
That lonely I suffer them, unwedded and childless.
So leave me to grapple close with fears, hard-besetting fears:
Beware, keep aloof from me—oh, halt not beside me!\(^1\)

\begin{align*}
\text{(Metre: } & \text{Kámil.})
\end{align*}

I swear, not rich in sooth is he whom the World made rich,
Tho' he wax in pride; nor blest is he whom Fortune blessed.
Misguided fool! is he glad at heart—a mortal man—
When he hears the dove that laments for him, and the lute that
mourns?\(^2\)

\begin{align*}
\text{His brimming cups and the mandolines of his singing-girls}
\text{Are lightning-flashes and thunderbolts of calamity.}\(^3\)
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{(Metre: } & \text{Basít.})
\end{align*}

The richest mortal is one devout that dwells on a peak,
Content with little, a scorner of tiara and silk;
The poorest man in the world a monarch who for his need
Requires a great host in arms to march with thunderous tramp\(^4\).

\begin{align*}
\text{(Metre: } & \text{Tawil.})
\end{align*}

When those whom thou sitt' st beside hear nothing but truth from
thee,
They hate thee, for every friend is bent on deceiving.
The whitest of men in soul, we see them run after pelf,
As though they were crows jet-black down-dropping on seed-corn.
Let them seek: be thou content, and so win to wealth indeed;
Let them speak: be mute, and so come off with the marrow.
If absence for ever from thy kinsfolk thou canst not bear,
'Tis part of self-discipline to visit them seldom.
A man, when his hour is come, will call the physician in:
No hurry! the thing is grave—too grave to be physicked.\(^5\)

\(^1\) II. 215, 9.
\(^2\) Cf. the note on No. 43, last verse, and Luzím, i. 256, i: "The songs of
the singing-girls in it (the world) moved me to tears, as a dirge chanted by
women over their lost ones."
\(^3\) I. 265, 2.
\(^4\) I. 212, 5.
\(^5\) I. 120, 12.
The Meditations of Ma'arrî

(188)
You kept the fasting months?—then why did you
Not silence keep? Without it there’s no fast.
Man takes the wrong way in his first ado
With Life, and stays in it until his last.1

(Metre: Tawil.)

Whenever a man from speech refraineth, his foes are few,
Although he be stricken down by fortune and fallen low.
In silence the flea doth sip its beverage of human blood,
And that silence maketh less the heinousness of its sin.
It went not therein the way the thirsty mosquito goes,
Which trumpets with high-trilled note, and thou smarting all the
while.
If insolent fellow draw against thee a sword of speech,
Thy patience oppose to him, that so thou mayst break its edge.2

(Metre: Wafr.)

Thy tongue is a very scorpion, and when it stingeth
Another, 'tis thou art stung by it first and foremost.
On thee is the guilt thereof, and thine a full share
Of any complaint against it by whomsoever.
It mixes a double dose for the twain of evil—
How hard are the days of him and of thee, how bitter!3

(Metre: Tawil.)

My clothes are my winding-sheet, my dwelling my grave, my life
My doom; and to me is death itself resurrection.
Bedizen thee with splendidest adornment and get thee wealth!
Outshone, lady, are the likes of thee by a dust-stained
Unkempt little pilgrim-band who walk in the ways that lead
To Allah, be smooth the track they travel or rugged.
Nor bracelet nor anklet gleams amongst them on wrist or foot,
No head bears a diadem and no ear an earring.4

In some of these poems we find references not only to
"fear of God" but also to a future life. I will now cite a few
more passages in which Ma'arrî uses here and there the

1 I. 178, 4. 2 I. 128, 12. 3 I. 92, II. 4 I. 198, 5.

9—2
language of Moslem religious asceticism. What significance we should attach to them must, of course, depend on our view of his real attitude towards Islam and dogmatic religion—a question too complex to be settled offhand.

(Metre: *Tawil*.)

Thine is the kingdom: if Thou pardon me, 'tis Thy grace Toward me; and if so be Thou punish, 'tis my desert. At Thy call a man shall rise immediately from the grave With all that he wrought of sin inscribed on his finger-joints. Oh, there shall the hermit's staff avail more than 'Ámir's spear To succour, and shall outshine in glory the bow of Dawn.

(Metre: *Tawil*.)

With Life I walked in woe and strife, Oh, what a luckless friend is Life! In past days I have restive been, But tame is he whom Time breaks in. If fast and vigil mar thy face, Wan cheeks shall win a robe of grace. The old man creeps in listless wise, Unlike the child that creeps to rise. None gave me bounty and reward Except the Lord of every lord. Labour for Him, whilst thou hast breath, And when thine hour comes, welcome Death!

(Metre: *Tawil*.)

Perforce after forty years thou lead'st an ascetic life, When all's over but the wail of women that chant thy dirge. And how canst thou hope to earn the recompense? Him we praise Who scorneth the world's delights, a man in his lusty prime.

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1 See p. 128, note 1.
2 I. 121, 5. "The bow of Dawn" is the curved rim of the sun when it first appears above the horizon.
3 I. 119, 3.
4 *I.e.* Paradise.
5 I. 238, 3.
I found myself foiled in every hope, until I renounced—
Nor then was left free to live the life ascetic alone.
To God the glory! My wormwood sourly cleaves to me still,
And I am not speaking truth if honey I shall it call.
And none, I fancy, shall win in Paradise to abide,
Excepting folk who in godly fear fought hard with themselves.
The day goes by, busy cares unceasing keep me from rest;
And when the dark covers all, I cannot watch thro' the night.
'Tis bed for me: on my side reclined I lay me to sleep,
Though true religion is where sides meet not beds any more.

Certain precepts in the following poem—e.g. the injunction against holding office under the Government—are characteristic of the strict pietism which developed in the Umayyad epoch and prevailed amongst the early Sūfis. It will be observed, however, that while the reader is exhorted to worship God and seek refuge with Him, nothing is said to indicate that what he has sown here he may hope to reap hereafter. The translation retains the monorhyme, but not the metre, of the original.

Kneel in the day-time to thy Lord and bow,
And when thou canst bear vigil, vigil bear.
Is fine wheat dear, 'tis nobleness in thee
To give thy generous horse an equal share;
And set before thyself a relish of
Bright oil and raisins, scanty but sweet fare.
A clay jug for thy drink assign: thou'lt wish
Nor silver cup nor golden vessel there.
In summer what will hide thy nakedness
Content thee; coarse homespun thy winter wear.
I ban the judge's office, or that thou
Be seen to preach in mosque or lead the prayer;

1 L. 272, 6.
2 The merits of olive oil are set forth (Luzán, II. 264, 13-14): no blood is shed and no soul is hurt when it flows; it costs little to provide; darkness is removed by the light which it gives.
3 Cf. I. 204, 5; 219, 4.
And shun viceroyalty and to bear a whip,
As 'twere the sword a paladin doth bare.
Those things in nearest kin and truest friends
I loathe, spend as thou wilt thy soul or spare.
Shame have I found in some men's patronage:
Commit thyself to His eternal care;
And let thy wife be decked with fear of Him
Outshining pearls and emeralds ordered fair—
All praiseth Him: list how the raven's croak
And cricket's chirp His holiness declare—
And lodge thine honour where most glory is:
Not in the vale dwells he that seeks the highland air.

More important, as throwing light on the character of his asceticism, is a poem that has been partially translated by Von Kremer and published by I. Krachkovsky with two Russian translations, one in prose and the other in verse, from the hand of Baron V. Rosen. The challenge conveyed in the opening verse was taken up by Hibatu'llah Ibn Abí 'Imrán, the chief missionary (dd'i 'l-du'dt) of the Ismá'ilís in Cairo, who begged for information as to the grounds on which the poet adopted vegetarianism. The letters that passed between them have been published and translated by Professor Margoliouth in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

(197)

Thou art diseased in understanding and religion. Come to me, that thou mayst hear the tidings of sound truth.

Do not unjustly eat what the water has given up, and do not desire as food the flesh of slaughtered animals,

Or the white (milk) of mothers who intended its pure draught for their young, not for noble ladies.

And do not grieve the unsuspecting birds by taking their eggs; for injustice is the worst of crimes.

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1 See p. 43, note 1.
3 *Zapiski*, vol. 22, pp. 291-301 (Petrograd, 1915).
4 Cf. *Luzím*, i. 145, penult. 
5 *I.e. fish.*
And spare the honey which the bees get betimes by their industry from the flowers of fragrant plants;
For they did not store it that it might belong to others, nor did they gather it for bounty and gifts.\(^1\)
I washed my hands of all this; and would that I had perceived my way ere my temples grew hoar!
O people of my time, do ye know secrets which I knew but divulged not?
Ye journeyed in the darkness of falsehood. Why were ye not guided by the promptings of your enlightened (intellectual) faculties?
The voice of error called you—and wherefore did ye recklessly respond to every voice?
When the realities of your religion are exposed, ye stand revealed as doers of deeds of disgrace and shame.
If ye take the right course, ye will not dye the sword in blood or oblige the surgeon’s probe to try the depth of wounds.
I admire the practice of ascetics, except that they eat the labour of souls that covet wealth.
Purer in their lives, as regards food, are they that toil from morn to night for lawful earnings.
The Messiah (Jesus) did not seclude himself in devotion to God, but walked on the earth as a wanderer.
I shall be interred by one that loathes the task; unless I shall be devoured by one whose stench is loathly.\(^2\)
And who can save himself from being the neighbour of bones like the bones of the corpses that lie there unburied?\(^3\)
One of the worst human dispositions and acts is the wailing of those who bring news of death and the beating of the breast by mourning women.
I forgive the sins of friend and foe, because I dwell in the house of Truth amidst the tombstones.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Cf. i. 363, 2; ii. 169, 9, etc.
\(^2\) The hyena.
\(^3\) Cf. his remark in one of his letters to Ibn Abi Imrân: "Ofttimes, too, have I seen a couple of armies, each of them professing a distinct cult, meeting in battle and thousands falling on either side."
\(^4\) Cf. i. 177, 7:

When’er I speak, my years present to me
The apparition of a stern admonisher
Saying, "Whose shall let his tongue offend me,
Behoveth him to be abased and silenced."
And I reject praise, even when it is sincere: how, then, should I accept false praises?
The soul, obstinate in evil, ceased not to be a beast of burden until it became feeble and jaded.
It profits not a man that clouds pour rain over him whilst he lies beneath a flag of stone\(^1\);
And if there were any hope in nearness to water, some people would have been eager to provide themselves with graves in the marshland\(^2\).

Here, as in many passages of the *Luzúm*, Ma‘arrí preaches abstinence from meat, fish, milk, eggs, and honey on the plain ground that to partake of such food is an act of injustice to the animals concerned, since it inflicts unnecessary pain upon them\(^3\). In his reply to Ibn Abí ‘Imrán he adds that on reaching the age of thirty\(^4\) he restricted himself to a vegetarian diet for the benefit of his health; besides, he could not afford to buy meat. The latter motives are clearly subordinate to the first, and are not inconsistent with it. Professor Margoliouth thinks that Ma‘arrí cuts a poor figure in this correspondence. No doubt Ibn Abí ‘Imrán found his letters unsatisfying. Whether he was deceived by what I have called the poet’s oracular style or whether, being an Ismá‘ílí, he supposed that every religious precept must have an esoteric doctrine behind it, he had hoped that “the tidings of sound truth” would yield something piquant: in fact, he wished to draw from Ma‘arrí a confession as to the nature of his theological beliefs. “Why,” he asks, “should you abstain from animal food? If God empowers one animal to eat an-

\(^1\) Amongst the Arabs of the desert, water is the symbol of life; hence in their elegies we often meet with such expressions as “may the clouds of dawn keep green thy grave with unfailing showers!” (Sir C. Lyall, *Ancient Arabian Poetry*, p. 55). This is one of the things which indicate that the pagan Arabs were conscious of an existence after death. Cf. G. Jacob, *Altarabisches Beduinenleben*, p. 142 foll.

\(^2\) *Luzúm*, i. 232. 8.

\(^3\) Cf. *Luzúm*, i. 261, 11; ii. 210, 13; 258, 12; 284, 13; 373, 9; 383, 14–15, etc.

\(^4\) This statement, taken in conjunction with the seventh verse of the preceding poem, makes it likely that Ma‘arrí’s vegetarianism developed its ascetic character after his return from Baghdád.
other, though He knows best what is wise and is most merciful to His creatures, you need not be more just and merciful to them than their Lord and Creator.” This line of argument was hardly one that a reputed heretic would care to pursue, while an earnest moralist might be excused for ignoring it. Must we solve the problem of evil before we can justify abstention from what reason and conscience forbid? Ma‘arrí thought not. Having no solution, or none that he was willing to communicate, he took his stand with the Buddhists and Jainas on a principle which inspires all his ethics and constitutes his practical religion—the principle of non-injury. That was the “truth” which he promised to his readers, and they could not fairly reproach him if he declined to state how it was to be reconciled with divine providence, whatever his views on that subject may have been.

On the same ground he prohibits the use of animal skins for clothing, recommends wooden shoes\(^1\), and blames fine ladies who wear furs\(^2\). Probably he derived these doctrines from Indian asceticism, which he had opportunities of studying in Baghdád. Von Kremer identified them with Jainism, remarking that the prohibition of honey is peculiar to the Jainas\(^3\); which proves nothing, since any one who desired to live in accordance with the above-mentioned principle might naturally make this rule for himself. The Jainas, again, are forbidden to dye their clothes\(^4\), and Ma‘arrí tells us that his dress was “of cotton, neither green nor yellow nor dark-grey\(^5\).” When we come to his ethical discipline, we shall find that in the main it tallies with the ethics of Jainism as described in the following sentences:

The first stage of a Jaina layman’s life is that of intelligent and well-reasoned faith in Jainism; and the second is when he takes a vow not to destroy any kind of life, not to lie, not to use another’s property without his consent, to be chaste, to limit his necessaries,

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\(^1\) II. 51, last line and fol.  
\(^2\) II. 415, last line.  
\(^3\) Die philosoph. Gedichte des Abu 'I-'Alá, p. 83.  
\(^5\) Luzúm, II. 337, 15.
to worship daily, and to give charity in the way of knowledge, medicine, comfort, and food. And these virtues are summed up in one word: *ahimsā* (not-hurting). "Hurt no one" is not merely a negative precept. It embraces active service also; for, if you can help another and do not—your neighbour and brother—surely you hurt him.

Little is said in the *Luzūm* about Indian ascetics. Ma'arrí refers to their habit of letting their nails grow long, and observes that he, like Moslems in general, considers it a mark of asceticism to pare the nails. He speaks with admiration of their religious suicide. The Indian practice of cremation meets with his approval: fire saves the corpse from disinterment (and hyenas) and is a more effective deodoriser than camphor. In another poem he says ironically that the cremated Indian is happy in being exempt from the torture which buried Mohammedans undergo.

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Think about things! Thought clears away some part of ignorance.

Were skilled

The nesting bird to see the end, it ne'er would have begun to build.

The Indians, who cremate their dead and never visit them again, Win peace from strictness of the grave and ordeal by the angels twain.

To male and female in the world the path of right is preached in vain.

He praises cremation without urging his readers to practise it. Let the dead be laid in mother earth, uncoffined: coffins are second graves. How foreign to the spirit of Islam his asceticism is, and how fully it harmonises with Indian and Manichaean ideas, I can best show by quoting some passages of a different kind.

1 *Outlines of Jainism*, by J. Jaini, Introd., p. 23. Naturally, the rules for Jaina ascetics include celibacy and are in general more severe than those for the laity.

2 *Luzūm*, 1. 367, 8; 371, 16. 3 See No. 70. 4 *Luzūm*, 1. 235, 5–7.

5 According to orthodox belief, when the dead man is laid in the grave he is examined by two angels, named Munkar and Nakfr; hence Mohammedans take care to have their graves made hollow, that they may sit up with more ease during the inquisition. Cf. *Luzūm*, 11. 231, last line.

6 *Luzūm*, 1. 418, 18. 7 1. 184, 10–11.
Whenever I reflect, my reflecting upon what I suffer only rouses me to blame him that begot me. And I gave peace to my children, for they are in the bliss of non-existence which surpasses all the pleasures of this world. Had they come to life, they would have endured a misery casting them to destruction in trackless wildernesses.

Allah disposes. Be a hermit, then, And mix not with the divers sorts of men. I know but this, that him I hold in error Who helps to propagate Time's woe and terror.

Humanity, in whom the best Of this world's features are expressed— The chiefs set over them to reign Are but as moons that wax and wane. If ye unto your sons would prove By act how dearly them ye love, Then every voice of wisdom joins To bid you leave them in your loins.

The rich man desires a son to inherit his wealth, but were the fathers intelligent no children would be born. Procreation is a sin, though it is not called one: a father wronged by his sons pays the just penalty for the crime which he committed against them. To beget is to increase the sum of evil, and the lizard's ancestors are the cause of its being hunted. It is better for a people, instead of multiplying, to perish off the face of the earth. The first condition of happiness is that no woman should have been created.
(Metre: Basit.)
The son is wretched; by him his parents wretched are made,
And blest is that man whose mind was ne'er distraught by a son.
A lad who clings to his sire puts cowardice in the brave;
The generous miserly show or yield not even a spark.  

Amends are richly due from sire to son:
What if thy children rule o'er cities great?
Their nobleness estranges them the more
From thee and causes them to wax in hate,
Beholding one that cast them into Life's
Dark labyrinth whence no wit can extricate.

"Refrain from procreation, for its consequence is death."
Ma'arrif followed his own advice. He was the last of his line
and takes credit for having escaped the universal plague:
that is what he means when he says—

The cord of generation stretched unbroken between Adam and
me, but no br was attached to my
When Khâlid yawned, 'Amr yawned because of infection, but I
was not infected by their yawning.

Before he died, he is said to have expressed a wish that
his epitaph should be the verse:

My sire brought this on me, but I on none.

What a contrast with the Greek poet's calm declaration! —μη φύναι μὲν ἄπαντα νικᾶ λόγον. Here we face pessimism
as a practical creed remorselessly pointing to the extinction

1 I. 253, 2. Cf. II. 354, 9-10.
2 Because, the more noble a man is, the more keenly does he feel the
pain of existence. Cf. II. 151, penult. and fol.
3 I. 45, 3.
4 I. 373, 10.
5 I.e. the final l of wasl (connexion) was not followed in my case by the
preposition bi (with), which would have linked me to my successor if the
series had continued.
6 I. 44, 6.
7 See Dhahabi's biography in the Letters of Abu 'l-'Alâ, p. 177.
of mankind. If Ma'arrí believed in a future existence, it would seem that he held the same opinion as Hafiz of its value in relation to the present:

A Paradise of pleasure
Bought with a world of pain—
Fie on the luckless treasure
That I must bleed to gain!

Recognising that his panacea is too heroic to be popular, he sometimes offers it in a diluted form. "If you must wed," says he, "take care to have no children"; and he censures the foolish Jew who divorced his wife because she was barren. He is more humane than logical in counselling men to seek husbands for their daughters but deter their sons from matrimony.

IV.

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION.

Ma'arrí stands for the largest humanistic culture of his time. While he may properly be called a philosopher in so far as he sought after a reasoned view of life and the world, he was only an amateur of scientific philosophy. He reflects on its problems, takes up this or that theory in turns, and concludes that nothing is certain except death. His speculations are capricious and incoherent. "He is almost entirely wanting in the gift of combination. He can analyse, but he does not hit upon any synthesis, and his learning bears no fruit." There is, however, something to be said on the other side. Philosophy is defined by Jāhiz as "Knowledge of the essences of things and the doing of that which is best." Ma'arrí is not primarily concerned with abstract truth. He seeks the True for the sake of the Good, and seldom loses sight of the practical end. We should also recollect that neither the form of his verse nor the circumstances in which it was composed allow us to see his philo-

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1 ii. 253, 14.  
2 ii. 265, 4-5.  
3 i. 216, 10.  
4 De Boer, Hist. of Philosophy in Islam, tr. by E. R. Jones, p. 66.  
5 Mafāṭib 'l-'ulūm, ed. Van Vloten, p. 131.