

I. EBED-JESU'S MAĶĀMĀT.

The following notices of this singular work are founded upon a MS. copy of it, written in the modern Nestorian character, which is in the library of the Oriental Society.

It is in the ancient Syriac language, and is entitled *The Book of the Paradise in Eden*. The author was *Ebed-Jesu*, ܐܒܕܝܫܘܥ, a metropolitan bishop of *Zoba*, ܙܘܒܐ, and Armenia, who lived in the latter part of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century.

It commences with the following announcement by the anonymous transcriber: "In thy adorable strength, O God, we begin to transcribe the Book of the Paradise in Eden; which was composed and formed by the unction of my lord, Ebed-Jesu, metropolitan of Zoba and Armenia; and to which is prefixed a Proem, showing the occasion and the object of the work.—O Lord, in thy mercy assist me, and bring me to the consummation of the work."

From the declaration of the author himself, in the Proem (page 5, line 3, etc.), it appears, that Ebed-Jesu commenced writing the book in the year of the Greeks 1602, or A. D. 1291; and that he finished it in the year of the Greeks 1627, or A. D. 1316; that is, at the end of 25 years. The work therefore is now (A. D. 1853), 537 years old. And the transcriber, in a subscription on the last page of the volume, tells us, that he completed his task in the year of the Greeks 2047, or A. D. 1736, on the 13th day of the month Tamuz (June), which, he says, was the third day of the week, (or Tuesday,) and Apostles' day. He likewise states, that he performed his task in the blessed town of *Darband*, ܕܪܒܢܕ, in the blessed land of *Targoor*, ܬܪܓܘܪ; and that his copy was that of the martyr Mar Jacob.—This manuscript, therefore, has now been written 117 years; and it has evidently been bound a second time, when considerably worn.

The Proem or Introduction to the work, thus speaks of the occasion and the object of its composition.—Many of the Arabian literati, and some among the Syrians, were accustomed to extol greatly the elegancies and powers of the Arabic language, and to depreciate those of the Syriac; representing the latter language as unpolished, stiff, and clumsy; while the former possessed exquisite beauty, flexibility and precision. And, in proof of such assertions, they were perpetually appealing to an Arabic book called *Makâmât*, with which the Syriac afforded nothing that would bear a comparison.

Now, it was to confute this slander upon the Syriac language, and to show, by numerous examples, the amazing richness, flexibility and power of this slandered tongue, that Ebed-Jesu undertook the composition of this curious work.

It consists of fifty short poems or discourses, composed with great art; and each poem is followed by copious explanatory notes and illustrations. The author calls them all *Mimre*, מִמְרֵי, *Discourses*:

but they are really *Poems*, consisting of פַּיִם , metrical lines or *verses*, and of פַּיִם , *stanzas* or *couplets*. The lines or verses are all either *hexameter*, or *double trimetric*. The former consist of from twelve to fourteen syllables, or from six to eight words, with no uniform cesura; the latter consist of two distinct trimetric portions, each made up of six or seven syllables, in three or four words. The *rhythm* in these poems, like that of the Hebrew poetry, appears to depend on the number of logical terms, and the cadence in correct reading, rather than on the number and length of the syllables. And both in the choice of words and in their grammatical structure, there is very frequent recurrence to what is called poetic licence. But the most marked peculiarity of these poems is the regular occurrence of certain *letters*, or their exclusion, in definite parts of the lines or verses; and these artificial dispositions of letters are so numerous and varied, that no two of the poems are constructed in precisely the same manner. Throughout the book, the single lines, if detached, or the couplets, if they form stanzas, commence with the several letters of the alphabet in their order (like the alphabetic Psalms in Hebrew); and if any supernumerary lines or couplets are introduced, they are martialled under their appropriate initial letters. And the termination also, not only of the lines and couplets, but even of the trimetric half-lines in many instances, are regulated by the laws of the several poems. In some of the poems, a particular letter, (as, an א , a ב , a ג , etc.,) is found in every word, from the beginning to the end of it; while certain other letters, (three, four, or five, in number,) are altogether excluded from the poem. To these *alliterations* (as they may be called), which are numerous in themselves, and susceptible of various combinations, we may add the very artificial arrangement of letters in two of the poems, namely, the 3d and the 21st. In the first of these poems, (the 3d,) we have twenty-nine double trimetric lines, in alphabetic order, and each terminating in its own initial letter; but its chief peculiarity is, that the letters composing the first trimeter in each line are reversed, or read backwards, in the second trimeter; so that one may read each line from right to left, or from left to right, and meet with the same identical letters, arranged in the same order, and yet making good sense. The other

of these two poems, (the 21st,) consists of twenty-four alphabetic hexameter lines, each of which contains all the twenty-two letters of the Syriac alphabet, once written and not repeated; so that each line has precisely the same letters, namely, the entire Syriac alphabet, arranged in one of twenty-four different ways, and in each making tolerable sense.

As it was avowedly the great object of this singular work, to exhibit the plastic character of the Syriac language, and to make a book that would rival the famous Arabic *Maḳāmāt*, the author taxed his invention to form series of words in which letters would play fantastic tricks, and surprise us with their whimsical feats. And to facilitate the matter, he chose such subjects for his poems as he found most manageable; namely, simple, general truths, perfectly familiar to every educated Christian man. And hence these poems are of very little value for the important truths they contain, or for the beauty and grandeur of the conceptions in them. This book, therefore, as far as the poems are concerned, is a mere literary curiosity, of no solid worth. But the copious explanatory notes subjoined to the several poems, and constituting much the larger part of the volume, may be regarded as a useful contribution to Syriac lexicography; as they certainly are quite necessary to render the strange and enigmatical language of the poems intelligible.

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II. SYRIAN SOCIETY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES.

THE existence and prosperity of this Society is an indication, most interesting to the philanthropist and the scholar, that the culture of western nations is exerting a great and happy influence upon minds in Syria, and even gives promise, that the naturally fine intellect of the Arab race may be re-cast in the mould of modern civilization. A copy of the First Part of the Transactions of the Society, recently received for the library of the American Oriental Society, enables us to confirm this general remark by some statements which, we think, will interest the reader.

The Syrian Society of Arts and Sciences was established in 1847. Its objects are defined in the second article of its Constitution, as follows:

“The objects of this Society shall be: first, the acquisition of the sciences and arts, on the part of its members, by means of mutual communications, tracts, discourses, and reports; second, the collecting of books, and papers, whether printed or manuscript, and especially those which are in the Arabic language, likely to be of use to the