

THE QUATRAINS OF
HÁLI

(MAULAVI SAIYID ALTÁF HUSAIN ANSÁRI PÁNIPATI)

EDITED (BY PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR)

IN THE ROMAN CHARACTER

WITH A TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

ALTHOUGH there are plenty of Hindustani textbooks and Manuals which enable British Officers serving in India to pass the prescribed examinations and hold a certain amount of intercourse with the people among whom their lot is cast, there are comparatively few which are calculated to arouse in them any interest in modern Hindustani literature or induce them to continue their study of the language after the examinations are over.

An Englishman in India, whatever may be the nature of his employment, has little spare time for reading of any kind, and he is more likely to devote his leisure to whatever book may be handy in English type than to reading in the vernacular script even such a work as 'The Lectures and Speeches of Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khán bahádur,' although the volume in which these are published is exceptionally well lithographed.

As a matter of fact, the knowledge of Hindustani literature which is picked up by the majority of British officials in the country, after they have once settled down to their work, is picked up in conversation—a phrase here—a quotation there—sometimes an old proverb, and sometimes a line from a poet, ancient or modern, which may have attracted attention from its novelty or pertinency, and therefore dwells in the memory. In this way a good deal is learnt in the course of years almost imperceptibly.

The present book merely aims at serving the same kind of purpose as is attained by such conversations in the manner described above. It is hoped that it may be taken up at odd

moments by Anglo-Indians who are too busy to study Hindustani literature in the Persian or Nāgari character, but who are yet conscious that there is no surer key to the affection of the Indian people than a sympathetic appreciation of all that is good in their language. It is even hoped (though perhaps hope is too strong a word to use in this connexion) that it may help to remove the prejudice against the study of any *modern* language of India which exists in this country. The translations have been made as literal as it seemed possible to make them with due regard to the differences of idiom in the two languages, but they are no more than translations. All the embellishments of neatness of expression, of rhythm, and of rime, must be looked for in the original text, where they will not be found wanting.

The Quatrains of Hāli form a very small portion of his poetical work; indeed in the lithographed edition of his minor poems they occupy a space of twenty pages only out of more than two hundred and twenty. His best known work is a *Musaddas* (i. e. a poem in stanzas of six lines each) called by him 'The Flow and Ebb of Islām' which was written, as we are informed in a preface to it by himself, at the suggestion of Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khān bahādūr. Of this poem an English-speaking Muhammadan gentleman writes, 'We read it in our school days, we read it when we grow up, we recite it in our clubs, we listen to it in our Anjumans, we see the best of the land recurring to it in our conferences, we hear it sung with music and without it, again and again, and yet without a trace of weariness.'¹

The name Hāli is of course a *nom de plume*. The author's secular name and address is Maulavi Saiyid Altāf Husain Ansāri of Pānipat. The following few particulars of his life may be gleaned from his writings. He was born at Pānipat, apparently before the mutiny, but losing his father at an early age was brought up by an elder brother, to whose memory he has consecrated a short poem of singular pathos and beauty. While under his brother's care he seems to have lived at Dehli, and in

¹ 'The new school of Urdu Literature' by Shaikh Abdul Qadir, B.A., Lahore, 1898. The word 'Anjuman' is equivalent to 'Debating Society' or 'Literary Club.'

his youth was a pupil of the famous Ghālib, of whom some account is given in the note to Quatrain 60, p. 76. He left Dehli with much regret in order to take up an appointment at Lahore, where he resided for many years. At the age of forty he came under the influence of the great Musalmān reformer, Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khān bahādūr, and from that time has devoted his poetical gifts to the cause of reform and the service of his coreligionists in India. His *nom de plume* Hāli (in French 'actuel') may signify either 'real' in the sense of *genuine*, or 'modern' in the sense of '*up to date*.' It was adopted, probably in the former sense, long before he undertook the task of moulding the literature of his country upon modern lines, but is especially applicable in the latter sense to his later writings. In prose he has published a life of the Persian poet Sa-di, a volume of Reminiscences of the poet Ghālib with a detailed criticism of his writings, a life in two volumes of Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khān bahādūr, and an excellent critique on poetry and poetical style. The following verses, to which a prominent place is given in the collected edition of his minor poems, exhibit his attitude to the poetical literature current at the time when he somewhat sadly undertook the rôle of a reformer. The sense of each couplet is fairly represented in the accompanying prose translation, but the charm which resides in the melody of the verses is lost.

'-aks ě gul men rang hai gul kā, pa gul ki bū nahīn.'¹

¹ 'In the reflection (in a mirror) of the rose there is the colour of the rose, but the perfume of the rose is not there.' The metre of this line, written by Saudā (an Urdu poet who died in 1780 A. D.), is

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The scansion of Hāli's verses will be found explained on page 59.