



***ABU AL-ALA
AL-MAARRI***

***THE LUZUMIYAT
OF ABU'L-ALA***

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Abu al-Ala al-Maarri

The Luzumiyat of Abu'l-Ala

Selected from his Luzum ma la Yalzam and Suct us-Zand

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PREFACE.

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When Christendom was groping amid the superstitions of the Dark Ages, and the Norsemen were ravaging the western part of Europe, and the princes of Islam were cutting each other's throats in the name of Allah and his Prophet, Abu'l-Ala'l-Ma'arri was waging his bloodless war against the follies and evils of his age. He attacked the superstitions and false traditions of law and religion, proclaiming the supremacy of the mind; he hurled his trenchant invectives at the tyranny, the bigotry, and the quackery of his times, asserting the supremacy of the soul; he held the standard of reason high above that of authority, fighting to the end the battle of the human intellect. An intransigent with the exquisite mind of a sage and scholar, his weapons were never idle. But he was, above all, a poet; for when he stood before the eternal mystery of Life and Death, he sheathed his sword and murmured a prayer.

Abu'l-Ala'l-Ma'arri,^{[1](#)} the Lucretius of Islam, the Voltaire of the East, was born in the spring of the year 973 A.D., in the obscure village of Ma'arrah,^{[2](#)} which is about eighteen hours' journey south of Halab (Aleppo). And instead of Ahmad ibn Abdallah ibn Sulaiman ut-Tanukhi (of the tribe of Tanukh), he was called Abu'l-Ala (the Father of the Sublime), by which patronymic of distinction he is popularly known throughout the Arabic speaking world.

When a boy, Abu'l-Ala was instructed by his father; and subsequently he was sent to Halab, where he pursued his studies under the tutelage of the grammarian Muhammad

ibn Abdallah ibn us-Sad. His literary proclivity was evinced in his boyhood, and he wrote verse, we are told, before he was ten. Of these juvenile pieces, however, nothing was preserved.

He was about five years old when he fell a victim to small-pox and almost lost his sight from it. But a weakness in his eyes continued to trouble him and he became, in middle age, I presume, totally blind.³ Some of his biographers would have us believe he was born blind; others state that he completely lost his sight when he was attacked by the virulent disease; and a few intimate that he could see slightly at least with the right eye. As to whether or not he was blind when he was sent to Halab to pursue his studies, his biographers do not agree. My theory, based on the careful perusal of his poems and on a statement advanced by one of his biographers,⁴ is that he lost his sight gradually, and total blindness must have come upon him either in his youth or his middle age.⁵ Were we to believe that he was born blind or that he suffered the complete loss of his sight in his boyhood, we should be at a loss to know, not how he wrote his books, for that was done by dictation; not how he taught his pupils, for that was done by lectures; but how he himself was taught in the absence in those days of a regular system of instruction for the blind.

In 1010 A.D. he visited Baghdad, the centre of learning and intelligence and the capital of the Abbaside Khalifs, where he passed about two years and became acquainted with most of the literary men of the age.⁶ He attended the lectures and the readings of the leading doctors and