

Classic Poetry Series

Baha ad-Din Zuhayr
- poems -

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Baha ad-Din Zuhayr(1186 - 1258)

Baha' al- Din Zuhayr was born in Mecca, which is now in Saudi Arabia. His full name was Abu al-Fadl Zuhayr ibn Muhammad al-Muhallabi. He was educated in Qus in Egypt during the Ayyubid Dynasty and later moved to Cairo.

In Cairo he entered the service of the prince as-Salih Ayyub, and his fortunes knew many ups and downs. Initially he served as the prince's secretary during a campaign in Syria, when the prince was imprisoned due to family differences, Baha' al- Din stayed close and remained loyal, his loyalty paid a rich dividend when as-Salih Ayyub became the Sultan, as he immediately appointed him as his vizier, unfortunately the poet lost the Sultan's approval and with it also lost his position. He tried but failed to gain favour in Syria and was fated to spend his last years in anonymity.

Baha' al- Din Zuhayr wrote Qasidas (odes of praise) as well as poetry on love and friendship.

His Divan was translated into English by E.H. Palmer and published as The Poetical Works of Beha-ed-Din Zoheir

On A Blind Girl

They call my love a poor blind maid:
I love her more for that, I said;
I love her for she cannot see
The gray hairs which disfigure me.

She is a garden fair where I
Need fear no guardian's prying eye;
Where, though in beauty blooms the rose,
Narcissuses their eyelids close.

Baha ad-Din Zuhayr

The Mu'Allaqat

'Does the blackened ruin, situated in the stony ground between Durraj and Mutathallam, which did not speak to me, when addressed, belong to the abode of Ummi Awfa?

And is it her dwelling at the two stony meadows, seeming as though they were the renewed tattoo marks in the sinews of the wrist?

'The wild cows and the white deer are wandering about there, one herd behind the other, while their young are springing up from every lying-down place.

'I stood again near it, (the encampment of the tribe of Awfa,) after an absence of twenty years, and with some efforts, I know her abode again after thinking awhile.

'I recognized the three stones blackened by fire at the place where the kettle used to be placed at night, and the trench round the encampment, which had not burst, like the source of a pool.

'And when I recognized the encampment I said to its site, 'Now good morning, oh spot; may you be safe from dangers.'

'Look, oh my friend! do you see any women traveling on camels, going over the high ground above the stream of Jurthum?

'They have covered their howdahs with coverlets of high value, and with a thin screen, the fringes of which are red, resembling blood.

'And they inclined toward the valley of Sooban, ascending the center of it, and in their faces were the fascinating looks of a soft-bodied person brought up in easy circumstances.

'They arose early in the morning and got up at dawn, and they went straight to the valley of Rass as the hand goes unswervingly to the mouth, when eating.

'And amongst them is a place of amusement for the farsighted one,
and a pleasant sight for the eye of the looker who
looks attentively.

'As if the pieces of dyed wool which they left in every
place in which they halted, were the seeds of night-shade
which have not been crushed.

'When they arrived at the water, the mass of which was
blue from intense purity, they laid down their walking sticks,
like the dweller who has pitched his tents.

'They kept the hill of Qanan and the rough ground about
it on their hand; while there are many, dwelling in Qanan,
the shedding of whose blood is lawful and unlawful.

'They came out from the valley of Sooban, then they
crossed it, riding in every Qainian howdah
new and widened.

'Then I swear by the temple, round which walk the men
who built it from the tribes
of Quraysh and Turhum.

'An oath, that you are verily two excellent chiefs, who
are found worthy of honor in every condition, between ease
and distress.

'The two endeavorers from the tribe of Ghaiz bin Murrah
strove in making peace after the connection between the
tribes had become broken, on account of the shedding of blood.

'You repaired with peace the condition of the tribes of
'Abs and Zubyan, after they had fought with one another, and
ground up the perfume of Manshim between them.

'And indeed you said, 'if we bring about peace perfectly by the spending
of money and the conferring of benefits, and by good words,
we shall be safe from the danger of the two tribes, destroying each other.'

'You occupied by reason of this the best of positions, and
became far from the reproach of being

undutiful and sinful.

'And you became great in the high nobility of Ma'add;
may you be guided in the right way; and he who spends his
treasure of glory will become great.

'The memory of the wounds is obliterated by the hundreds
of camels, and he, who commenced paying off the blood money
by instalments, was not guilty of it (i.e., of making war) .

'One tribe pays it to another tribe as an indemnity, while
they who gave the indemnity did not shed blood sufficient for
the filling of a cupping glass.

'Then there was being driven to them from the property
you inherited, a booty of various sorts from young camels
with slit ears.

'Now, convey from me to the tribe of Zubyan and their
allies a message,- 'verily you have sworn by every sort of
oath to keep the peace.'

'Do not conceal from God what is in your breast that it
may be hidden; whatever is concealed,
God knows all about it.

'Either it will be put off and placed recorded in a book,
and preserved there until the judgment day;
or the punishment be hastened and so he will take revenge.

'And war is not but what you have learnt it to be, and
what you have experienced, and what is said concerning it,
is not a story based on suppositions.

'When you stir it up, you will stir it up as an accursed
thing, and it will become greedy when you excite its greed
and it will rage fiercely.

'Then it will grind you as the grinding of the upper millstone
against the lower, and it will conceive immediately after
one birth and it will produce twins.

'By my life I swear, how good a tribe it is upon whom
Husain Bin Zamzam brought an injury by committing a
crime which did not please them.

'And he had concealed his hatred, and did not display it,
and did not proceed to carry out his intention until he got a
good opportunity.

'And he said, 'I will perform my object of avenging myself,
and I will guard myself from my enemy with a thousand
bridled horses behind me.'

'Then he attacked his victim from 'Abs, but did not cause
fear to the people of the many houses, near which death had
thrown down his baggage.

'They allowed their animals to graze until when the interval
between the hours of drinking was finished, they took them to the deep pool,
which is divided by weapons and by shedding of blood.

'They accomplished their object amongst themselves, then
they led the animals back to the pasture of unwholesome
indigestible grass.

'I have grown weary of the troubles of life; and he,
who lives eighty years will, may you have no father
if you doubt grow weary.

'And I know what has happened to-day and yesterday,
before it, but verily, of the knowledge of what will happen
tomorrow; I am ignorant.

'I see death is like the blundering of a blind camel; -him
whom he meets he kills, and he whom he misses lives and will
become old.

'And he who does not act with kindness in many affairs
will be torn by teeth
and trampled under foot.

'And he, who makes benevolent acts intervene before

honor, increases his honor;
and he, who does not avoid abuse, will be abused.

'He, who is possessed of plenty, and is miserly with his
great wealth toward his people, will be dispensed with,
and abused.

'He who keeps his word, will not be reviled;
and he whose heart is guided to self-satisfying benevolence
will not stammer.

'And he who dreads the causes of death, they will reach
him, even if he ascends the tracts of the heavens
with a ladder.

'And he, who shows kindness to one not deserving it, his
praise will be a reproach against him, and he will repent of
having shown kindness.

'And he who rebels against the butt ends of the spears,
then verily he will have to obey the spear points joined to
every long spear shaft.

'And he who does not repulse with his weapons from his
tank, will have it broken; and he who does not oppress the
people will be oppressed.

'And he who travels should consider his friend an enemy;
and he who does not respect himself
will not be respected.

'And he, who is always seeking to bear the burdens of
other people, and does not excuse himself from it,
will one day by reason of his abasement, repent.

'And whatever of character there is in a man, even though
he thinks it concealed from people,
it is known.

'He, who does not cease asking people to carry him, and
does not make himself independent of them even for one day
of the time, will be regarded with disgust.

'Many silent ones you see, pleasing to you,
but their excess in wisdom or deficiency
will appear at the time of talking.

'The tongue of a man is one half, and the other half is his
mind, and here is nothing besides these two, except the shape
of the blood and the flesh.

'And verily, as to the folly of an old man
there is no wisdom after it,
but the young man after his folly may become wise.

Baha ad-Din Zuhayr