

# THE FIRST MUEZZIN

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"BAILAL"

If all that worship Thee to-day  
Should suddenly be swept away,  
And not a Muezzin left to cry  
Through the silence of the sky,---  
"God is Great!" --- there still would be  
Clouds of witnesses for Thee  
On the land and in the sea . . . .  
Aye! and if these, too, were fled,  
And the earth itself were dead,  
Greater would remain on high;  
For all the planets in the sky; ---  
Suns that burn till day has flown,  
Stars that are with night restored.---  
Are Thy dervishes, O Lord,  
Wheeling round Thy golden Throne!  
--- EDWIN ARNOLD.

### I

**THE** Traveler slumbering for the first time within the walls of an Oriental city, and in the vicinity of a minaret, can scarcely fail to be impressed by the solemn

beauty of the Mohammedan Call to Prayer. If he have worthily prepared himself, by the study of books and of languages, for the experience of Eastern travel, he will probably have learned by heart the words of the sacred summons, and will recognize their syllables in the sonorous chant of the Muezzin, --- while the rose-colored light of an Egyptian or Syrian dawn expands its flush to the stars. Four times more will he hear that voice ere morning again illuminates the east: --- under the white blaze of noon; at the sunset hour, when the west is fervid with incandescent gold and vermilion; in the long after glow of orange and emerald fires; and, still later, when a million astral lamps have been lighted in the vast and violet dome of God's everlasting mosque. Perhaps the last time he may distinguish, in the termination of the chant, words new and mysterious to his ear; and should he

question his dragoman, as did Gerard de Nerval\* regarding their meaning, he would doubtless obtain

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\* *Le premier fois que j'entendis la voix lente et sereine du muezzin, au coucher du Soleil, je me sentis pris d'une indicible melancholie, "Qu'est ce qu'il dit?" demandai je au drogman. = "La Allah ila Allah! . . . Il n'y a d'autre Dieu que Dieu!" --- "Je connais cette formule; mais ensuite?" "O vous qui allez dormir; recommandez vos ames a Celui qui ne dort jamais!" --- Voyage en Orient "Le Drogman Abdullah."*

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a similar interpretation: " --- O ye that are about to sleep, commend your souls to Him who never sleeps!" Sublime exhortation! --- recalling the words of that Throne-verse which jewellers of the Orient engrave upon agates and upon rubies, "*Drowsiness cometh not to Him, nor sleep.*" And if the interpreter should know something of the hagiology of Islam, he might further relate that the first Muezzin, the first singer of the *Adzân*, was the sainted servant of Mahomet, --- even that Bilâlibin-Rabah whose tomb is yet pointed out to travelers at Damascus.

Now Bilâl was an African black, an Abyssinian, --- famed for his fortitude as a confessor, for his zeal in the faith of the Prophet, and for the marvelous melody of his voice, whose echoes have been caught up and prolonged and multiplied by all the muezzins of Islam, through the passing of more than twelve hundred years. Bilâl sang before the idea of the

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first minaret had been conceived, --- before blind men were selected to chant the *Adzân*, lest from the great height of the muezzin towers others might gaze upon the level roofs of the city, and behold sights forbidden to Moslem eyes. Today innumerable minarets point to heaven: even the oases of the Sahara have their muezzin towers, --- sometimes built in ignorance of the plumb-line, and so contorted that they seem to writhe, like those at Ouargla which Victor Largeau saw in 1877. And the words chanted by all the muezzins of the Moslem world, --- whether from the barbaric brick structures which rise above "The Tombs of the Desert," or from the fairy minarets of the exquisite mosque at Agra, --- are the words first sung by the mighty voice of Bilâl.

Even at the present day many special qualifications are required of him who would sing the *Adzân*: he must be learned in the Koran: his name must be without reproach; his voice must be clear, suave and sonorous, his diction precise and pure. But in earlier ages of Islam, while the traditional memory of Bilâl's voice

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was strong in the minds of the faithful, extraordinary vocal powers may have been required of those appointed to the office of muezzin. Moslih-Eddin Sadi, the far-famed Persian poet, relates in his Gulistan more than one singular anecdote illustrating the ideas of his day in regard to the selection of muezzins and Koran readers . . . . "Some one, in the Mosque of Sandjar," --- he tells us, --- "used to make the Call to prayer with good intent, yet with a voice repugnant to all that heard it. And the Chief of the mosque was a just emir, whose every action was good. Accordingly he sought to avoid giving a wound to the heart of that man. He spake to him thus, saying: 'O sir! there are old muezzins attached unto this temple, to each one of whom is allotted a salary of five dinars, and verily I will give thee ten dinars to betake thyself to another place.' The man agreed thereunto and went his way. But after a certain time he returned to the emir, and said to him: 'O my lord! truly thou hast done me an injustice by inducing me to leave this monastery for ten

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dinars! At the place to which I went they have offered me twenty dinars to go elsewhere, --- and I refuse!' Then the emir smiled and made answer: 'Take heed thou accept them not; for they will surely agree to pay thee even so much as fifty dinars!'" Chap. IV; *Upon the Advantage of Silence*.

Not less amusingly significant is the anecdote which follows in the same portion of the book, --- anecdote which will be more fully appreciated, doubtless, when we state that the old Arabian manner of reading the Koran ranks perhaps first among all preserved styles of religious cantillation:--- . "A man who had a disagreeable voice was reading the Koran aloud. A sensible man, passing by, asked of the reader: 'What is thy salary?' He answered: 'Nothing.' Then demanded the other, --- 'Wherefore dost thou take so much pains?' The man responded: 'I read for the love of God.' Then said the other: 'O, for the love of God, do not read!'"

Son of an Abyssinian slave girl, Bilâl began life as a slave.

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Little seems to be known of his earlier years.

He was very dark, --- "with negro features and bushy hair," Sir William Muir tells us, upon the authority of Arabian writers; he was also very tall, and gaunt as a camel; --- not comely to look upon, but vigorous and sinewy. Among the slaves of Mecca the first preaching of Mahomet took deep effect: --- to the hearts of those strangers and bondsmen in a strange land of bondage, the idea of a Universal Father must have been a balm of consolation. Bilâl would seem to have been the first convert of his race, inasmuch as the Prophet was wont to speak of him as "the first fruits of Abyssinia." Perhaps the young slave had obtained from his dark mother such rude notions of that Christianity implanted in Abyssinia during the fourth century, as might have prepared his mind to accept the monotheism of Islam.

But when the period of persecution commenced, it was upon those converted slaves that the wrath of



the idolatrous Koreish fell most heavily. Among the Arabs it had been, from time immemorial, a chivalric duty to protect

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one's own kindred at the risk even of life; and the shedding of Arab blood by Arab hands in time of peace never failed to provoke such reprisals as often entailed a long war of vendetta. By reason of this salutary social law, Mahomet and his free Arab converts felt themselves comparatively secure from dangerous violence; but the unprotected slaves who had embraced the new faith were cruelly beaten, often menaced with death, and tortured by naked exposure to the blistering sun. Under such suffering, to which the torments of hunger and thirst were superadded, --- the temptations of cool water and palatable food and shady rest proved too much for the courage of the victims: one by one they uttered, with their lips at least, the prescribed malediction upon their Prophet, and the idolatrous oath by Lat and Ozza. Afterwards, many of them wept bitterly for their recantation. But Mahomet gave ample consolation to the poor renegades; and for their sake that special exemption for reluctant apostasy was provided in the Koran: --- "*Whosoever denieth GOD. after that he hath*

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*believed, EXCEPTING HIM WHO IS FORCIBLY COMPELLED THERETO, HIS HEART REMAINING STEADFAST IN THE FAITH --- on such resteth the wrath of God."* Sura XVI, 108.

Bilâl alone never apostatized: the agony of blows, the fiery pains of thirst, the long exposure to the sun upon the scorching gravel of the Valley of Mecca, --- all failed to bend his iron will; and to the demands of his persecutors he invariably answered, --- *Ahad! Ahad!* "One, one only God!" This episode of his confessorship has been chosen by the Poet Farid Uddin Attar as the text of a pious admonition contained in the superb invocation of the Mantic Uttair:--- "Bilâl received upon his feeble body many blows with clubs of wood and thongs of leather: his blood flowed in abundance beneath the strokes, --- yet never did he cease to cry out, 'God is one, God is the only God!'"

It happened one day, while the poor Abyssinian was being thus tormented, that a small, lithe, slightly built man, with handsome aquiline features and a singularly high forehead, suddenly appeared among the spectators of

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Bilâl's fortitude and suffering. This slender little man was the merchant Abdallah, son of Othman Abu Cahâfa, but better known to students of Moslem history as Abu Bekr, famous as the bosom friend of the Prophet, his comrade in the Fight, and his companion in that famous cavern over whose entrance fond tradition avers that spiders wove a miraculous veil of webs to hide the fugitives, --- Abu Bekr, also called *Al Siddick*, "the True," "father of the virgin," --- father of Mahomet's future wife Ayesha, and destined to succeed him in the Khalifate. Already he had expended the greater part of a fortune of forty thousand dirhems in purchasing the freedom of slaves persecuted because of their conversion to

Islam. These were mostly women or weaklings. "O my son!" Abu Cahafa was wont to say to him, --- "I see that thou freest weak women; but if thou wert to free strong men, they would stand by thee, and repel harm from thee." "Nay, father!" would Abu Bekr reply; --- "I desire only those things which are of God!" And the Traditionists record that by reason of this

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pious squandering of his wealth, Al Siddick at last found himself reduced to wear a coarse garment of goat's hair, "pinned together at his breast with a wooden skewer."

Abu Bekr did not long remain a silent witness of Bilal's resolution: he negotiated upon the spot for the purchase of the slave, and succeeded in obtaining him from his owners --- "Umayyah b Khàlàf and Ubayy-b-Khàlàf" --- for a cloak and ten pieces of money. Little did any of the spectators of that bargaining imagine the day would ever come when Umayyah and his son might vainly beg mercy from the slave to whom they had shown no mercy. Ten years later, after the furious battle of Bedr, it was Bilâl's turn; his keen eye singled out his former owners from among the multitude of Koreishite prisoners; and it was his grim satisfaction to have them slain before his face, --- for the faith of Islam did not enjoin the returning of good for evil.

Now Bilâl was the first really valuable slave redeemed by Abu Bekr, who immediately after the purchase had set him free, "for the love of

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God." Bilâl was a powerful man; the feebleness spoken of by the Persian poet must only be understood as referring to the weakness of human nature by contrast with spiritual strength. Calumniators were not slow to declare that the Abyssinian had been bought free for purely selfish motives; a report apt to find credence in a community where the devout merchant had long been known as a shrewd speculator and a hard bargainer. Mahomet wrathfully rebuked this malicious gossip; and it is traditional that his reproof is embodied in the Ninetieth-and-second Sura of the Koran, entitled THE NIGHT, --- comprising that part of its text from the opening line, "*By the Night when it covereth,*" to the close of the words, "*Verily, your endeavor is different!*"

...

Thus it happened that Bilâl obtained his manumission, to become the devoted servant of Mahomet, and to perform a great part in the expanding history of Islam. There is a legend that, after the Flight of the Prophet, he and others of the faithful temporarily re-

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maining in Mecca, were again persecuted by the Koreish; but this account is totally discredited by the

best modern authorities upon the history of Mohammedanism. We next hear of Bilâl at Medina, in the character of The First Muezzin.

## II

During the infancy of Mohammedanism, when the faithful ones dwelt in the immediate vicinity of their prophet's home, the *Adzân* was unknown: --- the simpler cry: *To public prayer!* being easily heard by all. It was not until after the building of the first mosque at Medina, and after Mahomet had changed the *Kibla*, --- or the direction toward which the worshipers turned their faces --- from Jerusalem to Mecca and its Kaaba, that the *Adzân* was established. But Jerusalem retains a large place in the Moslem legend and remains dear to Moslem faith; --- for hath it not been recorded in the Traditions that among the greater signs of the Last Hour, shall be the coming of "Jesus the son of Mary" to Jeru-

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salem even at the moment of morning prayer, when the Mosque of Omar will be lighted by the shining of His face, and He shall take the place of the awe-stricken Imam, and shall confound all those that call themselves Christians by uttering in mighty tones the great confession of Islam: -- *Aschaduan na Mohammed rasoul Allah!*

The idea of the *Adzân* was obtained in a most singular way. After the building of that Mosque of Mahomet, which, despite the humbleness of its material, really formed the model for Saracenic architecture, it soon became evident that the old manner of summoning the congregation to worship was unsuited to the new conditions, and utterly devoid of that solemnity which ought to characterize all public performance of religious duty. At first the Prophet bethought him to have a trumpet made; but having removed the *Kibla* from Jerusalem he could ill persuade himself to adopt an instrument used by the Jews in certain ceremonial observances. Then he thought of having a bell rung at certain regular hours;

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but there was no one in Medina capable of making such a bell as he desired, and he had almost fixed his choice upon a wooden gong, when it came to pass that a certain citizen of Medina dreamed a strange dream.

It seemed to him that he beheld, passing through the moonlit street before his dwelling, a stranger uncommonly tall, clad in green raiment, and carrying in his hand a large and beautiful bell. And it seemed to the sleeper also, that, having approached the tall stranger, he asked: "Wilt thou sell me thy bell?" --- and that the tall man smilingly returned: "Tell me for what purpose thou seekest to buy it."

"Verily," answered the dreamer in his dream, --- "it is for our Lord Mahomet that I wish to obtain it, that he may therewith summon the faithful to prayer."

"Nay!" said the stranger, seeming to grow taller as he spake, --- "I will teach thee a better way than that! Let a crier cry aloud, even thus . . . ." And in a voice so deep, so wonderful, --- so superhumanly sonorous, so supernaturally sweet that a great and holy fear

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came upon the listener, he chanted the *Adzân* of Islam, even as it is chanted to-day, from the western coast of Africa to the eastern boundary of Hindostan: ---

"God is Great!

"God is Great!

"I bear witness there is no other God but God!

"I bear witness that Mahomet is the Prophet  
of God!

"Come unto Prayer!

"Come unto Salvation!

"God is Great!

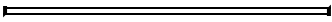
"There is no other God but God!"

. . . Awakening with the vibrant melody of that marvelous voice still in his ears, the good Moslem hastened to the Prophet with the story of his dream. Mahomet received him as one bearing a revelation from heaven; and, remembering the uncommon vocal powers of his devoted Bilâl, bade the Abyssinian to sound the Call to Prayer, even as the words thereof had been revealed to the dreamer. It was yet

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deep night: ere dawn the First Muezzin had learned the duties of his new office, and at the earliest blush of day, the slumberers of Medina were aroused by the far echoing and magnificent voice of the Abyssinian, chanting the *Adzân* from the summit of a lofty dwelling hard by the Mosque . . . . Does not the opening chapter in the history of the graceful Minaret --- that architectural feature to which, above all others, the picturesqueness of Moslem cities is most largely due, rightly begin with Bilâl's ascent to the starlit housetop in Medina, twelve hundred years ago?

And during all those centuries Islam has known no day in which the cry of the Muezzin has not gone up to God. Still the chanting of the *Adzân* times the passing of the hours for the populations of innumerable cities; \* and it is among the Traditions that it shall also signal the approach of the last hour, the end of



\**It is rarely indeed that such an irregularity occurs as might have been suggested in the beautiful lines of Sadi:*

*"The Muezzin has lifted up his voice before the time: he knoweth not how much of the night is passed! . . . Ask thou of mine eyes how long the night, for sleep hath not visited mine eye lids even for one brief moment." --- Gulistan.*

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time, --- when the last Imam Mahdi, the Antichrist of Moslem belief, shall announce his coming by singing the Call in so mighty a voice that the sound will roll around the world.

The summons to prayer has ever been obeyed with a scrupulous punctuality that evokes the surprise and admiration of travelers; and this well known Moslem fidelity to religious duty has, more than once in the history of Islam, been cruelly taken advantage of. It was at Nishapoor, --- the city beloved of the *Perfumer of Souls*, that Attâr by whom Bilâl has been sung of in "The Language of Birds," that the Adzân was perhaps first chanted for a treacherous end. During the eighth year of the seventh century, the city was utterly destroyed by the hordes of Ghengis Khan. In their role of exterminators the Tartars ever observed one practice unparalleled for sinister cruelty and cunning. This was, after having withdrawn from a wasted place, to suddenly return thither a few days later, so as to surprise any survivors who might have chanced to escape the fury of fire and sword, or such as might

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have returned to search for valued objects among the smouldering ruins. Returning thus to Nishapoor the Mongol leader caused the Adzân to be sounded; and by this brutal device it is said that many were lured from their secure refuges to slaughter. Well might a Persian historian say of those hordes: "*Their aim was the destruction of the human race and the ruin of the world, not the desire of dominion or of plunder.*"

### III

In the luminous atmosphere of tradition, the voice of Bilâl vibrates for us like the voice of the Stranger in Green Raiment, superhumanly, paradisaically. After the lapse of so many hundred years it were difficult indeed to determine the precise character of the African's voice, or to particularize the indubitable merits of his chant. But if any rational inference whatever may be drawn from the highly florid evidence of the many traditions concerning him, we have a right to suppose that Bilâl's voice was a baritone of ex-

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traordinary range and volume, in strong contrast to the shrill and effeminate Arabian tenor. There is reason to doubt whether any of the singers famous in the annals of the pre-Islamic age, or "period of Ignorance" --- Djâhéliâh belonged to that race so effectively characterized by a French traveler as *un peuple criard*. As M. le Docteur Perron tells us in that delicious book *Les Femmes Arabes* (published at Algiers in 1858), most of them were slaves; and nearly all the slaves held by the Arabs before the advent of Mahomet were Abyssinians or negroes. It is quite probable that those especially celebrated female singers, Youmad and Youad, --- surnamed the *Djerradah Ad*, or Crickets of the Adides, and some of whose compositions are still extant, --- were Abyssinian girls. They were owned by an Arab of the Beni Ad, --- Abdallah, son of Djoudan, --- concerning whom various beautiful traditions have been preserved. In almost all periods of Arabian history, mestizos, black freedmen, or the children of African slaves, found occasion to distinguish

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themselves as poets, artists or musicians. One of those swarthy singers, whom the Arabs termed by reason of their color, "The Ravens," occupied so high a place that his songs are classed with the best productions of the best era of Arabian poetry, and one of the immortal mohallakats, or "Suspended Poems," bears his name: Antarah. Khoufaf, the warrior-poet and cousin of the famous Khaysa --- (one of the greatest female singers of the desert) --- was a quadroon. Chanfare, another *Raven*, --- a poet of no little merit, --- singly declared war against the whole tribe of the Benou-Abs who had killed his father-in-law for no other reason than that he dared to bestow his daughter's hand upon the son of a slave. Chanfara swore to kill a hundred men of the tribe; --- ninety-nine fell beneath his hand, before he was hunted down and slaughtered like a wild beast; --- long afterward, one of the Benou-Abs, trampling upon the bleaching skull of the poet, lacerated his naked foot and died of the wound, so that the oath of Chanfara did not fail of accomplishment. Mahomet used often

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to regret that he had not lived in the time of Antarah, --- less, probably, because he admired the poetry of the half-breed nomad, than because he recognized the value to his own cause of such a warrior-singer, who could have rallied all the freedmen of the desert about the standard of a Prophet who preached equality. The spirit of Islam gradually suppressed the beautiful poetry of the desert, --- "warmly colored as the nature of that region, ardent as its sands, burning as its sun;" but although the *Ravens* no longer composed mohallakats, they continued to sing. No small number of the celebrated musicians who flourished during the first three centuries of Islam\* were half breeds or blacks. Said-ibn-Mousadjih, whose goods were confiscated by order of the Caliph Abd-el Mélik on the ground that by the charm of his singing he had excited the sons of the aristocracy to ruin themselves in giving him presents, was a negro of Mecca, †

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\* See Caussin de Perceval: --- "*Notices Anecdotiques sur les principaux Musiciens Arabes.*"

† Said, however, went to Damascus, obtained an audience of the Caliph, and in lieu of pleading his case in words, sang one of his best compositions. On hearing him the Caliph restored the confiscated property, loaded the singer with gifts, and even declared he could excuse those who ruined themselves for the pleasure of hearing so mighty a singer.

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Abou Mahdjan Nossayb, son of the negro poet Rehab, was honored by many governors and caliphs from the day of Abd-el-Melik to the time of Hisham; --- Yezid II one day filled his mouth with fine pearls. Abou Abbâd Mabed, prince of singers in his day, charmed three Caliphs in succession. Yezid fainted with delight at hearing the negro sing; the succeeding Caliph once made him a gift of 12,000 pieces of gold (\$33,600) : --- and Walid II, in whose palace he died, led the funeral cortegé accompanied by his royal brother, both attired in robes of mourning. The singer Sallamah el-Zarka, "the Brunette," --- who received for a single kiss two pearls worth 40,000 drachmas, was probably a quadroon girl. Sallamah, or Sellamat-el-Cass, of Medina, and Habbaba, her companion, were pretty half-breeds of Medina. The story of Caliph Yezid's love for the latter, and his death for grief at her loss, is one of the most touching narratives in Arabian history. Ample proof

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that the voices of black slaves and their method of singing possessed a peculiar charm for their Moslem masters may be found in the works of most celebrated Arabian and even Persian authors. Ismail ibn-Djami of Mecca, --- the greatest singer of the golden Age of Islam, --- once paid a negress four dirhems to teach him a curious air that he heard her sing while carrying a water jar upon her head. Afterward he sang the same air for Haroun el-Raschid, who declared he had never heard anything so original before, and paid the artist 4,000 pieces of gold (\$11,200) as a reward, together with a house luxuriously furnished, two men-servants and two pretty girl-slaves. Sadi the Persian poet has related sundry instances which show that negro-singers were still highly prized at a later day. The following anecdote is told in that portion of his *Gulistan* entitled "On the Manners of Dervishes;" --- and the poet relates it as a personal experience:---

. . . "Once, voyaging to Hedjaz, a band of sensible youths were my friendly companions. Sometimes they murmured to themselves, and

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repeated certain mystic verses. And there was one with us, a Devotee, who disapproved the conduct of Dervishes, having indeed no knowledge of their suffering. Now when we had arrived at the Palmtree of the children of Helial, a young negro boy came forth from an Arab encampment, and lifted up such a voice as might even have called down the birds of heaven. And I saw the camel of the Devotee become excited; it cast its rider to the ground, and took its way to the desert. `O Sheikh !' I cried, `the voice of that child hath made impression even upon an animal, and yet hath made no impression upon thee.'"

It has been a custom among the Arabs, from prehistoric times, to encourage camels on the march by the chanting of verses; and Gentius, commenting upon this fact in his quaint Latin translation of the *Gulistan* (Amsterdam, 1654) , relates a still more extraordinary anecdote:---

. . . "An author of much weight recounts that he himself, while traveling in the Arabian deserts, was

once received at a house whose

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proprietor had just lost all his camels, --- and that a little negro-slave came to him, and prayed him, saying: 'O traveler, thou wilt not displease my master by interceding with him for the pardon of my fault.' When they were at table, therefore, the traveler said: 'I will not partake of any nourishment until thou shalt have pardoned this slave his offense.' Then the master said: 'This slave is a rascal; he hath lost all my riches and reduced me to desperate straits . . . this slave is gifted with a most sweet voice; and having made him conductor of my camels, he so excited them to exertion by the charm of his singing that in one day they made a three days' journey; but upon being relieved of their loads at the end of the voyage, they all died. Nevertheless in consideration of the hospitality I have accorded thee, I will remit the punishment which the slave deserves.' "

Another proof of the high esteem which singers proficient in this sort of chanting enjoyed in the Orient is afforded by an anecdote concerning the Caliph Al-Mansour, quoted in

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Jalal'uddin's history: --- "Salem, the camel-driver, once drove Al-Mansour's camel, singing to it; and Al-Mansour was so excited with delight that he nearly fell from the animal, and he rewarded him with half a dirhem. The man said: 'I drove Hisham ; and he rewarded me with ten thousand.'" . . .

It is beyond doubt, therefore, that during the pre-Islamic era and for more than a century afterward, the musicians of the Arabians were chiefly slaves and generally half breeds or blacks; \* that these dark slaves often possessed phenomenal voices, and rose to high distinction by their skill in musical improvisation. We have no just reason to doubt that Bilâl may have been a really wonderful singer, and that the traditions regarding his vocal pre-eminence may have been founded upon fact. It remains to be considered whether he really established the method of chanting still followed by muezzins; and whether he improvised the first *Adzân* music, or simply sang according to the teaching of his master Mahomet.

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\* See *Femmes Arabes*, p. 467.

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First of all, it must be remembered that notwithstanding their musical sensibility, music among the ancient Arabs scarcely rose above the grade of vocal improvisation, --- sometimes resembling the modern Corsican *voceri*, --- more generally being a sort of psalmody, "variegated and embroidered" according to the caprice of the singer and the effect he desired to produce, --- the utterance of each word being accompanied with an infinity of vocal flourishes, floritures, trills, modulations so that to chant a cantilene of only three stanzas sometimes required as many hours of artistic exertion. This tendency survives among Modern Arabs --- "What traveler in Egypt," asks Perron, "has not heard



these two words sung over and over again for half an hour at a time, or even more, --- *La leily?* --- "O my Night?" It is possible, nevertheless, that even in the time of Mahomet three distinct varieties of melody were recognized by Arabian musicians

First, that which was called *Straight*: a solemn or heroic style, suitable either for the

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chants of warriors or the songs of cameleers ; ---

Second, --- That which was called *Modulated* or *Composite*, consisting of very many different movements or effects of voice and tones:--

Third, --- That which was known as *The Light* or *Quick* --- "affecting and stirring hearts, moving and troubling even serious minds."

As a slave, and therefore at times, no doubt, a conductor of camels, Bilâl may have been accustomed to chant in the measure called *Straight*; but as an African it is likely that the natural musical feeling of his race may have found utterance at other hours in melody of a less severe description, --- such as the Arabs would have classed as *Modulated*. He should accordingly have been well able to improvise the melody of the *Adzân*, nor is it unreasonable to suppose that he did. Music heard in dreams is much less easily retained in the memory than are other incidents of slumber; the reader is doubtless familiar with the story of Tartini's *Trille del Diavolo*. It is hard to believe that the melody of the *Adzân* as chanted by the

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stranger in Green Raiment could have been so perfectly memorized by the dreamer as to be communicated to another person. On the other hand, it is not at all incredible that Bilâl, upon being taught the words, sang them in his own wild African way, and that Mahomet approved the melody, just as he is known to have approved Bilâl's subsequent addition to the revealed *Adzân* of the words "*Prayer is better than sleep.*" Mahomet would have been likely to approve any improvisation; for so highly did he esteem the Abyssinian that he was wont to ask his advice in matters of the greatest importance, and that although two other muezzins were subsequently appointed, they were never permitted to exercise their calling when it was possible for Bilâl to perform that duty. On the whole we have good reason to believe that the melody of the Call to Prayer was really improvised by Bilâl and that he chanted it with those singularities of modulation and weirdness of feeling still characteristic of African melody.

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#### IV

During the lifetime of the Prophet, Bilâl continued to be his constant attendant. Immediately after

chanting the Call to Prayer, Bilâl would always arouse Mahomet with a pious ejaculation; and when the congregation had assembled within the Mosque, all eyes were fixed upon the African who stood in the front row, and whose genuflexions and prostrations were studiously imitated by the rest. It is still the duty of the muezzin to mingle his chant with that of the officiating Imam, to whom he occupies such a relation as that of the Christian deacon to the priest or minister. But as Islam grew in power, Bilâl's position greatly increased in importance, and far weightier duties were assigned to him: --- in addition to his stewardship of Mahomet's household, he held the office of treasurer of the Prophet, receiving and keeping in trust all the revenues of the khalifate. When Mahomet made his triumphal entry into Mecca, it was Bilâl who received the keys of

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the Kabba; and it was Bilâl who first chanted the *Adzân* from the summit of that now world-famous temple. It was Bilâl who summoned Medina to prayer, when the princes came from the far-off land of Hadramaut "out of desire to embrace Islam." It was Bilâl who chanted the *Adzân* when the cavaliers of Islam camped in the desert to prepare for battle with the idolators. Some sinister traditions of his savage zeal after the battles of Bedr and Kheibar reveal an unrelenting hatred to the enemies of his benefactor; but these passages of his life need not be here detailed. It is more pleasant to remember that when Mahomet made his last pilgrimage to Mecca, the faithful black walked at his side to shade him with a rude screen from the noonday sun. Perhaps during that sultry journey over the glaring sand of the Holy Valley, Bilâl might have found himself treading the very spot where he and his fellow slaves had once been tortured by the Koreish . . . .

But after the death of Mahomet other muezzins summoned the faithful of Medina to

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prayer. The wonderful voice was hushed; for Bilâl made known his resolve never to sing the *Adzân* again. How long after the accession of Abu Bekr, Bilâl remained in the City of the Prophet is uncertain; but we know that he was more highly honored by the faithful than ever before, and that he possessed influence enough to obtain a freeborn Arab wife for his black brother --- a remarkable condescension upon the part of a race whose noblest tribes are still distinguished by the surname *El H'rar*, or, "The Thoroughbreds." Even after the death of Abu Bekr, Bilâl seemed to have exercised various important functions. When the austere just Omar resolved to disgrace and supersede the "Sword of God," it was Bilâl who removed Khaled's helmet, and bound the warrior's hands before the assembly in the Mosque of Hims, exclaiming in his puissant voice: "Thus and thus the Commander of the Faithful hath said." . . . But after this episode we hear little of Bilâl until the visit of Omar to Syria. Thither the old man had followed the army; and, having been granted land near Da-

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mascus, had retired altogether from public life.

Most of the Companions were dead; Abu Bekr and Khaled had followed their Prophet to Paradise, together with a great host of those who had fought the first battles of Islam; and the new generation

was not like unto the old. The primitive and praiseworthy simplicity of the Bedouin tribes had almost disappeared from Arab life; --- strange Asiatic luxuries were being bought and sold in the cities of the desert; --- and the riches of Persia poured into Medina like a veritable inundation of gold, until Omar lifted up his voice and wept, saying --- "Verily I foresee that the riches which the Lord hath bestowed upon us will become a spring of worldliness and envy, and in the end, a calamity unto my people!" The faith Bilâl had suffered for, the faith that had so long been unable to extend itself beyond the secluded quarter Abu Talib, had now imposed its supreme law upon Arabia, Syria, Palestine, Persia; and ere the venerable muezzin should for the last time commend his soul to Him

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Who never sleeps, the lands of Africa were to be added to the conquests of Islam; and the Call to Prayer was soon to be obeyed by nations of worshipers, from the confines of India even to the Atlantic shore. Already horsemen of the Arabian deserts had appeared before the gates of Cabul; and a son of Bilâl might have lived to see the Empire of the Prophet's successors extending over the greater portion of the earth's temperate zone, --- from east to west two hundred days' journey. How must the fervent faith of the old man have been strengthened by the vast spectacle of Moslem power even in the eighteenth year of the Hegira!

After the death of Mahomet Bilâl ceased to sing the *Adzân*; the voice that had summoned the Prophet of God to the house of prayer ought not, he piously fancied, to be heard after the departure of his master. Yet, in his Syrian home, how often must he not have been prayed to chant the words as he first chanted them from that starlit housetop in the Holy City, and how often compelled to deny the petitions

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of those who revered him as a saint and would perhaps have sacrificed all their goods to have heard him but once lift up his voice in musical prayer! . . . But when Omar visited Damascus the chiefs of the people besought him that, as Commander of the Faithful, he should ask Bilâl to sing the Call in honor of the event; and the old man consented to do so for the last time.

The religious enthusiasm of the youth of Islam in those early years of the faith almost knew no bounds; and the announcement that Bilâl would sing the *Adzân* must have enkindled such pious delight, such feverish exaltation among the people of that rose-scented city as we could find no parallel for in Christian history save in the period of the Crusaders. To hear Bilâl must have seemed to many as sacred a privilege as to have heard the voice of the Prophet himself, --- the proudest episode of a lifetime, --- he one incident of all others to be related in long after-years to children and to grandchildren. Some there may have been whom the occasion inspired with

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feelings no loftier than curiosity; but the large majority of those who thronged to listen in silent expectancy for the *Allah-hu-akbar*, must have experienced emotions too deep to be ever forgotten. The records of the event, at least, fully justify this belief; --- for when, after moments of tremulous

waiting, the grand voice of the aged African rolled out amid the hush, --- with the old beloved words, --- the old familiar tones still deep and clear, --- Omar and all those about him wept aloud, and tears streamed down every warrior-face, and the last long notes of the chant were lost in a tempest of sobbing.



What student of musical history would not wish to know how Bilâl sang that last *Adzân*? or to hear the words chanted precisely as the first Muezzin chanted them? Needless to say that wish is absolutely impossible to realize. Utterly ignorant of the art of preserving music by written characters, the early Arabian melodists trusted to memory alone for the conservation of favorite airs or methods of cantillation; and we shall never be able to deter-

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mine whether Bilâl's improvisation has or has not been wholly lost. Nothing is left us but the privilege of a theory. Still, the theory may afford some consolation to the musical romanticists. We have some good reason to believe that melodies may be preserved by memory alone through more than a thousand years:--- there is even some ground for the supposition that certain Hebrew melodies have been transmitted unchanged through generations from the days of Solomon even to our own. Conservatism of religious tradition and practice was never less potent among the Arabs than among the Hebrews; --- the melody of the first *Adzân* might have had as fair a chance of being preserved as the religious melodies of Israel. It is at least barely possible that in the modern *Adzân* chant, some fragment of Bilâl's cantillation may be retained, --- all the more so inasmuch as the words of the Call to Prayer have not been changed. Egypt, above all countries, --- conquered by the Moslem armies while Bilâl was yet alive, --- Egypt, the Land of Changelessness, might have retained

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the traditional memory of the chant as first chanted in the second decade of the Hegira, by muezzins who had heard Bilâl. And it would indeed be pleasant to believe that Bilâl himself sang the *Adzân* somewhat as Villoteau heard it sung in modern Egypt, with syllables of the name of God wrought into arabesques of tones and fragments of tones --- so strangely impressive to Occidental ears:---

The singer heard by Villoteau sang more artistically, more ornately, than that muezzin whose chant has been preserved for us by Lane, and may be found in his *Account of the Modern Egyptians*. Moreover, as a music-loving friend points out to me, the cadences of the second part in Lane's version all end on the second of the minor scale ---  --- instead of the tonic ---  --- as is natural, --- thus giving an impression of a chant suspended, unfinished. One might prefer to believe that Bilâl sang after the manner of the singer heard by Villoteau, --- with all those Saracenic flouritures, those fractions of tones that seem so nearly allied to the weird melodies of African improvisation.

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And still there is a pathetic and beautiful solemnity in the other and simpler chant, whose singular cadences seem to hold a pious intimation of the suggestion of the duty of worship, eternally beginning,

yet never terminating, --- of the prayer that may indeed be suspended, yet never finished, --- of the adoration that may pause but never end --- not even when the last muezzin shall have uttered the last call to prayer, and the last mosque shall have closed its gates forever, and the spider shall weave her ghostly tapestries unmolested, within the deserted sanctuary of the Kaaba.