

correct. According to Ibn-Ḳuteybeh, the time of Imra-el-Ḳeys was forty years before that of Moḥammad ; as is stated in the Calcutta edition of the Mo'allakát. M. Fresnel contends that the honour commonly ascribed to El-Muhelhil is due to Zuheyr Ibn-Jenáb El-Kelbee, of whose poetry at least seventy-nine verses have been preserved, fragments of different poems, including a piece of fifteen verses, of which the first hemistich of the first verse rhymes with the second hemistich, according to rule. But this Zuheyr, during a portion of his life, is related to have been contemporary with El-Muhelhil. In a fragment ascribed to him, he represents himself (if the fragment be genuine) to have lived two hundred years : and one tradition assigns to him a life of two hundred and fifty years ; another, four hundred years ; and another, four hundred and fifty years!*—Upon the whole, then, it seems that we may with probability refer the first ḳaṣeedeh to a period within a century and a half, at the utmost, before the Flight.

Moḥammad said, on being asked, "Who is the best of the poets?" "Imra-el-Ḳeys will be the leader of the poets to Hell." And in the general estimation of the Arabs, he is the most excellent of all their poets. His Mo'allakah is most especially admired by them. Of the pagan and unbelieving poets who flourished before and during the time of Moḥammad, El-Beyḍáwee sarcastically remarks (on chap. xxvi. verses 224 and 225 of the Ḳur-án, in which, and in the verse that next follows, they are censured as seducers, bewildered by amorous desire, and vain boasters,) "Most of their themes are unreal fancies, and their words chiefly relate to the description of the charms of women under covert, and amorous dalliance, and false arrogations or professions, and the rending of reputations, and the impugning of the legitimacy of parentages, and false threatening, and vain boasting, and the praise of such as do not deserve it, with extravagance therein." The like is also said in the Keshsháf, (on the same passage of the Ḳur-án,) and in too large a degree we must admit it to be just ; but it is very far from being unexceptionable. The classical poetry is predominantly objective, sensuous, and passionate ; with little imagination, or fancy, except in relation to phantoms, or spectres, and to jinn, or genii, and other fabulous beings ; and much less artificial than most of the later poetry, many of the authors of which, lacking the rude spirit of the Bedaweese, aimed chiefly at mere elegancies of diction, and plays upon words. Generally speaking, in the classical poetry, the descriptions of nature, of the life of the desert, of night-journeyings and day-journeyings, with their various incidents, of hunting, and stalking, and lurking for game, of the tending of camels, of the gathering of wild honey, and similar occupations, are most admirable. And very curious and interesting, as will be shown by many citations in the present work, are its frequent notices (mostly by early Muslim poets) of the superstitions that characterized, in the pagan times, the religion most generally prevailing throughout Arabia ; in which, with the belief in a Supreme Deity, with strange notions of a future state, and with angelolatry, astrolatry, and idolatry, was combined the lowest kind of fetishism, chiefly the worship of rocks and stones and trees, probably learned from Negroes, of whom the Arabs have always had great numbers as slaves, and with whom they have largely intermixed. Sententious language consisting of parallel clauses, like that of the so-called "poetical books" of the Bible, was probably often employed by the Arabs of every age. It seems to be almost natural to their race when excited to eloquence. But the addition of rhyme in this style of language appears to have become common in the later times. Moḥammad Ibn-Eṭ-Ṭeiyib El-Fásee says (in article *خطب* of his Annotations on the Ḳámoos) that the oration termed *خطبة*, in the Pagan and the early Muslim ages, was, in most instances, not in rhyming prose. The remains of classical prose are often used as authorities ; but being more liable to corruption, they are regarded as less worthy of reliance than the poetry.†

* See the first and second and third of M. Fresnel's "Lettres sur l'Histoire des Arabes avant l'Islamisme:" the second and third in the "Journal Asiatique," 3rd Series, vols. 3 and 5.

† Those who desire to pursue the study of the history of the classical Arabic beyond the limits to which I have here confined my remarks, together with that of its sister-languages, will find much learned and valuable information in M. Renan's "Histoire Générale et Système Comparé des Langues Sémitiques;" though his scepticism in relation to

questions merely philological (as well as to sacred matters) is often, in my opinion, ill-grounded and unreasonable. I must particularly remark upon his erroneous assertion that the poems of the age anterior to El-Islám make no allusion to the ancient religions of Arabia, and hence appear to have been expurgated by Muslims, so as to efface all traces of paganism. Many of such allusions, by pagan poets, might be adduced from lexicons, grammars, and scholia ; and some examples of them will be found in the present work, in articles *دور* and *عز* and *مور* &c. ; the [first