Ibrāhīm b. Adham.

By *Reynold A. Nicholson.*

Ibrāhīm b. Adham (Abū Ishāq) b. Manṣūr¹⁾ b. Yazīd b. Jābir al-Tamīmī al-ʿIjlī belonged to a noble family of Balkh in Khurāsān. Adham, who is described as a rich and pious man, made the pilgrimage to Mecca with his wife, and Ibrāhīm was born in the holy city.²⁾ His father, it is said, took him up in his arms and followed the devotees and ascetics who were circumambulating the Kaʿba, and asked them to pray for the child. "Evidently", adds the biographer, "some of these prayers were granted". The story bears a legendary stamp, and we may doubt whether Mecca was really Ibrāhīm's birthplace. It seems more probable that he first saw the light in the far east of Īrān, in the province of Balkh, the ancient Bactria (Ibn al-Athīr VI 38, 16). His sister was the mother of the poet Muḥammad b. Kunāsa of Kūfa, who died in 207 AH (*Aghānī* XII 111, 7; Ibn al-Athīr VI 272, 20). In what year Ibrāhīm himself died is uncertain: the dates given range from 160 to 166 AH. His nephew, Muḥammad b. Kunāsa, composed the following verses on this occasion:³⁾

"I see thou art not content with what exceeds sufficiency,
But Ibn Adham was content with less than enough.
He regarded the much of this world as little,
For he held in awe the command of God concerning it.

1) According to *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, "b. Sulaymān b. Manṣūr".

2) *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā*, Leiden MS., I 183.

3) *Aghānī* XII 113. 7.

He mortified passion until passion avoided him,
 Even as a bloodguilty man avoids the seeker of blood.
 Mildness prevailed in him over rudeness,
 So that rudeness could not mutter a word.
 Most times when you met him in company, he was silent.
 But if he spoke, he vanquished the speakers and corrected
 them.

In appearance he was humble, lowly, self-abasing,
 But a biting lion when he faced the foemen.
 Peace and weal to the western tomb from the people of
 Wā'il!

How good and noble is he who lies there!"

Ibrāhīm was an Arab — one of the people of Wā'il, who is the legendary ancestor of the great tribes of Bakr and Taghlib. It is generally said that he died in Syria. According to 'Alī b. Bakkār, the cause of his death was disease of the belly, while he was taking part in a naval expedition against the Greeks (*Hilyat* I 188). His conversion to Šūfiism is related with many marvellous circumstances. Our earliest authority, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, gives the following account, which I have slightly abridged in translation:¹⁾

One day he went out to hunt and an unseen voice awakened him from his heedlessness. He abandoned the path of worldly pomp for the path of asceticism and piety, and went to Mecca and associated with Sufyān al-Thawrī and Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād. Then he entered Syria, where he worked and lived by his labour until his death.²⁾

Ibrāhīm b. Bashshār said: "I associated with Ibrāhīm b.

1) *Ṭabaqāt al-Šūfiyya*, British Museum MS., 4 seq.

2) According to the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā* I 87, 19 sqq., Ibrāhīm on leaving Balkh wandered in mountains and deserts until he arrived at Marv al-Rūd, where he miraculously saved a man from drowning. He then proceeded to Nishāpūr and lived nine years in a cave, practising the most severe austerities. He became celebrated as a saint, for which reason he fled from Nishāpūr and journeyed to Mecca.

Adham in Syria — I and my friends Abū Yūsuf al-Ghasulī and Abū 'Abdallāh (al-Sinjārī). Once I asked him to tell me how his ascetic life began. He answered: My father was one of the princes of Khurāsān. One day, in my youth, I rode on horseback to the chase, taking a dog with me. I started a hare or a fox, and while I was pursuing it, an unseen voice cried, 'O Ibrāhīm! wert thou created for this? Wert thou commanded to do this?' I stopped in affright, then I rode on. This happened thrice. At last I dismounted, and meeting one of my father's shepherds, I clad myself in his woollen garment and gave him my horse and all that I had with me, and turned my face towards Mecca. While I was in the desert, I saw a man going along without any vessel or provision for the road. After performing the sunset-prayer, he moved his lips and pronounced some words which I did not understand, and lo! I beheld a vessel of food and a vessel of drink. I ate and drank and remained with him for several days, and he taught me the greatest name of God. Then he vanished and I was left alone. One day, weary of loneliness, I invoked God by that name. Immediately a person laid hold of my waist-cloth and cried, 'Ask and it shall be given thee.' His words terrified me. 'Have no fear', he said; 'I am thy brother, Khaḍīr (Khidr). My brother David¹⁾ taught thee the greatest name of God, but do not call on God therewith against any one between whom and thee there is enmity, lest thou perish in this world and the next. Pray God that He may encourage thy cowardice thereby, and strengthen thy weakness, and befriend thy solitude, and renew thy longing for Him at every moment.' Then he turned away and left me."²⁾

1) Ibrāhīm is reported to have said that he learned the Name from the ascetic, David of Balkh (*Nafahāt* 56, 6).

2) The same story is told more compendiously by Qushayrī and with considerable embellishments by 'Aṭṭār (*Tadh. al-Awliyā* 1 86, 3—90, 7). A different legend has been translated by GOLDZIEHER in his essay on the influence of Buddhism upon Islam (JRAS for 1904, p. 132). According to *Fawāt* 1 3, 19 Ibrāhīm's conversion was caused by a dream.

According to the author of the *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā*, Ibrāhīm after his conversion came to 'Irāq, but finding no lawful food there, proceeded to Syria. Having stayed a short time at Maṣṣiṣa, he continued his journey to Ṭarasūs, where he hired himself to work as a gardener. A servant coming into the garden with some friends asked him to fetch a large ripe pomegranate, and on being presented with one that was unripe and sour bade him go his way.

The same biographer has preserved for us a few vivid sketches of Ibrāhīm's manner of life, drawn by eye-witnesses and contemporaries.

After praying the evening-prayer he used to stand in front of the houses, shouting at the top of his voice, 'Who wants wheat ground?' Then the women would bring out baskets and great sacks (*safīḥ*), and Ibrāhīm would set the quern between his legs and take no sleep until he ground all the wheat for which he was hired. After that, he would rejoin his companions.

He preferred reaping (*ḥaṣād*) to gleanings (*liqāṭ*). While working he used to repeat the rhyme,

'In God alone confide
And put mankind aside.'

In winter he wore a garment of fur, with no shirt underneath; and he wore neither boots nor turban. In summer he wore two pieces of cloth, worth four dirhems, one over his shoulders and the other round his waist. He used to fast both at home and abroad and not sleep during the night, but pass the time in meditation. When he had done reaping, he sent one of his friends to settle accounts with the farmer and would not touch the money himself, but told his friends to buy food and eat as much as they liked. If there was no reaping, he hired himself to look after gardens or sown fields. He used to sit and grind a *mudy*, i. e. two *qaṣṭz*, of wheat with one hand.

Aḥmad b. Fuḍayl relates that his father said: "I mounted

guard on the wall of 'Akka with Ibrāhīm b. Adham. He sat astride the wall, between the two merlons (*shurfatān*), as a man sits on horseback; then he said to me, 'Lie down and sleep, like one who snatches an opportunity.' I lay down, but sleep did not come, so I listened intently to hear what might fall from his lips, but I only heard a sound in his chest like the buzzing of bees. He did not keep watch on Friday nights, 'for', said he, 'men desire the merit of Friday night and therefore keep watch over themselves. When they watch, we sleep, and when they sleep, we watch over them'."

Ibrāhīm worked for hire in Palestine, and when troops going to Egypt passed him while he was drawing water, he cut the cord of his bucket and threw it into the well, in order that he might not be forced to supply them with water. The soldiers used to beat him on the head and ask questions about the road, he provoking them in the meantime, for fear that he should have to act as their guide.

Ibrāhīm b. Bashshār al-Raṭṭāb said: "While Ibrāhīm b. Adham and Abū Yūsuf al-Ghasūlī and Abū 'Abdallāh al-Sinjārī and I were making for al-Iskandariyya we came to a river called the Urdunn and sat down to rest. Abū Yūsuf set before us some pieces of dry bread, and we ate and praised God. One of us rose to fetch water for Ibrāhīm b. Adham, but he outstripped him, and ran knee-deep into the stream and said 'Bismillāh' and drank and said 'God be praised!' Then he began once more and said 'Bismillāh' and drank and praised God. Then he came out and stretched his legs on the land, saying, 'If kings knew the happiness that we enjoy, they would fight against us for its possession with their swords all the days of their lives, so delightful is our pleasure and so little is our care.'

He said to 'Abdallāh b. Mubārak, who asked him why he had left Khurāsān, "I find no joy in life except in Syria, where I flee with my religion from peak to peak and from hill to hill, and those who see me think I am a madman or a camel-driver (*jammāl*)."

Ibrāhīm is described by Bishr b. al-Mundhir, the Cadi of Maṣṣiṣa, as resembling an Arab of the desert in appearance, partaking sparingly of dry bread and water, and so thin that it seemed as if he would fall at a breath of wind.¹⁾ He would not sit or converse with strangers, but on returning home to the company of his friends he would laugh with them and be perfectly at his ease. He surpassed his friends, not in fasting and prayer, but in sincerity and generosity. It is mentioned that he served in two expeditions by land against the Greeks,²⁾ but refused his share of the spoil, nor would he eat the food (fowls and honey) which the peasants brought into the Moslem camp.

1) Elsewhere he is described as a man of great strength, so that he split with an axe a block of firewood which one of his companions could not break. Al-Awzā'i calls him "the best and most generous of the *qurrā* or ascetics" (*Jilīyat* I 186).

2) One of these expeditions was led by 'Ablās al-Anṭākī, the other by a general whose name appears in the text as مېكان (*in marg.*, مېكار).