

## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

1. Of the origin of the nomenclature of this science—علم عروض, there are many explanations; but that most commonly accepted is that Khalil of Busra, to whom in answer to his prayer: "O God, shew me some new knowledge" it was revealed, called it out of pious gratitude عروض - the holy precincts, *i.e.* Mecca and Medina with their environs.

Other explanations, all more or less far fetched from the dictionary meanings of the word, are:—

- (i) A pass through hills, *i.e.* a high road to knowledge.
- (ii) A stumbling block (as, unfortunately it has proved to many a would-be partaker of the Pierian Spring).
- (iii) A cloud dimming the horizon.
- (iv) An unbroken and stubborn she camel.
- (v) Surfeit (*i.e.* excess of detail).
- (vi) Necessity (*i.e.* a 'sine qua non' for the poet).
- (vii) Pruning or trimming.

2. Prosody is that part of grammar which treats of the quantity of syllables, of accent and of the laws of versification and rhythm.

A knowledge of this subject is necessary not only for a proper appreciation of, but also for a correct understanding of Urdu poetry as scansion alone will often settle the question of a suspected "izafat" after a word, the existence or non-existence of which may change the whole meaning of the line.

This science, in so far as it applies to the Muhammadan languages of the East, is of Arabic origin; and is, in that tongue, comparatively straightforward.

The Persians succeeded in complicating it but it was the Urdu prosodians who, in putting what, doubtless, they considered the finishing touches, have introduced that mass of detail which now makes it so difficult a science to master.

3. The first question which the student is likely to ask is this:—"To what extent does Urdu prosody resemble English prosody"? The answer is, I regret to say, "Very little"! The fundamental difference lies in the fact that Urdu poetry scans by letters whereas English poetry scans by syllables.

Oriental prosody may be said to resemble classical prosody in so far as it chiefly rests on metrical weight and not on accent, that is to say, it is measured by short and long quantities while the accent only regulates its rhythm.

In Oriental prosody every letter of every word (subject to certain definite rules of omission and elision) is taken into account and is termed either "movent" or "quiescent." In English poetry actual letters do not count but syllables accented or unaccented.

For example let us take the following line:—"Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears." We know that Shakespeare wrote "Julius Caesar" in blank verse and, in consequence, scan the line into five iambic feet by accenting the syllables to fit the metre, thus:—

Friends Ro | mans Coun | try men | lend me | your ears |

But if the line were separated from its context, and coming across it and not knowing whence it came, we were asked to scan it, we might, and with some justification, scan it as a dactylic trimeter with one long syllable surplus or hypermetrical as:—Friends Romans | countrymen | lend me your | ears.

This could never happen (except in the special case noted in Part II, chapter 3, Sec: 19) in Urdu poetry where the words composing a foot must have actually the same number of letters as the "Standard foot" *i.e.* the model foot for the particular metre.

These standard feet are made up from that hard worked trilateral root *فعل* with which the student will have made a more than nodding acquaintance when studying the Arabic measures in use in Urdu which have been so clearly described by J. T. Platts and Colonel Phillott in their works on Urdu grammar.

The second difficulty will be the immense number of technical terms of Prosody *اصطلاحات علم عروض* and the third is catalexis occurring in metre.