

**Chapter Nine**  
**CONCLUSION.**

The campaign of Napoleon opened the gates of Egypt towards the West. In his learned essay Prof. Gibb has pointed out that "all social changes in the Near East during the past century or so have arisen, directly or indirectly, from the impact of our Western society and the penetration of western techniques and ideas into what used to be the Ottoman Empire." (1)

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(1) Gibb: article "Social Change in the Near East" in The Near East, Problems and Prospects, Chicago 1942.

The westernization of social life in the Middle East was accompanied by the gradual assimilation of western culture through travel, commerce emigration and schools. Its immediate effect was also to increase the gap between Muslims on the one hand and Christians and Jews on the other. The latter became westernized in mind more quickly than the Muslims. (1)

The contact with Europe had enabled Muslims to escape from decadence by breaking up their rigid social order and freeing them from belief in occult forces and fantasies. "But western civilization", says an Algerian thinker who formed in French culture, "being itself in decline could not give Muslims what they needed, a basis for the social virtues.

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(1) A.H. Hourani: Minorities in the Arab World, p.25, London 1947.

This could come only from a restoration of the true Islamic doctrine of man." (1)

The intimate relationship between the West and the Arabs had paradoxical results. The Arabs resent the West politically but reflect Western social ideological influences. Every Arab and every Muslim is compelled to live at least partly in the West: to speak Western language, to wear Western clothes, to employ western techniques and to profess western concepts in the modern social movements. He is forced to concede in his life, if not in his thought and speech, the superiority of the West in the modern civilizations.

For centuries Muslim Arabs had generally regarded Western Europe as the land of barbarians from which the world of Islam had

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(1) Malek Bennabi: Vocation de 'Islam, p.356, Paris 1954

nothing to learn. The language of the Qur'an and Arabic poetry responded to the challenge of philosophical and scientific ideas coming from Greece, Persia and India.

By the early twentieth century the intellectual renaissance of the Arab East had reached such dimensions as the European renaissance in the early sixteenth.

Taha Hussain remarks: "Egypt takes the essence of the European civilization, assimilates it, and moulds it into a shape adoptable to the oriental temperament." (1) But it cannot be denied that westernization has produced serious social strains. (2)

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(1) Taha Hussain: article "Modern Egypt" published in Islam Today edited by A.J.Arberry.

(2) Marree Berger: The Arab World Today, p.11.

Kurd <sup>Ā</sup>Alī, a nationalist in his views wrote in 1948, "The contact of Easterners with the West has taught them nothing but extravagance and ostentation ..... We could have copied (from the West) their painstaking perseverances, their industry, and their care for the material and economic features of life. We could have learned from them to be self-reliant and dependent on personal effort and merit instead of on our ancestors and property." (1)

Taha Husayn says, "If one day the Arab peoples and the entire Islamic East come to forget the ancient enmities that existed between the Orient and the Occident and speak to cooperate in raising the standard of human culture, it should never be forgotten that the the vigorous culture of Egypt played its

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(1) Muhammad Kurd <sup>Ā</sup>Alī: Memoirs of Muhammad <sup>Ā</sup>Alī 1948-49 translated by Khalil Totah, p.183, Washington 1954.

important part in this achievement."

Taha Husain published a book entitled Mustaqbal al-Tahqafa fi Misr in 1938 expounding his thesis that Egyptian culture is not a part of Asiatic culture, but rather part of the Mediterranean. He writes that Egyptians feel much more at home in the presence of an Englishman or an American than in the presence of an Indian or a Chinese or a Japanese. He continues, "Our educational system is exclusively based on European methods which are applied throughout our primary secondary and higher schools. If for the sake of argument we suppose that the mentality of our fathers and grand fathers may have been eastern and essentially antithetic to the Europeans, we must see that our children are quite different. We have been putting into their heads the modes of thought and ideas that are almost

completely European. (1)

The Arabs want change but they differ on the degree and method of change. The aim is agreed upon, the methods to achieve the aim are the points of difference. "I can conceive of nobody, writes Taha Husain, "Seriously advocating for the abandonment of the European system in our schools and the revival of techniques used by our ancestors. As a matter of fact, the European borrowed the methods (to be employed to achieve a higher culture) that prevailed in the Islamic world during the Middle Ages. They did then just what we are doing now. It is essentially a matter of time." (2)

Taha Husain suggests: "In order to become equal partners in civilization with the Europeans, we must literally and forthrightly

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(1) Taha Husain: Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr, p.36

(2) Ibid, p.36, see also al-Bastani,.....  
Buturus al Bastani in his book Khutba  
fi Adab al- 'Arabi, p.31, Beirut 1859



do everything that they do: We must share with them the present civilization with all its pleasant and unpleasant sides. " (1)  
"Europe is ahead of us in every way," Qasim Amin assumes his reader, "it is comforting to think that while they are materially better than we, we are morally better, but it is not true. The Europeans are morally more advanced. (2)

In the Arabic literature during the nineteenth century, special emphasis was deliberately laid on the two aspects of the subject \_\_\_\_\_ the struggle between the old and the new conceptions and the gradual emergence of a simplified Arabic prose style.

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(1) Ibid p.49.

(2) Qasim Amin: al-Mar<sup>ḡ</sup> at al-Jadīda, p.196, Cairo.

The question of how to meet the ever-growing need for literary diction in Arabic became one of the major problems of the intellectual life. In the Arabic language, the striking feature in our time is the infiltration of English and French phraseology translated into Arabic (so called borrowed translation). The language of daily communication (press and radio) and of writers with little or no classical education has particularly a distinct European touch. (1)

Hamilton A.R.Gibb says:

".....It must be admitted that the literary productions of the century (19th) were of the little merit in themselves, and important only for the influence which they exerted in one or the other directions. There are few young men in Egypt and Syria today who know even the names of the writers of the seventies and eighties, and practically none to whom their work would make any appeal. With the single exception of Nasif al Yaziji, who was in reality a belated representative of medieval Arabic literature, the writers of the nineteenth century faithfully follow the ideas, conditions and problems of their own days and community, and with the gradual change which these have undergone have lost all but a historical value." (2)

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- (1) Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition Vol.I  
p.572.
- (2) H.A.R.Gibb: Studies on the Civilization of Islam.

Gibb seems to be right when we see that at this stage no original literary work could be expected of Arabic speaking peoples still suffering from the bewilderment of European civilization and lack of mental adjustment caused by the suddenness of cultural revolution. Moreover western ideas had been too rapidly acquired to have any conclusive effect.

About the literature of the nineteenth century, Gibb writes at another place in the same book: "The earlier literature of the nineteenth century, swaying between a lifeless reproduction of medieval Arabic models, and on imitation of western models, without sufficient intellectual life of the people was thrown into confusion by the contradiction in principle between the old system of thought with its dogmatic basis and intellectual freedom of western

scientific Methods." (1)

And we find that in Egypt this confusion continued throughout the century and has yet not been eradicated. Its seeds are sown in the schools where Shaikhs from the theological colleges and graduates of European universities teach side by side. Down to 1914, at least, only a small proportion of serious students succeeded in overcoming the handicap imposed upon them by their early training. "It is largely owing to this that Syrian writers educated from the outset on consistent western lines, became the leaders of the movement of emancipation in the last decades of the century." (2)

The spread of western ideas, the edition and publication of the Arab

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(1) H.A.R.Gibb: Studies on the Civilization of Islam, p.259.

(2) Ibid., p.259.

classics by western orientalists, the introduction of the printing press and establishment of newspapers and periodicals led to a revival of Arabic literature.

## II.

The Arabic language has been the carrier of a mighty culture for fourteen centuries and in the middle ages it was, besides Latin the language of learning in Europe and the East. (1)

Western ideas have been spread through translations and works of popularization. (2)

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(1) Dr. 'Abd al Karim Germanus: article Linguistic Foundation of the Unity of the Arabic Speaking Peoples in "Islamic Review", March, 1950.

(2) A.N.Hourani: Syria and Lebanon: p.37

New literary forms such as the poetic drama, the novel, romantic autobiography have been introduced to the Arabic literature, (1) and at the same time some old forms have been revived with new ideas.

The culture of the Arab East has begun to be built up like the pyramids of Egypt on the solid foundations of Arabic language and Islamic traditions, and is rising towards the sky in the bold outlines. (2)

After the end of the first World War the need was felt in the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire to replace by Arabic equivalents the Turkish works hitherto used

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- (1) M.M.Musahrrafi Cultural Survey of Modern Egypt, p.58, part 2.
- (2) Dr.Germanus: Aspects of Modern Arabic Literature in "Islamic Review", December 1955.

in public administration and other branches of public life.

Until the second half of the nineteenth century Arabic literature had no adequate terminology for such terms as nation, nationalism, fatherland, patriotism. French provided the concepts and served as a guide.

(1)

The Academy of Arabic language in Cairo was created as a part of the Ministry of Education in 1932 and had twenty members. It began by compiling one Arabic dictionary, The Wasit, for the use of secondary schools, an English-Arabic dictionary for scientific terms for almost all the fields of knowledge, and a historical dictionary for the Arabic

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(1) Hitti: The Near East in History, p.494.

language. In this way a number of scientific terms were formed from Arabic roots. About the work of Arabic academies, Hans Wehr writes: "They have greatly understood the difficulties of artificial regulation of language. The problem lies not so much in inventing terms as it does in assuring that they gain acceptance." (1)

### III.

Once Prof. Germanus during his visit to Egypt put a question to 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād: "how will the Arabic language again become a vivid medium for the people, when today it is only spoken by scholars? His answer was none the less straight and short." "By the school," he retorted.(2)

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(1) A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Hans Wehr, New York Introduction.

(2) Dr. Germanus: Linguistic Foundation of the Unity of the Arabic Speaking People, in "Islamic Review," March 1950.



He meant that formerly Arabic language was clear and comprehensive, then the Arabs lost their political independence and foreigners ruled over them. The people remained illiterate. But now schools will gradually teach people Arabic grammar, education will lend them good taste, eventually they will speak as the literate beings should do.

Dr. Husain Haikal (1) in his book Thawrat fi'l-Adab (2) boldly criticizes the trend which Arabic language is showing. He rebukes the Egyptian writers for the fact that they derive observations not from life but from books, and consequently the literature cannot rise to reality. He rebukes the writers for their hypocrisy and

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(1) Dr. Muhammad Husain Haikal: 1886 -1956

(2) Published 1933.

want of sincerity.

For Taha Hussain, the Arabic language is the common good of Egyptians which they have inherited from the past. Unlike the Islamic reformer, he does not emphasise the importance of language as a means to religious awakening but as the basis of a sound national life. He consistently regards it as no less important for Copts than for Muslims. The Arabic is not the language of the Muslims only but the language of all those who speak it though they may differ in faith.

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