

## LITERARY LIFE IN THE ARABIC PENINSULA

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Translated from the Arabic by Martin Sprengling

ONE MAY in these days present of the land of the Arabs two very different pictures, which nevertheless will both be true. On the one hand it is a part of Asia for long ages named by one name. On the other hand it is composed of countries and climes which differ from each other in their nature, being quite distinct from each other in their geographical, social, political, and religious circumstances. Some of them are level and some are rough; some high and some low; some rich and fertile, some dry and barren; some are inhabited by a sedentary population and some by bedouin. Again some have retained political independence strong or weak, while others are entirely subject to the foreigner. In addition to all this, there are in Arabia those who follow the faith of the Sunnites (orthodox or Catholic Moslems) and hold fast tenaciously to the tenets of the Moslem Church Fathers; those who adhere to the creed of the Shiah (the greatest body of schismatics in Islam, addicted to a peculiar reverence for Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali, and his descendants and to a peculiar philosophy of politico-religious life); and those who follow the Sufic form of religious life (Mohammedan mysticism with rites to induce trances). Again there are some who lead the life of ordinary Moslems in other Islamic lands and some who are totally ignorant of Islam and are immersed in a sort of bedouinism most similar to that which the ancient Arabic poets describe as the life of the pre-Islamic Arabs, who used to worship idols and trees before the appearance of Islam.

All this you may find in the land of the Arabs. So you can scarcely say truthfully that this land has any unity at all or that it is in any wise easy to speak of it and its literature as one may speak of any other country of the Arabic East. You can talk about Egypt and Syria and Tunis and Algiers and describe the social, political, cultural, and religious life of any one of these without appreciable difficulty. For each of these lands has its unity, geographical, political, and in language, and this unity enables you to describe such a country at least approximately, though it may not be possible in every detail. But the land of the Arabs or the peninsula of Arabia,

as the geographers call it, has no such unity. What you may say about the Hejaz will not be true about Yemen, and what you may say about the affairs of Nejd will not hold good with regard to Tihama.<sup>1</sup> There is in it not one country, but a number of countries and climes.

This picture of the land of the Arabs which I now sketch for you is very like the picture of this same land which you will find in pre-Islamic poetry, when all these regions were united in nothing but name, when they differed from each other in language and dialect and in political, social, and religious organization according to the difference of countries and climes, when the camel, the only means of communication, was not able to eliminate the separateness that marked off these climes from each other. These regions continue today as they were before Islam, the distances between them not eliminated, not brought nearer to each other by railroads, no appreciable impression made upon them by the use of the telegraph which is still rare, nor by the passage of steamships along their coasts in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf. Arabia is in its ancient condition nearly isolated from the outside world, and it is likewise in its ancient condition, with scarcely any permanent connection existing between its inner divisions. It is, indeed, strange, how very similar is its political situation after the great war to its political situation in the fifth and sixth Christian centuries, before Islam had appeared and established a firm bond of union between it and the lands of the Near and Middle East.

The boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula in the fifth and sixth Christian centuries adjoined the Byzantine Empire, and the result of this contiguity was that political relations were established between the Ghassanian princes<sup>2</sup> and the Constantinopolitan Caesars similar to the relations of the protectorates in this modern age.

What sort of thing is now the principality of Transjordan? It is the principality of the ancient Ghassanians; in it are a few cities with a scanty portion of settled inhabitants, and in it is a strong and rich bedouin element: at their head is a prince, who was a Ghassanian before Islam, and who is now a Hashimite. This principality before Islam was subject to the protectorate of Constantinople and it is now subject to the protectorate of London.

<sup>1</sup>The low coast lands between Yemen, Asir, and Hejaz, and the Red Sea.

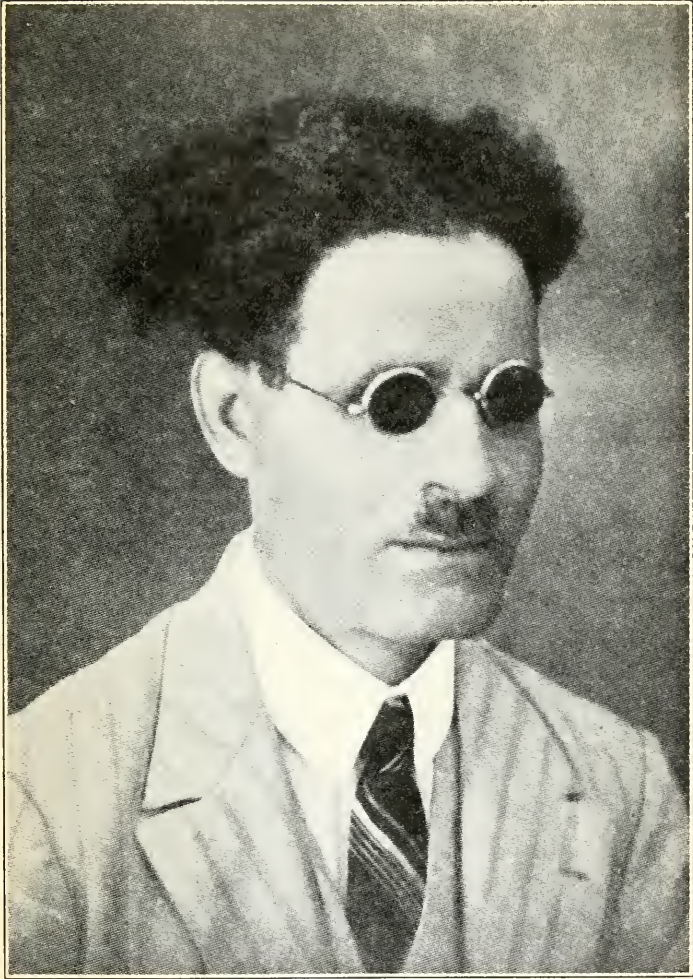
<sup>2</sup>These were chieftains and presently princes of the Arabs in Transjordan and the western half of the Syrian Desert.

On the Iraq side the boundaries of the peninsula were contiguous to Persia. In this section there arose an Arabic principality, which the Chosroes of Persia took under their wing, while it in turn guarded the limits of the Sassanian empire against the raids of the bedouin. Now there is established in it an Arabian kingdom, at whose head is no longer a Lakhmid, as of yore, but a Hashimite. And it is no longer the Persians, who exercise a protectorate over it, but the English.

The country of Yemen, with the adjoining southern regions within the peninsula, was in the fifth and sixth century an area of contention between Persia and Eastern Rome. It was subject to Rome through the mediation of the Abyssinians, or it was subject to Persia in its own right, or it would snatch a tenuous bit of independence while it continued to be a bone of contention between these two. It is now, as formerly it was, in part subject, along the coast, to the control of the English in their own name, and in part independent, but a bone of contention and rivalry between the power of England and the power of Italy.

The names of the powers exercising or coveting a protectorate over the borders of the peninsula have changed, and something of the forms of the protectorate and the desire for it have changed. But the nature of things has not changed, and the reasons for the protectorate and the covetousness have not changed. Foreign powers keep watch over the borders of the Arabian peninsula either for fear of the bedouin or for the expansion of commercial influence or for both reasons together. And the way in which the Arabs themselves understand the bond between themselves and the foreigners has not changed. It rests in the twentieth century, as it did in the fifth and the sixth, upon the need for goods and the fear of power. Whatever foreign power in the neighborhood of the peninsula was strongest and richest, that power has ever been the influential master among these folk.

The heart and interior of the peninsula likewise has changed but little. Quite independent bedouin make a show of submission or obedience to emirs of settled territory through covetousness or terror or for fear and cupidity together. There is in this respect no difference between the Imam of Sanaa in the Yemen today and a king of Himyar in ancient times. He has governmental authority centered in a capital in settled territory, but the people of the desert



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are independent and submit to him only in the measure in which they fear him or desire his gifts. And it is just the same in Nejd and Tihama and the Hejaz. This is one of the two pictures to which I alluded in the beginning of this section.

The second picture depicts the land of the Arabs insofar as it is in certain respects, something resembling a unity. The established religion for this land is Islam. The established language for this land is the language of the Koran. And the established culture in this land is the ancient Islamic culture.

Hence, however much the inhabitants of the Arabic peninsula may differ in their geographical habitat, in their political organization, in their religious denomination, in their relations with foreign powers, and in their specific dialects, they are all Moslems, they all write the language of the Koran when they write at all, and they think and live about as the Moslem used to think and live before any bond of connection was established between him and the Europeans and Americans. From this point of view the student of culture in Arabic lands may sum it up in a single term as though he were speaking of one people, with the proviso that he must not lose sight of certain specific qualifications which circumscribe certain of its territories and establish for their culture attributes not applicable to the culture of other of its regions.

But a statement about literary culture in the peninsula of Arabia makes it necessary that another difficult problem be broached before we may venture into the matter itself. The land of the Arabs is the cradle of ancient Arabic culture. In its northern and central section arose pre-Islamic (pagan) poetry and in the Hejaz appeared the Koran. From the Hejaz and Nejd and Tihama spread the Arabic language and whatever of religion and culture it carried with it to the lands of the Near East. (This ancient Arabia) flourished most abundantly and remained a homeland for unmixed Arabic culture throughout the first century of the Hijra (the Mohammedan Era, which begins 622 A.D.) The great poets of the Omayyad age were all either bedouin or citizens of the Hejaz and Nejd. And although in the Abbasid era Iraq came to occupy a position of marked preëminence and there arose in it a great group of poets some of whom were of Persian extraction and others of that mixed Semitic stock which was scattered through Iraq and Mesopotamia and Syria, yet there remained in the desert distin-

guished poets who continued to eulogize the caliphs and viziers of Baghdad until the end of the third century of the Hijra.

Then the cultural bond was nearly or wholly severed between the Peninsula of the Arabs and the other lands of the Arabic East, and Arabia relapsed into the isolation which had characterized it before the advent of Islam, complete in regard to culture and extensive in regard to political and other manifestations of life. And what was the reason for this isolation, the result of which was that this land which had been the source of illumination for the Islamic East became the home of barbarism and injustice—that this land, which had been the cradle of the Arabic language and of Arabic literature became the least distinguished of Islamic lands in literature, language, and religion, not to speak of other arts and sciences?

The answer to this question is not difficult. The Omayyad dynasty was pure Arabic, and the caliphs of the sons of Omayya had a special regard for the peninsula of Arabia, because, on the one hand, it was the homeland of the ruling aristocracy, and, on the other, it was the home of the people from which their army was recruited. It is not strange, then, that Arabia should be the most distinguished country of Islam. It was at that time the home of the heads that planned and the hands that worked to uphold the government. It was ruling and the other lands were ruled. When the Abbasid dynasty rose, everything changed, because this dynasty rose on the shoulders of the Persians and by their management of affairs. So Khorasan came to stand in the place of Arabia and became the land which furnished the dynasty with the planning heads, viziers and palace officials, and with the working hands, the army and the employees of the government bureaus. Little by little the Arabs were removed from the army and the bureaus; their country was not the equal of the rest of the Islamic lands in riches and plenty. The dynasty neglected it, and it despaired of the Caliphate. The lines of communication between it and the capital of the Caliphate were neither well ordered nor easy. And so it is not strange that the bond between it and the center of Islamic rule in Baghdad weakened gradually, until it was cut off altogether.

Add to this that the Persian and the Turk, predominant in Baghdad, cared nothing about maintaining any connection between the Arabian peninsula and the settled lands of Islam. And Arabia it-

self had neither riches nor opulence to enable it to live on its own account and to maintain its share of that elevated literary life and civilization which had been freely imported into it in the days of the Omayyads. With all this the peninsula was dragged down, if that expression be permissible, from the general level of Islamic life. The desert bedouin relapsed little by little into barbarism. The settled territory maintained a slender, imitative hold on civilization, literature, and science. But, except for the facts, that the sacred territory is in the peninsula of Arabia and that the Moslems make pilgrimage every year to Mecca and Medina, and that Yemen had importance of its own in the commerce of the Middle Ages, Arabia might well have been wholly neglected and forgotten in the history of the Moslems.

Out of this isolation there developed certain very detrimental influences in the literary life and language of Arabic in general, and in the life of language and letters in the Arabic peninsula in a special way. The close union of the Islamic world with Arabia in the first century of the Moslem era had roused in Arabic literary culture in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt a spirit of bedouinism and desert life, which endowed it with strength and joyousness in word, style, and content from time to time. When this bond was severed, this Arabic literature flourished in settled civilization and luxury; and gradually lost its pure Arabic spirit, until in the end it was transubstantiated into a body in which life scarcely coursed any longer. Its vocabulary was corrupted and abounded in foreign terms; its contents were corrupted with the overrefinement of poets and authors; its style was corrupted and appeared weak and contemptible.

The Arabian peninsula did, indeed, profit in those first centuries from its connections with the surrounding lands. Deputations of Arabs to the settlements of Iraq and Syria and deputations from settled lands to the cities of the Hejaz and Nejd stirred up in the minds of the native Arabs ideas that would not have stirred in their minds, if they had remained in their primeval isolation. To see this one need only glance at the Hejazian love song, the most beautiful love song ever sung in Islam. It is certainly a result of the exchange of gifts between the peninsula of Arabia and the settled territories of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. On the other hand, the outside world itself suffered a quite irreparable loss by the renewal of this isola-

tion. For it is just as certain that the native Arabs of the Hejaz and Nejd did not stop producing literature when the bond between them and the centers of Islamic civilization was severed. There still continued to be among them poets and orators and story-tellers and reciters of poetry. But their poetry and their stories and their literary product in general was no longer being conveyed to the schools of Basra, Kufa, and Baghdad, and was not being studied there, as had been the case in the first centuries. Nor was it being collected in diwans (collections of poetry by authors or subjects). Memory alone preserved it for a few decades. Then the death of the reciters and memorizers carried it away, and it was scattered over the deserts as the sands are scattered by the action of the winds. In addition to this the Arabic language and literature in the peninsula began to change, until from time to time a complete revolution had been accomplished, with neither record nor report of this revolution. Thus it has now become impossible for us to ascertain the true connection between the Arabic dialects now existing in the peninsula and the dialects which were current in it during the course of the first three centuries.

On the other hand, the bonds between the country of the Arabs and the other Islamic countries were never entirely severed. The Moslems went on making pilgrimage every year as of yore, and the Yemenite commercial center was always of importance to the countries of the Mediterranean. Scarcely had attrition worn through the connection between the peninsula and Baghdad, when there arose in its place other connections between the peninsula and Cairo. From the beginning of Fatimid rule (in Egypt 969 A.D.) Cairo had desired that its influence should become supreme in the Hejaz and in Yemen especially. But these connections were more political and religious than cultural and scientific. Those who wish to follow up the history of Arabic literary culture within the peninsula will be able to sense something of it in the cities of the Hejaz and Yemen thanks to the connection between these two countries and Egypt and to the religious preëminence of Mecca and Medina. As for Nejd, its literary life, until about the eighteenth century is totally lost to us.

In any case there are in Arabia two distinct literatures. One of these is tribal, using as a means of expression the tribal tongue, not in the Arabic peninsula alone but in all the Arabic deserts in



Syria and Egypt and North Africa. This literature, even though its language be corrupt, is alive and strong and has its own distinctive value by the fact that it is a truthful mirror to the life of the Arabs in their desert habitat. In its topics, content, and style it is altogether like the ancient Arabic literature which flourished in pre-Islamic times and in the first centuries of the Moslem Era. That is because the life of the Arabs in the desert has not changed in any way whatever. Socially, politically, and materially the life of the tribe is now as it was thirteen centuries ago. It is natural, therefore, that the poetry which depicts this life should be like the poetry which used to depict the ancient life, and that its subject matter should be all that happens between the tribes by way of war and contention, which call forth boast and eulogy, satire and elegy, and whatever variety of pain or pleasure stirs the soul of individuals and calls unto song now in lament, now in love, now in revenge. The Arabic tribal ode (*kasidah*) now, like the ancient Arabic ode begins with a short, simple, moving love song; then it passes at considerable length into description of the camel and the desert; then it arrives at its goal, which may be praise or boast or whatever species of poetry it may be. The same may be said about oratory. For the bedouin now is eloquent, as was the bedouin of old; sweet of speech, a lover of conversation at night and of stories, when he is at peace and at leisure; oratorical and rhetorical, when there is strife or quarrel between him and another.

This Arabic tribal literature is transmitted in the desert by a group of reciters, who inherit it from their fathers and bequeath it to their sons and earn by its recitation their material livelihood and at times a place of distinction. Unfortunately the learned men in the Arabic East pay no attention whatever to this literature, because its language is far from being the language of the Koran. And the literary Moslems are no longer able to see that literary art is an end in itself; with them literature is merely an instrument for religion.

The other literature, copy-literature, seldom found in the desert, is centered habitually in the settlements. It uses as means of expression the language of the Koran. Whereas the tribal literature drew of the Arabic bedouin life a truthful and distinctive picture, this imitative literature is as remote as possible from presenting any picture at all. That is because it is forced and artificial and has no

connection with free nature. It reflects nothing of what poets and authors feel; it merely follows a pattern in which the poets and authors decide they want to compose. There is more hypocrisy than genuineness in it. Then it is imitative; its exponents produce nothing of themselves; they merely imitate in it the people of settled lands, Egyptians, Syrians, Iraqensians. Thus were the men of letters in the cities of Arabia throughout the middle centuries, and so they are now. In fact we can state definitely that the people of the Hejaz borrow their literature from Egypt and Syria especially, even though they may also be influenced by others who visit them for the pilgrimage. Yet the books, which they study in Mecca and Medina are the books which the Egyptians study in the Azhar. The poetry which they read and memorize is the poetry which is read and studied in Egypt and Syria. So, when they undertake to write about the religious sciences, they imitate the Egyptians, as they imitate them in their studies. And when they undertake to compose poetry, they imitate the Egyptians and Syrians.

The people of Yemen, though they belong to a special religious school, are no less under the influence of Egypt than the Hejazians. They certainly follow the Egyptian school in the study of religious and linguistic sciences. They are disciples of the Azhar. They come there to study; then they return home to teach. The strange thing about this is that they continue to study the exact and natural sciences almost in the same way as they were studied in the Azhar before it was touched by modernism early in this century. Astronomy, arithmetic and algebra, mensuration and trigonometry, and natural science, all this is studied there, as it was studied in the Azhar and other institutions of Moslem science, before they had felt the influence of modern European civilization. And the Yemen, also, has a sort of poetry, but it is as imitative as the poetry of the Hejaz, following slavishly the old Egyptian school, before the rise of what now really is Egyptian poetry. You will incur considerable misery, if you undertake to search in Yemen and in the Hejaz at present for poetry of real literary worth; it is merely words strung together, in which much is made of strange and flowery expressions, all of which revolves about insipid topics. What do you think, for example, of four or five poets wasting their time in composing long, thin odes about this topic: Which of the two is better, nearness of spirit to spirit or nearness of body to body?

And you may say the same about the eulogy of the Hejazians and Yemenites, and about their elegy, and their satire and their love-song. Talk, with neither profit in it nor song, a true photograph of what was said in Egypt and Syria fifty years ago!

The eastern half of Arabia is under the influence of Iraq far more than that of Egypt and Syria. In some of the villages situated in tracts of the peninsula which lie close to the Iraq there are poets, and in them there are likewise men learned in language and religion. They are disciples of theologians and poets who flourish in Baghdad and Basra,—and the people of the Iraq were not better off than the Syrians and Egyptians in the days of the Turkish Sultan. It is not strange that their disciples in the Arabian borderlands and in Nejd are mere slavish imitators. It is indeed laughable, when one reads something of what Alūsī publishes as poetry composed by a group of poets of Nejd, who describe in it a spring from which wells warm water, and which people frequent for healing. You will find in this metrical talk neither art nor feeling for beauty, nor vividness, in fact nothing which might arouse in your mind artistic pleasure. It is all heavy, clumsy terms, whose dismal ugliness is increased by the bad meter.

This was the state of literature in the land of the Arabs until very recently, in fact until after the great war:—intensely barren imitation of Egyptians, Syrians, and Iraqensians in the sciences of religion and language and in literature. But the movement of modernization, scientific and literary, appeared in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq during the past century and increased greatly in strength in this century, especially after the war, due to the forcible intermingling which is increasing daily between East and West. Everything came under the influence of this modernizing movement in the East, even the Azhar itself. It was inevitable, therefore, that effects of this movement should extend, also to the land of the Arabs, because the great war shook it as it shook other lands, because it has become linked most intimately to the Europeans after the war, and because the ties between it and the other lands of the Arabic East have likewise increased greatly. Exactly, then, as this land was imitative in its relations to the literature of the Middle Ages, so it is bound now to follow imitatively this new literary development.

In addition to this, however, the student of intellectual and liter-

ary life in Arabia can not overlook a powerful movement, which attracted the eye of the modern world in the East and the West, forced that world to pay close attention to its affairs, and made upon it a momentous impression. Its importance waned somewhat for a space; but in these days it has returned to a position of power, which makes itself felt not in the Arabian peninsula alone, but in its relations to Islamic lands in general, and in its relations with the European nations as well. This is the Wahhabite movement founded by Mohammed son of Abd al-Wahhab, one of the theological leaders of Nejd.

Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab sprang from a family of learned men, jurisprudents and Kadis. He outstripped his father's teaching and journeyed to Iraq, where he heard the lectures of the theologians and jurisprudents of Basra. There he developed his ideas, new and old together, until the displeasure of the people fell upon him, and he was forced to leave Basra. He wanted to go to Syria, but poverty stood between him and that purpose. So he returned to Nejd and remained a while with his father, assisting him and making propaganda for his opinions. Presently his fame rose, and his teaching spread, and people were divided into two parties about him, adherents and opponents. In the end his life was endangered, and he began to appeal to the princes and heads of tribal confederations to offer him refuge and to protect his propaganda. In this way he arrived at the town of Dera'iyeh. There he appealed to the Emir Mohammed Ibn Sa'oud who offered him refuge, and he swore allegiance to him for aid and succor. From that day forth the new creed became an officially recognized form of religion, sustained by political power, which aided and protected it, and, indeed, spread it broadcast through the regions of Nejd, at times with bland propaganda, but more frequently with war and the sword. Out of this league between religion and politics there arose in Arabia a political dynasty whose power and prestige grew so great that the Turks began to fear it most decidedly and to oppose it with all the means in their power. They accomplished little, and so they asked assistance from the Egyptians, whose government was at that time in the hands of Mohammed Ali the Great. The Egyptians succeeded in weakening this movement, in putting an end to this new state, and thrusting its princes back into the humble condition and anarchic confusion, from which they had emerged. With this

new creed, now, we will have to tarry for a moment, so that we may know what it is and what is the extent of its influence on the intellectual life of Arabia in this modern age.

I have said that this new creed was new and old at one and the same time. The fact is that it is new in relation to its contemporaries, but old in very deed; for it is nothing but a mighty call to sincere and pure Islam, cleansed of all taint of polytheism and idolatry. It is a call to Islam (submission to God) exactly as the prophet had made it, devoted to God alone, and eliminating any mediating instance between God and men. It is a revival of Arabic Islam and the cleansing of it from any impress which paganism or the admixture of non-Arabs had made on it. Indeed, Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab had forbidden to the people of Nejd whatever they had grown accustomed to by way of paganism in their belief and in their life. They had been revering tombs and had accepted certain of the dead as intercessors with God, and they had revered trees and stones and thought them capable of doing good or harm. And they had adopted in their life the habits of the pre-Islamic pagan Arabs, who made their living by raids and warfare. They had forgotten the alms tax and ritual prayers, and religion had become a name of no account.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab wanted to make of these uncouth, polytheistic Arabs a truly Moslem people much as the prophet had done with the people of the Hejaz more than eleven centuries before. It is indeed curious in what measure the appearance of this new creed in Nejd exhibits characteristics that remind one of the appearance of Islam in the Hejaz. Its founder preached it gently at first, and some people followed him. Then he made public propaganda, and persecution overtook him and endangered his life. Thereupon he offered himself to the princes and heads of tribal federations, as the prophet had offered himself to the tribes. After this he emigrated (made a *hijra*) to Dera'iyyeh and its people swore allegiance to him, to aid him, as the prophet emigrated to Medina. But Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not arrive at the point where he had to occupy himself with the affairs of this nether world. He left politics and government to Ibn Sa'oud and occupied himself with theology and religion, using government and its masters as instruments for his propaganda. When he had accomplished this, he began to summon the people to his creed, and whoever responded

was accepted by him, but against him who refused he stirred up the sword and kindled war. And the people of Nejd submitted to this creed and gave it their sincere obedience and sacrificed their lives in the path of its progress, as the Arabs had followed the prophet and made holy war with him. If the Turks and Egyptians had not joined hands in the attack on this creed and carried the war into its homeland, and that with forces and weapons to which the desert peoples were not accustomed, it is, indeed, extremely probable that this creed would have united the Arabs in one confession in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of the Hijra (19th and 20th centuries A.D.), as the appearance of Islam had unified their confession in the first century (7th century A.D.).

Now that which concerns us here with regard to this creed is its influence upon the intellectual and literary life among the Arabs. This influence was great and momentous in several directions. It awakened the Arabic soul and placed before it a high ideal which it loved and for which it strove mightily with sword and pen and tongue. It turned the eyes of Moslems in general and of the people of Iraq and Syria and Egypt in a special degree toward the peninsula of the Arabs. Then, while Turks and Egyptians were making war against the Wahhabites, the conservative theologians of Iraq, Sunnites and Shiites alike, wrote refutations of this creed and accused its adherents of being unbelievers. The Wahhabites wrote in defense of their faith, and they and their opponents, both, read the books of their forebears on Koran interpretation, on tradition, on theology, and on jurisprudence, seeking evidence for their opinions. Both, also, were publishing tracts and books which they themselves were composing, and, likewise, they were beginning to publish the ancient books to which they were referring in search for evidence and proof. In this manner new, strong life was infused into the legal school of Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, which the Nejdites followed, and many tracts and works of Ibn Taymiyyah and of Ibn al-Kayyim were published. The entire Arabic world profited from this new intellectual movement, and in my mind there is no doubt that it was this movement which aroused the people of Yemen also. They rose up to defend their Zaidite faith, published their ancient books, and wrote new ones on jurisprudence, theology, and traditions. The printing presses of Cairo have remained busy to the present time printing a variety of books for the Wahhabites

of the people of Nejd and for the Zaidites of the people of Yemen.

In the course of this vigorous movement there appeared around the emirs of the people of Nejd, who were waging holy war, a group of poets who began to glory in their victories in battles and to apologize for such defeats as overtook them. It cannot be said that they brought about a renaissance of poetry or that they created what had not existed before, but at least they returned in their poetry to the ancient style and gave us in the twelfth and thirteenth century in pure Arabic language that sweet Arabic song, which had not been heard in the memory of living men. This song, whose authors did not imitate the city folk nor force themselves to search for new and strange expressions, was conceived in liberty and borne along by all the greatness, the yearning for the highest ideal, and the strong longing for the revival of ancient glory, which filled its soul.

The Egyptians succeeded in suppressing this Wahhabite uprising, or we may say, they succeeded in disrupting this rise. They weakened its political power, but their own political power was weakened by Europe in the treaty of 1840. The Turks were too impotent to exercise governmental authority in the heart of the Arabian peninsula. So the Wahhabites rested and recovered from their wounds and renewed their strength and vigor, and their religious rise went on in its even way. Then, in these days, a new political rise stirred in this movement, extended its sway over all of Nejd and all of Hejaz, and renewed for its adherents their high ideal which is nothing less than the unification of Arabia in one confession of faith. This goal, however, is now not so smooth nor so easy of attainment, as it was in the early years of the nineteenth century. The feeling of nationalism has been aroused in all Arabic lands, and Arabia is encompassed on all its borders by a power, in which there is none of the weakness and corruption, the confusion and poverty which characterized Turkey—the power of the English. But we are not concerned here with the political future of this land, we are concerned only with its literary future. And it is certain that this literary future will be glorious some day, near or far.

The king of the Wahhabites has united under his sway a very large portion of the Arabic peninsula, but no way is left open whereby the Wahhabites and others of the kings and princes of the

Arabs may remain isolated from the common life of the world, as formerly they were. They are forced of necessity to establish orderly political and economic relations with Islamic and European states and they have begun to arrange these relations in fact. The Wahhabites have a minister plenipotentiary in London and the king of the Wahhabites is in constant touch with the representative of the English in Iraq. The people of Yemen maintain uninterrupted connection with the English in Aden, and the Italians have begun to encompass them. And there are other bonds, which are perhaps stronger and swifter in their influence than these political and economic ties. These are the intellectual ties furnished by newspapers, journals, and books. These papers, journals, and books are now printed in numbers in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and America. All or many of them reach a great number of the inhabitants of Arabia. They read and sometimes understand; at other times understanding is beyond them; in any case they admire, and admiration is the beginning of imitation, and imitation is the beginning of original production. And, indeed, clearly and conspicuously harbingers of new life have already appeared. At Mecca a paper speaks with the tongue of the government and publishes literary and political news as was done at first by the official Egyptian gazette in Mohammed Ali's time. It was named *al-Kibla* in the days of the Hashimite kingdom, and it is now named *Umm al-Kura* (Mother of Towns). In Mecca has appeared a journal *al-Islah* (Reform), and in Mecca there are printing-presses. In Mecca, likewise, and in other cities of the Hejaz there are civic schools about on the same level as the Egyptian elementary schools. In them the elements of science are taught by modern methods, and in them may be learned a few European languages; all this beside the old religious teaching. Still more strange than this is the fact that propaganda for modernization in thought and literary culture, written by Egyptians and Syrians, has for a number of years been spread in Hejaz, not without appreciable effect. This propaganda is very fanatical, and extremely hostile to everything old in the Hejaz, religious and literary education, governmental organization, and economic life. The opposition to this propaganda holds, that the Hejaz must live the life of a free and independent land; that it should guard its ancient heritage in religion and language, and that beyond that it should take from the European what it may;



that it should profit from the visit of the Moslems for the pilgrimage, but that it should not dissipate itself among the Moslems; and that its people should do their utmost for a good civil education including the two languages, English and French, the one being the language of economics and commerce, the other that of science and culture. Furthermore the Hejaz has in fact begun to send its youths to Egypt to study science there as the Egyptians study it. The propagandists for modernism, however, are not content with this; they want to have the sons of the Hejaz sent to Paris and to London. And still more the Hejazian modernists have really begun to compose poetry and prose after their modernist school, but they have not yet reached the point where the Hejaz has acquired a literary individuality of its own; they are merely disciples of the Syrians, especially the Syrian emigrants to America. They seek their highest ideal in literature in Ameen al-Rihani, Jabran Khalil Jabran and their fellows<sup>3</sup>

The people of Nejd, too, despite their determined conservatism in regard to their Wahhabite creed, will not be able to resist successfully the modernizing movement which reaches them from Iraq and Egypt. There lie before me at this moment no small number of odes composed by a group of Nejdite poets in honor of King Abd al-Aziz Sa'oud. He who reads these odes will find them very manifestly influenced by the Iraqensian spirit, whose foremost exponents are Jamil al-Zahawī, Ma'rouf al-Rusafi, and Abd al-Muhsin al-Kazimi, and by the Egyptian spirit which stands out clearly in the poetry of Hafiz and Shawqī. Nevertheless the new Nejdite poetry has an individuality which distinguishes it from the poetry of Iraq and that of Egypt. Despite the influence of modernistic poets it sticks with strange tenacity to its own language. It selects strange rhymes and carries them, oft repeated, through many verses. It indulges freely in strange bedouin terms, as though it were searching for them in the dictionaries or as though it were taking them from the tongue of the Nejd deserts, which is in substance the tongue of ancient Arabic poetry. Rarely are the Nejdite poets able to follow the poets of Iraq, where these latter exhibit

<sup>3</sup>On everything connected with the modernist movement in the Hejaz see the book *Khawātir Musrikhat*, by Hasan Awwad, printed in Cairo in 1345 A.H. (1927 A.D.)

the influence of the philosophy of al-Ma'arri<sup>4</sup> and al-Khayyam, or of modern European contentions, nor do they follow the Egyptians in their extreme modernism in the words, style, and content of poetry. They are far nearer to a revival of ancient poetry than to a creation of a new poetry. They are, after all, bedouin. They address their poetry to the king as the ancients used to do, and the king rewards them for their poems sometimes with camels and at other times with garments; rarely does he give them their reward in gold or silver. Yet the people of Nejd frequently visit Iraq and the Iraqensians go up to Nejd. It is inevitable, therefore, that the relations of these two countries should return to something of the state in which they were in the days of the Omayyads, when there was a lively exchange of cultural values between them.

In the Tihamah and in Asir there is indeed intellectual life; but it is very slender; it is restricted to Sufic mysticism and that under the influence of North Africa. For the Idrisids brought their *Maghrebine* Sufic rite with them and spread it in the land, when they seized the political power. This did not, however, engender any literary rise, nor, indeed, did it effect any change whatever in the state of literary culture.

The Yemen is by far the most conservative Arabic country. In true medieval fashion its people busy themselves with the sciences of religion according to the Zaidite rite of the Shi'ah. They publish many books on these sciences and have them printed in Egypt. They produce much poetry, but it continues along antiquated lines in the Egypto-Syrian spirit, prevalent in the poetry there before the rise of modernism. Moreover poetry for them is mingled with the sciences of religion. Rarely will you find among them a religious scholar who has not some share in poetry. Most of their *imams* are poets, and their Imam Yahya even now excels in poetry after the ancient manner. The strange thing about Yemen is that throughout the Middle Ages it continued in its settled territories to be the foremost of Arabic lands in science and literary culture. It might have been expected, therefore, that it would have been quickest among Arab lands to seize upon the means of the new life. Yet it is now perhaps the most intent of all Islamic lands to retain the pattern of antiquated civilization and antiquated literary forms. The people of Yemen come to visit Egypt, but they visit it for com-

<sup>4</sup>A famous blind sceptic, belonging to the generation before Omar Khayyam.

mercial purposes or to study science in the Azhar. None of them think of associating themselves with modern schools. In Sanaa there is neither school nor printing-press. The reason for this is apparently the wariness of the people of Yemen against foreigners, and they lock the gates of their land in the faces of foreigners both Moslems and Europeans. But modern material civilization has already established its hold on the coasts of Yemen. It will without fail break through the closed gates and Yemen will not be able to resist its advance.

To sum up, Arabia at present encompasses two widely different types of intellectual life: one conservative, held fast in the grasp of ignorance and widespread illiteracy; the other modernist, steadily rising by the force of its connection with Europe and advanced Islamic lands. The duel between these two types of life is becoming intense, but victory rests assured on the side of the new life. For Arabia has been laid open to European civilization, and it will not be possible henceforth to lock its gates in the face of this civilization. It may, indeed, be said that Arabia in earlier centuries was laid open to Islamic civilization, then locked its gates against it. What is to prevent it from being laid open to modern civilization now, then shutting itself away from it after a space? The answer to this objection is easy. Ancient Islamic civilization entered the land of the Arabs on the backs of camels and in handwritten books. Now modern civilization has broken over this land in automobiles and steamers, with the telegraph and the telephone, in printed books, papers, and journals, and how shall the desert resist these manifold forces? The future in Arabia, then, belongs to the modern life, and this future may be near in some parts and remote in others, but it is bound to arrive without fail.