

THE AWAKENING OF THE NEAR EAST

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THE STAGE, upon which the drama of civilization was first enacted, was the Near East. During the dark period, when Europe and North Africa were overrun by barbarian tribes and Rome itself was sacked, the Near East remained the center of a highly developed culture.

The Muslims carried on the work which their Greek and Roman predecessors had begun. An active intellectual life bloomed at Baghdad under the patronage of Harūn al-Rashīd and his son, al-Ma'mūn. Many famous Greek and Persian books were translated. Architecture and masonry, the fine arts and ancient music, poetry and theology flourished. Mathematics, alchemy, astronomy, navigation and medicine made important progress.

Hospitals, libraries and universities grew to great proportions. Although many books have been lost, we have lists of the names of thousands of ancient scholars and the volumes which they wrote. Explorers went on distant journeys and wrote accounts of their travels with conscientious accurateness. Students of comparative religion wrote books on scores of different sects, and wealthy men sent their agents to foreign lands in order to carry on research.

Before steamships were invented and the Suez Canal was built, great caravans traveled back and forth across the deserts of Persia and Arabia, filling the lands with wealth as they passed and bringing new ideas with the goods that they carried.

Many a Christian crusader was surprised to find that the despised infidel was more cultured than the people of Europe. Contact with the Saracens was one reason for the Renaissance.

Like a flower, the culture of the Near East was destined to blossom and fade away. Wild hordes of Tartars rode across Asia from the plains of Mongolia. They swarmed over the great, intellectual centers of the Near East like clouds of locusts, leaving ruin in their wake. Genghis Kahn and his brother, Hulagu, destroyed the great empire of the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad, during the first half of the thirteenth century. At the end of the following century,

Timur swept as far as the Hellespont, Aleppo, and Damascus. Carnage, destruction, and intellectual stagnation remained behind him.

It was during the closing years of the Ottoman Empire that an awakening began to be felt. Political exiles returned from enforced visits to European cities and brought back new ideas. Many foreign schools were permitted to teach modern science and western ideals of behavior.

As the Balkan States obtained independence, they allied themselves with Europe and exerted a strong influence on their neighbors to the East. In 1860, when Mount Lebanon was made a semi-autonomous province under the protection of the European powers, it became a center of intellectual growth. Egypt also made rapid progress after 1884, when Sir Evelyn Baring, or Lord Cromer, was appointed Consul General at Cairo.

During the Dark Ages stagnant Europe was awakened by influences that came from the Near East. In modern times the crushed intellectual life of the Near East is being revived by influences from Europe and America.

Since the Armistice this awakening process has become more rapid. The fleets of the Allies anchored at Constantinople. The British established mandates over Iraq, Palestine, and Trans-Jordan. They consolidated their control in Egypt, took definite charge of the Sudan and strengthened their influence in the Persian Gulf States. Even the Beduin of Najd and the Hijāz tasted the fruits of British gold during the war, and they had their eyes opened to the importance of modern machinery.

Four great personalities appeared in places of political power and set to work as agents of modern reform. Mustafa Kemal Pasha started to build up the new Turkey. His overthrow of the Caliphate, his organization of an independent republic, his substitution of modern law codes for the Islamic canon law, his liberation of women, and his adoption of the Latin alphabet and modern dress set the entire Near East to thinking.

With equal vigor and force of personality, the Shah of Persia has instituted similar reforms in his great country. Both rulers have encouraged railroad and highway construction and the Shah has obtained petroleum royalties, which assure the financial success of his administration.

King Faisal deserves to be called the "Father" of the new Iraq, because of his patient tact and loyal patriotism. As a stranger he came into a land that was devastated by war and rebellion, split by party strife, and lacking in leadership. At the time of his premature death, he left behind him a self-reliant state, with a hopeful economic outlook and a group of educated men to fill positions of responsibility.

The fourth dominant personality is Ibn Sa'ud. Like David of old, he was a political outcast. With dramatic daring he gathered together a small band of followers and seized his ancestral town in the uplands of eastern Arabia. Today he is the acknowledged ruler of all of Central Arabia.

No Beduin in his realm dares to steal. Pilgrims may travel in safety without fear of highwaymen. Automobiles convey the pilgrims from the seaport to Mecca and even across the rolling dunes between Najd and the Persian Gulf. On several occasions Dr. Dame of the American Mission at Bahrain has been invited to bring modern medical skill to the relatives and subjects of Ibn Sa'ud. Aeroplanes assure military stability. Over seventy new oases have been established and the roving Beduin taught how to settle down to peaceful pursuits.

When Ibn Sa'ud wished to introduce a telephone system, the Muslim ecclesiastics objected. He called a number of them to his presence. He asked each one of them to hold a receiver to his ear. By a prearranged plan, each shaykh heard the holy Qur'an being chanted in a beautiful way. One after the other the ecclesiastics set down their receivers with pious ejaculations, saying that if God so willed the telephone might be set in use.

Not only have the states of the Near East been reorganized by new governments, both native and foreign, but they have also been closely bound together by new means of transport. Before the war an Emir of the Persian Bakhtiari tribe brought his son to enter school at Beirut. The journey required seven weeks. Today the same journey can be made by motor car in three days. I once asked a shaykh from the holy city of Najf how long it took to travel from his home to Baghdad. He replied, "Five days by camel and five hours by car."

The automobile is bringing isolated Beduin tribes and remote villages into contact with the cities. News is passed along by the chauffeurs, and newspapers are constantly being brought to the

country districts. Peasants and even nomads find places on trucks and work their way to town, to see the sights. Poor country children dream about going to the cities and adopting modern customs.

The Beduin chiefs use cars for their raiding. The camel and the Arab mare are giving way to the motor truck and the touring car.

During the years after the war, when groups of foreign soldiers were quartered in almost every section of the Near East, the whole land was inoculated with a new attitude of mind. Schools have been started in hundreds of villages where there used to be total illiteracy. A surprisingly large number of foreign ships stop at the seaports, and a steady stream of European and American commercial travelers visit the important towns.

In the cities there are many cinema theaters, which show up-to-date news reels brought by air from Europe, as well as a great variety of dramatic films. It is interesting to sit in one of the theaters of Aleppo or Damascus and to see the faces of the peasants and swarthy Beduin as they watch the pictures and hear the sound of the "talkie." They have come from communities where a few years ago the conditions were just as they used to be when Saladin called his hosts to join the *jihād*. By magic they are plunged into the political turmoil of our day and bewitched by the manners and modes of Hollywood.

Rapid as the changes are among the poor peasants of the country districts, they are even more striking among the wealthier people of the towns.

One evening during the war time we loaned our University auditorium to a Muslim relief society. I shall never forget how surprised we were to see two hundred Muslim women enter the gallery with their veils thrown back. It was the first time that the Muhammadan women of the land had bared their faces in a public place. This innovation was due to a number of high-bred Turkish ladies who were sent to Syria to organize schools for girls. They were graduates of the Constantinople Woman's College and forerunners of the Turkish movement to emancipate women.

Ever since that time the women of the Near East have been gaining more and more freedom. In Turkey the process has been hastened by government action. In Cairo and Alexandria it has been helped by the European life of those large cities. Even in provincial districts the education of women, the throwing back of

the veil, the mixing of the sexes in cinema halls, and the employment of women in commerce are becoming commonplace affairs.

Before the war a girl was ashamed to be thin, as only a fat girl was considered beautiful. The Muslims wore veils and the Christians scarfs, instead of hats. Women avoided bodily exercise, assumed lazy habits, and wore loose-fitting clothes. Today the girls and many of the older women are dressed in the most up-to-date and tight-fitting Paris fashions, with bobbed hair, painted lips, and tilted hats. What is much more important, they ride about in cars, take their recreation with the men in public places, enjoy out-of-door sports, read the newspapers, and go on journeys. Most of the Lebanon summer resorts and many of the large towns hold beauty contests for the society girls. Last summer a Muslim girl was chosen to be "Miss Lebanon."

The present generation in the Near East is bridging the gulf between the feudalism and conservatism of the Middle Ages and the ultra-modern ideas of our own time. It is a common sight to see Beduin tents pitched alongside of luxurious summer hotels or the modern apartment houses on the border of some city. Parish priests and Muslim ecclesiastics marry in the East. It is a common thing for their sons to complete some scientific course. As the boys return home, imagine the conflict of ideas between them and their parents, for the doctrines of the Oriental Churches and formal Islam have scarcely changed for centuries.

Unfortunately modern customs have brought in the evil with the good. What is true of immigrant children in our American cities is equally true of the modernized children of the East. They have lost their ancestral traditions. They have been hypnotized by the blatant exterior of western civilization. They have failed to find new traditions and moral standards. They have equally failed to understand the elements, which have made our occidental culture great.

There has always been plenty of immorality in the East, but never before have the people of the Southern Levant been exploited by public forms of commercialized vice. It is not an uncommon thing for a Muslim parent to say, "If my boy is going to college at Beirut, please make sure that he is kept away from evil Christian influences." Of course the parent refers to the "artistes" in public dance halls, lax forms of cabaret entertainment, liquor drinking, betting at horse races, gambling with cards, and legalized prostitution. These things

have come with Christian civilization. Gambling, drinking, and public prostitution are relentlessly condemned in the Qur'an.

At the time of Christ, Latin was the language of the government officials, Aramaic was the dialect of the uneducated, and Greek was the popular tongue of the society people. History is repeating itself. In large sections of the Near East today, English is the official tongue, Arabic is the dialect of the masses, and French is the popular language for social purposes. Many educated men and women cannot speak and write literary Arabic. They are losing the culture of their fathers and saturating their minds with European ideas. But they fail to appreciate the beauty of European art, philosophy, music, and literature. Their culture is that of the newspapers and the cinemas.

Conservative forms of religion are giving way to unbelief, on the one hand, and to political sect propaganda, on the other. The Mayor of Tel Aviv told me that a strict old Jew was walking along a street on a Sabbath afternoon. He met a modern young Jewish colonist, who was coming out of a cinema theater, dressed in shorts and smoking a cigarette. He asked him in Yiddish if he was not ashamed of himself for breaking the Sabbath. The young man replied in his revived national tongue, "Please speak in Hebrew, I do not understand Yiddish." For the rising generation the Hebrew language, as a symbol of nationalism, means more than do the Ten Commandments.

In Lebanon the Muslim boys and girls are growing very lax about praying, attending the Friday mosque services, keeping Ramadan, going on pilgrimages, and learning the Qur'an. On the other hand, they support an enthusiastic Scout movement and a group of well-conducted schools, which propagate loyalty to Islam as a political and social force.

Modern scientific ideas are capturing the minds of growing boys and girls so that they are breaking away from ancient forms of religion and casting about for something that is in keeping with their new ideas. In the American University of Beirut, for instance, social service is becoming more and more popular as a practical form of spiritual expression.

Last spring the undergraduates contributed generously to support village welfare work. Three groups of teachers and students gave up large portions of their summer vacations, in order to carry on

recreational work, preventive medicine, hygiene, home building, and village improvement.

The authorities of the ancient Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and the East appreciate the fact that the youth of the land is growing away from the clergy. In order to train priests of a more modern type, the archbishops have asked the American University of Beirut to cooperate with them. Candidates for the priesthood are to receive a cultural course in the University, at the same time that they sleep at a near-by monastery and receive ecclesiastical instruction from a representative of the Church.

The awakening in the Near East has been so sudden and yet so thorough, that the intellectual and spiritual problems, which trouble the young men and women of the Orient are almost identical with those, which confront the rising generation in the West.

Rightly or wrongly, the people feel that the only way to adapt themselves to the new situation is by means of education. There is an almost incredible demand for education of all kinds. Before he died, King Faisal of Iraq said, "We wish to create a new generation, but we cannot create a new generation if the majority is illiterate."

The motives which create this demand for education may be explained in the following way.

In the first place, parents see the old feudal aristocracy going into decay and realize that social position will hereafter depend upon education rather than upon heredity.

In the second place, uneducated men and women have been unable to find work, whereas even the sons of refugees, who have been educated, have been able to procure positions.

In the third place, the overthrow of the Caliphate and the conquest of large portions of the Near East by foreign powers make the people realize that it is science and organization, rather than religious prestige, which determine the power of a modern state.

Fourthly, people know that they cannot compete with other nations in the realms of industry, commerce, medicine, engineering, warfare, and agriculture, unless they have trained specialists to guide them.

Lastly, parents realize that their children are doomed to drift away from the doctrines and traditions of the past, so that they are anxious to have them trained to understand the new thought and culture of the modern world.

A number of the Near Eastern states have wisely developed elementary and practical forms of education more rapidly than professional work. In other states the government agencies have encouraged forms of higher education to such an extent that it is already difficult for lyc e graduates to find positions.

The governments of Palestine, Iraq, and the Sudan are earnestly trying to use education to strengthen peasant life so as to avoid overcrowding in the cities and the creation of an unemployed intellectual class.

The Near East Foundation is guided by a similar policy. In Albania and Lebanon the Foundation is conducting farm schools in cooperation with the governments. In Macedonia it is teaching peasants of over fifty villages how to order their life-work in a wholesome and successful way. In Palestine the government department of Education and the Foundation are working together to train village school masters how to teach agriculture and how to make peasant life attractive.

There will always be a tremendous need for such practical forms of education. There will be an equally important need for a limited number of leaders, trained in a very thorough way. But higher education must be carried on in a wise manner or else it will create a class of half-trained men and women, whose veneration of European culture will render them too proud to do useful work and liable to become political agitators.

If American education is to be carried on in the Near East, it should either aim to help the peasants, as the Near East Foundation is doing, or else it should attempt to train the characters and minds of a limited number of leaders, who thoroughly understand the underlying meaning of our occidental, Christian civilization.

For many years western education was conducted under the protection of the capitulations, in defiance of, rather than in cooperation with the government authorities. This policy is not in keeping with the spirit of our modern age. To be a valuable force, education must identify itself with the spontaneous life of the states, which have been aroused to a new spirit of national reconstruction.

It is equally true that foreign education should not try to force a purely exotic culture upon the children of a land, but should aim to help them to develop their own national culture. The educated Oriental must know one or two foreign languages so as to be able to read European journals and scientific books. On the other hand,

it is important that he should first of all learn how to think and feel and act in his own tongue. In a recent address before the Royal Central Asian Society, Professor Gibb of the London School of Oriental Studies said: "If personality is to be truly creative, it must be rooted in the indigenous culture."

He went on to say about education that: "The crux of the problem, after all, is not the release of individuality — for almost any kind of modern education in the Muslim countries will do that, under present circumstances — but the creation of social personality: for this purpose nothing short of the strongest moral anchorage will do. Without it you can get only the unsocial individual, the destroyer, not the creator, of civilization."

For centuries education in the Near East has been used as a means of propaganda. As schools have been conducted by ecclesiastical agencies, they have formed strong party feeling and sectarian prejudice, rather than moral character and national unity.

After generations of war and despotism, it is inevitable that the greatest weakness of the people of the Near East should be an inability to cooperate together in commerce, in philanthropy, in intellectual effort, and in national life. Young men and women grow up without a feeling of civic responsibility. To too great an extent everyone looks after his own interests. This attitude of mind causes a lack of confidence and good citizenship, which are being intensified by the post-war extravagance and license.

As they are aware of these sources of weakness, parents are even more interested in character building than they are in mental development. Moreover, whenever the head of a business firm or government department thinks of employing a university graduate, he is sure to ask many more questions about the honesty, moral habits and cooperative spirit of the candidate than about his efficiency.

As a group of small states are emerging from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the only hope of progress is based upon education. It must be an education which unites, rather than divides; an education that develops national culture, at the same time that it introduces scientific and technical knowledge; an education which provides honesty and morality of character as a foundation for life; an education which inspires the youth of the land with a desire for social responsibility and good citizenship.

As the rising generation in the Near East is called upon to adapt itself to a situation that is filled with such possibility, as well as with

so much danger, it is essential that there should be no failure. The future of the world as a whole will be greatly affected by what takes place in Turkey and the Arab lands.

The Near East is the borderland between Europe and the vast inland districts of Asia. The people of the Near East must interpret the ideas of the west to Asia, and the ideas of the Orient to Europe. The political and commercial activities, as well as the religious and social reactions of the world, meet each other at the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

After lying dormant for centuries, the Near East has awakened. It is passing through a period of such rapid change that the people are utterly bewildered. It is a situation that may result either in a renaissance of enlightenment and international progress, or else in a chaos of chauvinism and unbelief.

Unless the people can receive the right kind of education, and be sure of a constructive leadership, they will fail to understand modern life and will misinterpret it to their neighbors in Central Asia. It is a glorious thing when a renaissance movement starts to enliven the world's progress, but when such an awakening does take place, Mr. Wells' description of history becomes true, it is "a race between education and catastrophe."