TAHA HUSAYN:

HIS PLACE IN THE EGYPTIAN LITERARY RENAISSANCE

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by

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P.C.
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### NOTES:

1. A short desinential vowel is not transliterated.

2. A fixed short vowel at the end of a word is transliterated only if the word occurs in the midst of a connected passage.

3. When an Arab author has published works in a European language, his own spelling of his name is retained.
PART ONE

THE EGYPTIAN RENAISSANCE
Chapter One

THE EPOCH OF ACQUISITION.

...the exercise of the creative power in the production of great works of literature or art ... is not at all epochs and under all conditions possible ... This creative power works with elements, with materials; what if it has not these materials, those elements, ready for its use? In that case it must surely wait till they are ready.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

The view that the Muslim world was completely at a standstill until the forces of the West collided with it at the end of the eighteenth century is no longer tenable. The stirrings of Wahhābism in Arabia and, somewhat later, of the Sinūsiyyah in North Africa are signs of vitality, of a desire for reform, which cannot be ascribed to outside stimulation. It is open to the polemist, therefore, to contend that, had it been allowed to take its own course, Islam might have produced its own Renaissance.

The fact is, however, that such indigenous movements did not become powerful enough and extensive enough to direct the political and cultural history of the Near East. Particularly is this true of the one country we are concerned with here: Egypt.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Egypt was nominally part of the Ottoman Empire. The role of the Turkish Governor, however, had been reduced to that of a figurehead, living in fear of his own garrison. Force was in the hands of Mamlūk Amīrs who were continually intriguing against or actually fighting one another, so that the population deemed itself fortunate when any one of them monopolised sufficient power to enforce public order. The ʿulamāʾ whose pronouncements had great influence over the people and carried some weight with the rulers, occasionally intervened to have unpopular measures rescinded, but they did not generally set themselves in opposition to the Mamlūks, who often patronised them.
These conditions were not altogether inimical to culture. If only out of vainglory, Mamlûks founded schools that would bear their name, and even some of the wealthier merchant families such as ash-Sharâ'ibî and al-Bârûdî had libraries and patronised men of learning. Such of the population as did not have to devote their entire energies to ensuring their day-to-day existence could hear sermons and lessons in the mosques and could send their children to the village kuttâbs where they would memorise the Qur'ânum, and then perhaps to one of the many religious madrasahs, of which the most famous was the Azhar. Copts had their own schools, which taught mathematics and surveying at rather a low level. The higher classes had their children educated at home, where some literary texts were studied in order to give distinction to their conversation.

It was the character of the learning thus imparted, even more than the narrowness of the circle it could reach, which was at fault. Since the Middle Ages, Islam had assumed the known to be "given" and eternal, so that learning was viewed not as a process of discovery, but as a mechanical accumulation of the known. Nothing could be discarded that was previously accepted, and nothing new could be accepted that was not in conformity with past authorities. Apart from memory work, the utmost exercise permitted to the individual's faculties was in deductions from accepted premises.

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(2) J. Heyworth Dunne, Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt, pp. 1-95

This is reflected in the curriculum of the Azhar, which was entirely mediaeval: dogmatic theology was by far the most important subject; language and jurisprudence were also studied, but as ancillaries to theology; the sciences taught - mathematics, astronomy, and physics - were at exactly the same level as they had reached four centuries earlier; and the philosophical works of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and al-Ghazālī were no longer studied. There was no interest in the West, and the rift between spoken and written Arabic all but completed the sterilisation of learning.

Accordingly, the literary output of the period is not small but lacking in originality. Azharists never ceased to produce commentaries, glosses, and superglosses on standard texts. They also compiled a few travel-books, some histories and biographies, here and there a work on government or topography, and miscellaneous writings on astronomy, medicine, mathematics, drawing, and surveying. Such works were not without merit and one must take note of the efforts of such as Shaykh Murtaqā - born in Souther Arabia but established in Egypt - who tried to revive interest in al-Ghazālī and in lexicography, and who went directly to ancient sources to compile his Tāj ul-ʿArūs.

(1) Ch. Issawi, Egypt, p.19.

It is in the field of belles-lettres more particularly that the lack of creativeness reveals itself, for these suffered considerably from the divorce between the written and the spoken languages, and from the view long held by Arab rhetoricians that the subject matter of literature is property common to all men and that artistry can be displayed only in the wording, so that to improve upon someone else's saying is not plagiarism but proof of originality. Thus, while all classes of society satisfied their desire for a stirring tale by listening to popular story-tellers, and otherwise read little serious literature apart from Sufi poems,tracts, and litanies, prose-writers like Ahmad ul-Barbîr (1747-1811) were expending their energies on rhymed and heavily ornamented, repetitious magâmât in imitation of al-Ḥarîrî, and poets were turning out panegyrics and love-poems on conventional patterns or indulging in the characteristic exercises of tashtîr and takhmîs, in which they diluted the poems of predecessors by imitative insertions of their own. These poets and writers were generally of the shaykh class, and it is very seldom that we find a poet like Ismâ‘îl az-Zahûrî rising out of the ranks of the common people to affirm an independent spirit in pleasure-poetry or vicious satire.

A convenient starting point for a history of the Egyptian Renaissance is the landing of Napoleon's forces in 1798. It was not merely a military expedition: with it came some distinguished French scientists and orientalists, and they brought to Egypt its first printing-presses, one confiscated from the College of Propaganda in Rome, as well as a smaller one.\(^1\) With great energy and efficiency, they founded the Institut d'Egypte, formed a library out of the books they had brought with them and those they collected locally, created a Physics and Chemistry laboratory, launched into archaeological research, and studied the flora, fauna, mineralogy, and irrigation systems of Egypt. They also published a newspaper, Le Courrier d'Egypte, and a periodical, La Décade.\(^2\) The Orientalists - Jean-Michel Venture de Paradis, Louis-Amédée Jaubert, Jean Joseph Marcel, and others - and some Syrian linguists attached to them such as Ilyūs Buqtur and father Rūfā‘Il Zakhūrah, seem to have had heavy duties as interpreters and translators of official documents, but they found time to collect, discuss, and even translate some local works.\(^3\) It is, in fact, a temptation to overrate their direct contribution to the Egyptian Renaissance, and one needs to remind oneself that their activities were designed to benefit the French, not the Egyptians. In the Institut d'Egypte, there was no provision for the membership of non-Frenchmen; the research initiated left no unbroken line of

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(3) Jāk Tājir, *Harakat ut-Tarjamah bi Miṣr*, pp.3-14.
descent in Egypt; apart from proclamations, and a small treatise in Arabic on small pox, the printing press turned out nothing of concern to the local population; indeed the existing culture suffered some immediate losses through the shelling of the Azhar, the disorganisation of madrasah life, and the execution of some of the `ulama'.

What Napoleon's venture undeniably did was to reveal to the Egyptians that there were other ways of life than their own, new things that others considered worth looking into, worth learning, worth doing. It was a brusque, hasty, unfriendly revelation, and Egypt did not immediately take it to heart. One scarcely notices any significant new departures in the literature of the period except in the emergence of the historian 'Abd ur-Rehman il-Jabarti (1754-1825) and of Shaykh Hasan ul-'Attar (1766-1855) who, after close contact with the French scientists, produced some works on mathematics, astronomy, and physics. However, the Napoleonic expedition also had the effect of bringing to Egypt, as part of the Ottoman forces sent to repel the French, an unlettered but shrewd, ambitious, and energetic Albanian soldier who was soon to become the ruler of the land: Muhammad 'Ali.

Modern Egyptian writers tend to represent the founder of the ruling dynasty as a wise, enlightened, not benevolent tyrant. In reality, there is little to show that Muhammad 'Ali had any appreciation of liberal values in culture. He was an out-and-out militarist, convinced of the superiority of European armies, and determined to emulate them. He had

enough perception to understand, in spite of his impatience for results, that these could be achieved only by laborious stages; and he forced the pace through these stages with an iron will that often demanded the impossible of his subordinates, and sometimes obtained it. The process had cultural by-products which, unintentional though they were, proved to be of more lasting value than the military achievements.

Thus in order to supply technicians to his army and officials to his administration, Muhammad ‘Alī imported foreign instructors, sent promising young men to study in Italy and France and created in the country as many as fifty primary schools which fed a number of higher educational institutes. The purpose of this programme was all too evident: especially at first, pupils were forcibly conscripted, both they and their teachers held military rank, and until 1837 when the Diwān ul-Madāris came into existence, they were mostly under the supervision of the Diwān ul-Jihādiyyah, or War Office. Besides, it was a hasty programme, lacking in overall planning, often hampered by incompetence, intrigues, and jealousies; and where - as in the teaching of Arabic - no foreign instructors were needed, no attempt was made to form teachers or improve methods: Azharist texts were memorised in time-honoured fashion, under the supervision of Azharist teachers. Nevertheless, learning - often of a new kind - was being extended; ambition and energy were being inculcated; curiosity was being awakened.

Similarly, it was in order to provide stationery, ledgers, and text

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(1) J. Heyworth Dunne, Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt, pp. 101-287.

books that Muḥammad ʿAlī founded, in 1822, another of the pillars of the Renaissance: the Būlāqyyah Printing Press. According to a list compiled by Dr. Perron, an instructor in the medical school, its output in the first twenty years of its existence comprised 243 books, of which 125 were in Turkish, 111 in Arabic, 6 in Persian, and one was an Italian-Arabic dictionary. Of course, the largest single group in this list consisted of military and naval manuals, whereas only two volumes of Arabic poetry were printed.¹

The existence of this press also made journalism possible, and as from 1828 an official paper called Al-Waqāʾiʿ-ul-Miṣriyyah was published, and it is still in existence today. In Muḥammad ʿAlī's time, it was edited in Turkish, but every entry in it was translated into Arabic in a parallel column; a French edition also appeared in 1833 and 1834 under the name of Le Moniteur Égyptien, in imitation of Turkey's Moniteur Ottoman.²

Most important of all developments under Muḥammad ʿAlī from the point of view of the literary Renaissance was the impetus given to translation. The need was urgent and immense, and Muḥammad ʿAlī's methods were characteristically drastic. Use was made of Orientalists in Egypt, such as Dr. Perron, Koenig Bey and Georges Vidal, and of Syrian Christians already versed in European languages; each European instructor had an interpreter, and together they were expected to compile some text or manual which was translated into barely readable Arabic for class-room use, and if deemed worthy was improved upon and printed; students sent on missions

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² Jāk Ṭājir, Harakat ut-Tarjamah bi-Misr, pp.39-41
abroad were to translate all the texts they studied, and on their return were sometimes locked up in the Citadel until they had completed their task; and eventually, since not every doctor or engineer trained abroad is necessarily a good translator, a School of Languages was created and placed under the direction of Rifā‘ah Rāfī‘u‘-Tahtāwī, an extremely able, versatile, and hard-working translator, and, as such, the foremost literary figure of the time.1

Needless to say, literary works received scanty attention, and translators were working under such pressure that the standard attained, even in Tahtāwī’s works, was never very high. Nevertheless, ideas were being disseminated, and a new kind of prose was gaining currency - a prose with a purpose, with something to say and little time to spare for verbal jugglery. It must also be noted that whereas 39 out of 48 military manuals printed at the Būlāqīyyah Press were in Turkish, 14 out of 15 medical texts and 11 out of 12 books on veterinary medicine were in Arabic.2 Arabic, which indeed had been supplying Turkish with its technical terminology for centuries, had become the language of the new sciences, and with the decline of Muḥammad ‘Alī’s military fortunes its comparative ascendancy over Turkish was accentuated.3

At the same time, this decline in Muḥammad ‘Alī’s military fortunes meant his loss of interest in all the reforms which he had introduced for no other purpose than military aggrandisement. Most of his schools were

(1) Ibid., pp.15-70.


(3) Ibid., pp.325-326.
closed down, and the work of retrenchment was continued by his successor ‘Abbās I, in whose reign not a single officially commissioned translation was published, and by Sa‘īd whose reform programme was limited and unstable.¹

It is easy, therefore, to speak of the failure and misguidedness of these early efforts. They amount only to an official Renaissance, a specious one thrust upon the people from the top, in ignorance of the fact that the best projects depend for their success upon some measure of competence and comprehension from the rank and file. Certainly they largely failed to achieve their promoter's aims. But a comparatively stable government had been established, agricultural reforms had been introduced, new possibilities had been revealed. Of the men who had been mercilessly driven to action, not all would fall back into apathy once the master's hand was lifted; in fact, it was while he was out of favour with ‘Abbās and virtually in exile in the Sudan that Rifā‘ah Rāfi‘uṭ-Taḥtāwī found time to produce what may well be considered the earliest literary translation of the age: Télémaque.²

Of the seed so widely and indiscriminately scattered by Muḥammad ‘Alī, some therefore had fallen on fertile ground, and it began to germinate in the sixties and seventies, coinciding largely with the rule of Ismā‘īl. Already under Sa‘īd there had been signs that the Renaissance had to some degree become a matter of popular demand, not an official imposition. Not

¹ J. Heyworth Dunne, Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt, pp. 288-341.
only had missionary schools like the Collège des Frères made a successful start, but the Copts under Patriarch Kiryllus IV had founded schools specifically intended to spread the new learning and had acquired a printing press of their own. Privately-run schools also made their appearance so that by 1883 there were 59 non-governmental schools in the country.¹

Now, Egypt had in Ismā'īl a ruler eager that his country should have at least the outward appearance of a modern European state, and with a munificence that was to deplete the treasury and invite foreign interference he subsidised many a project that fostered the assimilation of Western culture.

Furthermore, in 1860 there was a fearful outbreak of violence between Druses and Maronites in Syria; many Christians were massacred, many others fled to Egypt. These Syrian Christians, by reason of religious kinship, had long been in contact with the West: since the 10th century, there had been a Maronite school in Rome;² in the eighteenth century, not a few of them - like father Mīkhā'īl ul- Ghuzayrī, interpreter to Carlos III of Spain, who between 1760 and 1770 published an Arabic and Latin description of Arabic manuscripts in the Escorial Library - were in Europe serving the cause of Arabic culture.³ They had schools of their own, and a printing press in an Aleppo monastery as far back as 1749.⁴ More recently, missionary schools had been opened, and American Protestants had established a very active mission in 1838. Progressing without the shocks of a

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¹ J. Heyworth Dunne, Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt, pp. 313-341.
³ Louis Cheikho, Al-Ādāb ul- ʿArabiyyah fī 'l-qarn it-tāsiʿī ʿaṣhar, I, pp.11-18.
foreign invasion or the lashings of a taskmaster, the Syrians were having a less extensive and less ostentatious, but in some ways a more genuine Renaissance than the Egyptians. It is not altogether surprising, therefore, to find Syria produced some of the most consummate scholars of the time, such as Nāṣīf ul-Yāziji (d.1870) and Buṭrus ul-Bustānī, (1819-1883) and that these were not mere imitators of the West but had a profound interest in their Oriental heritage. And it was of no small benefit to Egypt that some shoots from this hot-house Renaissance were transplanted among the scattered seeds of its own.

The renewed energies of this period manifest themselves in many fields, the most important of these in a movement dependent upon a small literate minority being that of education. In this the leading lights were ‘Ali Pasha Mubārak (1823-1893), ‘Abd ullaḥ Pasha Fikrī (1854-1891). At first, what was done was to reopen schools of the old type; but these no longer corresponded to the needs of the time, and the law of 10th Rajab 1284 (7th November 1867) provided a comprehensive new programme which made a clear distinction between "civil" and military schools, created a well-defined gradation of primary, secondary, and preparatory schools, envisaged that parents of pupils might be called upon to pay fees in accordance with their means, and admitted the principle that the efforts to be exerted were to be primarily for the good of the pupils and only secondarily for that of the government. As ever, there was a gap between the intentions proclaimed and the measures carried out; successes were often more apparent than real, as in the designation of the schools, for only the preparatory ones were truly of a secondary standard, and of these there were only two; stiff curricula were imposed which discouraged initiative, and the notion remained that the highest reward of education was a position in the administration. Nevertheless new departures were made. In 1873, two
girls' schools were created, which were later amalgamated under the name of al-Madrasat us-Saniyyah; higher institutes of Engineering, Surveying, and Law were established; the first attempt to acquaint teachers with pedagogical principles was made by the institution of Dār ul-‘Ulūm in 1872, and special school-texts were composed by ‘Alī Mubārak and ‘Abd ʻul-lāh Fikrī themselves. At the same time, missions were sent abroad, and Catholic and Protestant missionaries, national and religious communities, and even lay organisations, were multiplying their private schools.

Other innovations of the period were the Khedivial, now the National Library, which was largely the creation of ‘Alī Pasha Mubārak, and such officially patronised learned societies as the Royal Geographical Society, founded in 1875, as well as Cairo’s excellent zoological garden.

Printing, including the revival of old texts, and translation were pursued with renewed energy. In this respect the needs of the government were great; not only did it set out to make Egypt appear as part of Europe, not only did it have extensive dealings with Europeans abroad and in Egypt, but some of its own undertakings - like the Post-Office, which was started as a private enterprise by an Italian - carried out their work in a foreign language, and the legal reforms which were to lead to the creation of the Mixed Courts demanded detailed acquaintance with European codes. Accordingly, the School of Languages was re-opened in 1868, and the curricu-

(1) J. Heyworth Dunne, Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt, pp. 342-424.
lum of government schools included not only Turkish and French, but at different times and for different immediate causes English, German, and Abyssinian. The names of translators for this period abound, the foremost among them being former pupils of at-Tahtawi, such as as-Sayyid Śāliḥ Majdī Bey (1827-1888), `Abd Ullāh Abū 's-suʿūd Bey, Aḥmad Bey Nadā (d. 1877) and many others.

Perhaps one of the most startling of the cultural activities of this period was the birth and rapid growth of non-governmental journalism. This, however, was largely due to the efforts of non-Egyptians. A Muslim Egyptian paper, Wādī 'n-Nīl, did exist as early as 1866, but it was in the pay of the Khedive. The earliest genuinely free efforts were those of the Afghan Jamāl ud-Dīn, the Syrian Salīm un-Naqūsh, and of a Jew named Yaʿqūb Ṣanwa', whose satirical "Abū Naqqārah" in colloquial Arabic was banned after the appearance of the fifteenth number, but continued to be printed in France and smuggled into Egypt. More particularly journalism was to provide scope for the Syrian Christian immigrants, and as from 1877 when the price of Ismāʿīl's extravagance came to be paid and foreign powers began to intervene in Egypt's affairs, it was men like Adīb Iṣḥāq, Salīm and Bishārah Taqlā, and Salīm un-Naqūsh who formed the backbone of a genuine opposition press, although the Egyptian `Abd Ullāh Nadīm (1844-1896) deserves mention both as orator and as journalist. Indeed it was an-Naqūsh who coined the phrase which was to become the rallying cry of Egyptian nationalists: "Egypt for

the Egyptians. 1

Not the least important development of this period is that it formulated, perhaps even determined the answer to, a vital question: Was the Renaissance to take root in native Islamic soil, or was it to be entirely an imitation of the West?

So far, the rulers had imported Western methods as though they were glorious liveries to be placed on perfectly submissive followers. The nation indeed, bludgeoned by a long succession of tyrannical rulers, was politically inactive, and inarticulate, so that when in 1866 Ismā'īl created a Chamber of Deputies, these were entirely bewildered at the thought that they were to provide an Opposition. But the nation was not without a spiritual life, centered in Islam, Islam as it was taught to them by Azhar-trained shaykhs. What were the reactions of the religious authorities to Western innovations?

There can be no doubt that the association of these innovations with the Christian world retarded their assimilation, as a comparison of the movements in Egypt and in Syria would show; especially was it as the Ottoman "caliphs" were trying to make use of religious prejudice to counter encroachments on their power, would show: It is not unnatural either that religious bodies of any denomination should tend to be at least cautious about any innovations, especially when, as in Egypt's case, these were eventually to destroy the shaykhs' monopoly of education and of the magistrature. But it was not until Ismā'īl's reign that these dangers became

(1) J. Heyworth Dunne; Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt, pp. 343-346.
evident, and the opposition of the Azhar to the new trends was not then very vehement or very active. Indeed the earliest artisans of reform were necessarily of the shaykh class and at-Tahtawi's connection with France was not as a student but as Imām to a student mission there.

This relative quiescence, however, was possible only because the issues had not been faced. Now, like a blazing comet traversing the sky, Jamāl ud-Dīn il-Afqānī travelled through the Near East preaching the reform of abuses within Islam, and the halting of Western penetration by a form of pan-Islamism in which the bases of the Islamic community were restated in terms of nationalism.¹

During his short stay in Egypt, he found a worthy disciple in Muḥammad ʻAbduh. A patriot and religious reformer, a leader, and above all a man of courage, he was firmly convinced that Islam could provide a suitable basis for the life of any community in any age.² He therefore set out to purify Islam from corrupting influences and practices, to reform Muslim higher education, to reformulate Islamic doctrine in the light of modern thought, and to defend Islam against European influences and Christian attacks. Necessarily, he had to fight against the uncritical acceptance of authority which had paralysed Islamic thought; in his Risālat ut-Tawhīd he contended that Islam had actually liberated Reason, so that "it must humble itself before God alone," and be bounded in its speculations only by the limits set by the Faith.

He himself was not a very original thinker, and in his theological treatise he was reviving the rationalising dialectic of an earlier age.³

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² Ch.C. Adams, Islam and Modernism in Egypt, pp.1-2.
But he approached issues in a spirit which, had it been generally adopted, might have given the Egyptian Renaissance a direction and an impetus derived from the most intimate component of the nation's consciousness.

Of course, the issues raised inevitably led to bitter polemics, and to the alienation of the 'ulamā' from Muḥammad ʿAbduh's movement. It is open to question whether such a movement of thought could ever have outpaced the flow of ready-made, unintegrated, but new and provoking ideas from the outer world. As it was, the movement compromised its chances of success by associating itself in Tawfīq's reign, with the ill-fated ʿUrābī rebellion.

This was primarily a gesture of protest by Egyptians in army service against the preference shown to Turks. It rallied other malcontents, such as the small landowners who were being penalised in the attempts made to repair the financial damage done by Ismāʿīl's extravagance. It was also warmly applauded in its defiant stage by most progressive elements. But it is vain to speak of it as a manifestation of national sentiment, for there was no national consciousness among the Egyptian masses then. After it had provided the excuse for the landing of British forces in Egypt, the rebellion crumpled quickly and easily, and some of its loudest acclamers were soon making abject apologies for their past misguidedness.

Amid such currents and counter-currents, the literary production of the period reflected the new spirit only in patches. With the exception of Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Azharists such as Ibrāhīm ul-Bayjūrī, Muṣṭafā'ī-ʿArūsī, and Shaykh ʿUlaysh continued to compile texts and commentaries on theology, logic, jurisprudence, and rhetoric in traditional fashion. Legal and scientific writings consisted mainly of translations, except in geography

(1) Ch. Issawi. Egypt, pp. 21-22.
where some serious but little-known work of exploration was corollary to military expansion in the south of the Sudan.

In the field of belles-lettres, poetry and prose were following very different courses.

The bulk of the poetry produced by men like `Alī Abū 'n-Naṣr (d.1881), 'Alī 'l-Laythī (d.1896), Mahmūd Ṣafwat us-Sā`ātī (1825-1880), and Ṣāliḥ Majdī is conventional and weak. It consisted mainly of panegyrics and elegies, personal satire, some descriptions, aphorisms, and pleasure songs, in all of which hackneyed comparisons, hyperbole, puns on names, and other verbal fireworks vainly tried to make up for insincerity and lack of continuity in mood or imagery. Thus all rulers were more just than Kiswa, more powerful than Caesar, more generous than Ḥātim, more brave than `Amr, and cleverer than Iyās. In successive elegies on four different ʼulamāʼ, `Alī Abū 'n-Naṣr proclaims in almost identical terms that the death of each of them is "the greatest catastrophe inflicted upon the world". Descriptions are overloaded with fanciful comparisons, often incompatible. Even when opposition to the ruler enlisted what may be expected to be the sincere

(1) Ibrāhīm Marzūq, of ʻAbbās:

ما حل حلم أحق؟ ما سماحة حكّام؟ ما كر عمو؟ ما ذكاء إياض؟

(2) Ṣāliḥ Majdī, of Sa`īd:

 grinned من شماع جرد جديد
هو في حرب مجيد الأسوعدد
وهو فيه إمام كل مجيد

(3) `Alī Abū 'n-Naṣr:

ورأجاه خطيب فتح الدنيا به
ورأجاه خطيب ساء أرباب الدنيا
ورأجاه خطيب إلهاننا وأهشنا
ورأجاه خطيب فتح الدنيا به

(4) ʻAbd al-Qadir (d.1883):

خس راح في إستباح أشرقت في سماة الكأس كالبر التسام
support of these poets, their contributions to it may be reduced to personal praise and satire, the same Sāliḥ Majdī who had compiled a tiresome metrical catalogue of Ismā‘īl’s contributions to public welfare now accusing him of greed and vice and selfishness.

Reflections of the new life are to be found only in schoolboyish descriptions of steam-powered trains and boats or of telegraphy, and here again the convention was soon established that the attitude to them should be one of wide-eyed, naive wonder.

The one significant new trend in the poetry of this period is rather a return to models of the distant past, to the sturdy, direct, and resonant poetry of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabs. Started by Shaykh Shahāb ud-Dīn, a weighman who became one of ‘Abbās’s favourite poets, the trend soon reached a high standard of imitative excellence in the poetry of Maḥmūd Pasha Sāmī ʿl-Bārūdī (1840-1904), one of the leaders of the ‘Urābī rebellion.

In prose-writing, the ideal of a rhymed and verbally ornamented prose persisted with such writers as Naṭmān ul-Alūsī, and it is in deference

[1] Sāliḥ Majdī, of a steamboat:

[2] Of Sa`īd, after his death:

(1) قَائَمَ البَيْتُ فِي هَوَنَ نُسْمَاء تَزَاوَحُ بروج لأَفْلَك السَّماَءُ تَزَاوَحُ

(2) وَأَيْمَا تُقَسَّمَ السَّماَءُ فَنَفَعُهَا وَأَيْمَا أَخَادِيمُ الْحَدِيدُ فَنَفَعُهَا

(3) على بِيْكَ وَتَوَادُ وَأَشِمْصْرَارٌ من النَّسَمَاءِ وَهُوَ لاَ يَقْعُ بِكْمَا نَارٌ

(4) وَأَفْقِ المَالُ لَا مَثَّا وَلاَ كرِيمًا يَقْعُ بِكْمَا نَارٌ وَلَا يَقْعُ بِكْمَا نَارٌ

(5) المرٌ يَقْعُ في الْدُنْيَا بِواحِدَةٍ
to this ideal that translators invariably chose rhyming titles for their publications. But it was inevitable that translation and journalism should aim at simple, direct, fluent, exoteric writing, and it is translation and to a lesser extent journalism which dominate the literary picture; original prose-writers who were not also journalistic are comparatively few, the most eminent being 'Ali Pasha Mubarak and 'Abd Ullah Pasha Fikri.

In fact, the most significant feature of the literary picture of the period was the appearance of literary translations. These soon became so popular that, unless specially commissioned to translate a scientific book, translators devoted their entire attention to fiction, so that apart from the influence they have had on style in general, translations are responsible for the appearance in Arabic literature of two new genres: novels and plays.

Until then, men of polish and learning had looked down upon mere storytelling. But after the appearance of Télémaque, translations of narratives multiplied, although they were as yet "bald and jejune," and sometimes departed from the original, descriptive passages being either omitted or cut down. Outstanding in the field was the work of Muḥammad `Uthman Jalāl (1829-1898), a pupil of Ṣaḥīḥi's and a product of this period although his career extends well into the next. In the days of Tawfīq he published under the title of al-Amāni wa 'l-minnah fī ḥadīth Qabūl wa Ward Jannah a translation of Paul et Virginie in rhymed prose interspersed with short verses instead of the philosophical reflections of the original; he thus succeeded in giving it a peculiarly Arab flavour.

Egyptian drama makes no more than a first appearance in this period. The Royal Opera House was inaugurated on 29 November 1869, as part of the festivities for the opening of the Suez Canal. But for some time it was only French and Italian productions that appeared there. The first public performances of plays in Arabic appear to have been given by Adīb un-Naqāš and other Syrians who came to Alexandria in 1876, for Syria had taken the lead in 1848 when Mārūn un-Naqāsh's translation of L'Avare was first produced. And it was another Syrian, Abū Khalīl il-Qabbānī, who brought his company to Cairo in the days of Iṣmā'īl and remained there until the reign of ʿAbbās.

Although an original play, al-Wāṭan wa l-ʿArab, was written by ʿAbdullāh Nadīm in the days of Tawfīq, it was mainly translations from English and French playwrights, often by Syrians, that were produced. Here again Muḥammad ʿUthmān Jālāl was to be the outstanding Egyptian contributor. His translations of the lofty, refined Racine's Esther, Iphigénie, and Alexandre le Grand into colloquial Arabic verse were perhaps ill-advised, and to the reader who has the original in mind, they often border on the ludicrous. He was, however, attempting a bold answer to a problem which to this day has not been satisfactorily solved: Should the language of serious drama be classical Arabic, stilted and unnatural on the lips and in the ears of moderns; or should it be the colloquial, with its undignified associations and its divorce

(1) Ṣalāḥ ud-Dīn iṭ-Ṭantāwī, Aʿlām al-Masrah, pp.1-2
(2) M.H. Abdal Raziq "Arabic Literature since the beginning of the Nineteenth century - I" E.S.O.S., II, Pt.2 (1922), p.255
(3) Ar-Risālah, XVI,806 (13 Dec.1948),pp.1397-1399.
from other accepted literary genres? The experiments were worth making. And for comedy his adaption of Tartuffe, which appeared as ash-Shaykh Matlûf (also in colloquial Arabic), was definitely pointing the way.
Chapter Two

THE EPOCH OF DILATION
1882-1919.

... the grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them. ... But it must have the atmosphere, it must find itself amidst the order of ideas, in order to work freely; and these is not so easy to command. This is why great creative epochs in literature are so rare.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

Artifically induced as it largely was, the Egyptian cultural revolution was naturally inclined to disregard warnings that creativeness must be preceded and fed by a great deal of critical work, in Arnold's meaning of the term. Under British Occupation, it found conditions particularly conducive to premature expansion.

It is not claimed that the British authorities in Egypt were deliberately, unselfishly leading Egypt along the road that led to independence. But by introducing financial, agricultural, and administrative reforms, by ensuring a measure of stability in the life of the nation, and by providing experienced "advisers" to run their projects, they not only improved material conditions but also provided pointers to some aspects of a desirable new life, and saved energies that would otherwise have been expended on the maturing but slow process of trial and error. In addition, the very presence of a foreign occupying power was a challenge to the self-respect of those who were becoming nationally-minded, and to the interests of some of the most ambitious. And having thus raised militant forces against them, the British allowed them a certain measure of free expression which, for all that it was limited by Censorship laws which claimed their victims and their martyrs, was always such as to attract to Egypt a number of active and educated men from Syria.
There could be no more stimulating combination of conditions, and after a decade of stock-taking and another spent in regaining momentum, with the turn of the century Egypt started a headlong rush at a number of shiny prizes, loosely identified with the "modern way", the Western way of life.

It was in this period that the association was finally and irrevocably made between Westernisation and material prosperity. For were not the countries of the West powerful and wealthy, and did they not impose their will upon the East? Had not foreigners in Egypt financially and legally the advantage over the natives? And if an Egyptian aspired to the dignity and munificence of a government position, did he not have to go to one of the schools where he learnt Western ways and Western languages? When he succeeded, did he not abandon his flowing robes and put on Western garb?

Tragically, these trappings of civilisation were thought of in contradiction to Religion. Whether Islam, with its very specific laws regulating worldly life and claiming to rest on revelation, is necessarily stationary, or whether the situation was created by historical circumstances, the fact is that the religious authorities set their hand against the innovations that were now filtering into the life of the people. And those of the people who had any choice to make thought that their alternatives were virtue in abject misery, or power and prosperity in disregard of moral and religious law.

Of course, the issue was never so frankly stated, and attachment to Islam was always vociferously professed. Indeed religious feeling between Muslims and Copts never ran so high as in the years 1908-1911, when the career of a Christian Prime Minister, Butrus Ghālī, ended in assassination.

(20 February 1910), and antagonistic congresses were being held by Copts at Asyût and by Muslims at Heliopolis;¹ but the bone of contention there was alleged favouritism in Government service. Whenever the "new ways" and established Islamic practice clashed in some material respect, the outcome was not long in doubt. Islam remained a powerful emotional rallying cry, an object of pride, a refuge in despair; but it was ceasing to be an actively guiding force in the life of the rising community.

Muḥammad ʿAbdūh had not abandoned his attempt to revitalise Islam. Before he died in 1905, he had attained a position of authority in the Azhar, and had his ardent admirers. In 1895 he even managed to effect some administrative reforms in the Azhar, which paved the way for some changes of curricula later on. But for his main aim he now realised that religious reform and political aspirations ought not to be made inter-dependent,² and he was even prepared to seek the support of the British authorities against the antipathy of the Khedive. He left behind two separate and partial lines of succession among the religious and among the laymen.

Among the religious, the Conservative majority scarcely gave him a hearing. But in 1897 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā founded, with Muḥammad ʿAbdūh's help, the movement known as the Manār. Eager to maintain ties with orthodoxy, it shows the deepest respect for the Qur'ān and makes the claim that in it is the seed of every human advance, including the "Rights of Man" and the high social position accorded to woman in the West. But in order to discover the message of the Qur'ān for our time, one must discard the shackles imposed by jurists in the first three centuries of Islam, and affirm the right of contemporaries

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² H.A.R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, p. 29/
to independent judgment, or ijtihād. It also pursues Muḥammad ʿAbduh’s attack on superstitions, and proposes to make use of existing Ṣūfī brotherhoods in works of public utility, such as charity and teaching. Where it differs most from other modernists in Egypt is that it retains Islamic traditions and tries to give them pseudo-scientific explanations which are usually more ingenious than ingenuous—for example, that the jinn are the microbes that it took Western scientists so long to discover.¹ In this, the movement is merely trying to appropriate to Islam ideas already current among the educated, and in a fast developing society it forms a body of opinion rather than a force.

More active and more influential were the lay followers of Muḥammad ʿAbduh, men like Muḥammad ul-Mahfī (d.1923) who taught literature, Qāsim Amin (1865-1908), the social reformer, and Saʿd Zaghlūl (1859-1927), the Nationalist leader.² These men did not adopt Muḥammad ʿAbduh’s views in their entirety. Rather, impressed by his spirit and strengthened against obscurantists by the fact that the initiative had come from a religious authority,³ they poured over their energies into the service of progress along Western lines.

In the social life of the educated minority, this trend gave rise to imitation of European ways on a large scale. European dress was adopted; European table manners were imitated; some social habits such as pleasure walks and drives gained currency; Christian families took to giving their

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¹ H. Lammens, Islam; Beliefs and Institutions, pp.210-215.
² C.C. Adams, Op.Cit., pp. 93-103
children European names, and there were other affectations which might be lightly dismissed if they were not symptoms of a choice already made and harbingers of deeper changes to come.

Most significant of all social changes were the stirrings of feminism that first appeared in this period. As we shall presently see, some individual women began to take part in educational and literary activities. Then Qāsim Amīn sounded the call for a reconsideration of the social position of women in his two books, Taḥrīr ul-Mar'ah (1898) and al-Mar'at ul-Jadīdah (1900, rewritten in 1911). Soon, with the help of foreign initiative, women were having organised activities, as in Lady Cromer's Dispensaries, started in 1908, and Lady Byng's International Club, founded in 1914. What is more, the movement had already found a native-born leader in Hudā Sha'rāwī (1879-1949). Although it was not until 1923 that she publicly dropped the veil and founded a Feminist Union which claims political rights, she was already active in 1909 when a French feminist, Melle. Clement, visited Egypt; no woman had given a public lecture in Egypt before, but Hudā Sha'rāwī secured the support of Princess ʿAyn ul-Ḥayāh and of Prince (later Sultan and King) Ahmad Fuʿād who, as head of the University, provided a hall in which Melle. Clement gave a very successful address comparing Western and Eastern women. Later, Hudā Sha'rāwī founded Jam'iyyat ur-Rugiyā il-Adabi li ʿs-Sayyidāt, but it died out in the course of the World War.

Of course, imitation of the West did not entail acceptance of domination by a Western power. Rather, as some apparent success was attained in emulating it, the idea gained ground that it could be defied, and that its weapons should be turned against it. Indeed the growth of nationalism is


itself an important aspect of Westernisation and of secularisation in Egypt, for loyalty to the modern state is fundamentally incompatible with the traditional thesis that the believer is a citizen of Islam, and his country a province of the ummah. The weakness of the Islamic bond was demonstrated and accentuated by the 'Urabi rebellion, directed as it was against Turkish influence. At the same time the quick collapse of the rebellion and the relative quiescence to British rule in the succeeding years show that the 'Urabists were not backed by a positive, widespread national sentiment. The appearance of patriotism in Egypt is connected with Muṣṭafā Kāmil Pasha (1874-1908), a brilliant orator who had the gift of communicating his passionate zeal to his audiences. Having studied law at Toulouse, he secured the sympathy and guidance of Mme Juliette Adam, and at the age of nineteen he was recruiting the support of French journalists and politicians for the Egyptian nationalist cause. With the encouragement of the Khedive he took the lead in anti-British agitation; but it was only among the educated that patriotism could exist at all, and it was only when something occurred to stir the elemental passions of the masses that the movement scored some blatant successes.

The first such occasion was the Danshaway incident of 13th June 1906, when there was an altercation between three British officers and some villagers, as a result of which one of the officers died; within two days sentences of death had been passed on four, of life imprisonment on two, of a year's imprisonment and fifty lashes on another three, and the hangings and floggings had been publicly carried out in the village of Danshaway itself. The horror of it so affected the population at large that it was recorded in a folk-ballad still current today, and Muṣṭafā Kāmil made political capital of it in

Egypt and abroad. The following year, Lord Cromer, the British Resident, resigned. In Egypt at least, this was ascribed to the success of Muṣṭafā Kāmil's campaign against him, and Muṣṭafā Kāmil followed it up by convening, in December, 1907, the first Nationalist Congress, out of which emerged the first organised political party in Egypt. Two months later, however, Muṣṭafā Kāmil died. The Nationalist party split, and there was a hiatus before a new national leader emerged.

Meanwhile the Liberal party had come to power in Britain, and a new policy designed to avert the repetition of such paroxysms of popular feeling as occurred in 1906 was adopted first by Lord Cromer in his last months of office, then by his successor Sir Eldon Gorst. Efforts were made to keep the masses contented, the Khedive was induced to withdraw his support from the Nationalists, and strict censorship was imposed on the intransigent press. Then in 1911 Sir Eldon Gorst died, and Lord Kitchener succeeded him. The appointment of a man who was known to have a feud of long standing with the Khedive appears to have marked the introduction of a new variation in the policy of conciliation: limited concessions were now more readily made to the Nationalists, at the expense of the ruler's prerogatives.

From the start, the nationalist movement had been coupled, as in Turkey, with a demand for a constitutional, democratic government. A first step towards it was now sanctioned, and in 1914 a Legislative Assembly with a majority of elected members came into being. It had few real powers, and it sat for five months only before the outbreak of war caused it to be suspended. But it was a tribune from which specific nationalist demands were voiced. It also consecrated the leadership of Saʿd Pasha Zaghlūl, a self-made man of

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peasant stock, of unassailable rectitude and uncompromising patriotism. He was then a non-party man, and his popularity could not be assessed until he was raised, by 65 out of 80 votes cast, to the highest elective position in the Assembly, that of joint Vice-President.

Such limited parliamentary activities may not be of paramount importance where civic consciousness is restricted to an educated minority. But the war was also to nullify whatever soothing effect the new conciliatory British policy may have had.

Genuine nationalism was boosted by the overthrow of Turkey's nominal suzerainty, by the triumph of the national over the religious bonds in the alignment of Arabs against an Ottoman Caliph who had called for Holy War, and by President Wilson's declared policy of self-determination for all nations. At the same time, almost every class of the population was given a grievance against the British: landowners had resented the restriction of cotton acreage and the commandeering of the 1918 crop, although the intentions behind these measures were justifiable; the urban middle class and the unskilled workers had suffered from the rise in the cost of living, ascribed to the presence of British troops; above all the peasants had their grains and farm animals commandeered, were required to make "contributions" to the Red Cross, and large numbers of them (estimated by Egyptians at over 1,000,000 and admitted by British sources to have been 90,000 at one time) had to endure what to them was the supreme calamity - leaving land and home for forcible "volunteering" into the Camel and Labour Corps. The powder was set for the

(2) 'Abbās Maḥmūd ul-'Aqqād, Saʿd Zaghlūl, p.230.
most violent and the most extensive explosion of nationalistic feeling that has occurred in Egypt to this day: the Revolution of 1919. It was touched off when Sa‘d Zaghlūl and others were arrested and deported for refusing to obey General Watson's command to desist from embarrassing the authorities.

The cultural activities of the period are deeply coloured by unrestrained Westernisation, with its concomitant of tacit secularisation, and by vociferous nationalism. In education, the religious institutions were allowed to proceed at their own pace, with only superficial changes of curricula, while all other schools, private or governmental, adopted Western models; soon they were completely out of touch with one another, and Prof. Gibb considers this rift the greatest single factor in the division of Muslim society into orthodox and Westernised.

Developments in the Westernised branch of education must themselves be considered in the context of opposition to British rule, for the nationalist thesis - widely accepted in Egypt to-day - is that the British deliberately tried to put a brake on educational developments in order to retard self-rule. One need not put such an utterly villainous interpretation on the facts, for the British did improve the organisation and efficiency of government schools, and there is some justification for resisting impatient demand for a greater measure of "higher education" before a sufficiently broad stratum of literacy has been formed. But it must be admitted that the educational programme of the British authorities was modest to a fault. In 1901, its aims were explicitly stated as: in the first place "to spread as widely as possible, amongst the male and female population, a simple form of education consisting of an elementary knowledge of the Arabic language and arithmetic. In the second place, to form a highly educated class suitable for the


(2) Háfiz Ibrahim, the least ill-disposed of the great poets of the time towards Lord Cromer, on the occasion of the latter's departure summed up his achievements in the following line:

...وأنك أخصب البلاد تعصما وأجديت في مصر العقول تعصما...
requirements of the government service." In effect, elementary education was a perpetuation of the old kuttāb, and what was called "higher education" consisted of primary and secondary stiff formal training which tended to produce only clerical automata. Only 3% of the budget was spent on education, and in 1905 - the last year before Lord Cromer's change of policy and before the self-assertive Sa'd Zaghlūl became Minister of Education - the numbers being educated in Government institutions were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuttābs</td>
<td>5,570</td>
<td>1,831</td>
<td>7,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary schools</td>
<td>6,821</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>7,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulaq Technical</td>
<td></td>
<td>427</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansurah Industrial School</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical School</td>
<td></td>
<td>116</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law School</td>
<td></td>
<td>273</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers' training</td>
<td></td>
<td>297</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missions abroad had been discontinued, but were resumed on Sa'd Zaghlūl's initiative, in 1907.

It must also be noted that training specifically for translation was abandoned, and that from 1888 until Sa'd Zaghlūl again reversed the trend, the teaching of History, Geography, and Natural Science in Secondary Schools, and of most technical subjects in the higher institutes, was in English or French, not in Arabic.

Yet popular demand for education was so keen that in 1914 there were 328 foreign private schools, teaching 48,000 pupils, and 739 Egyptian ones, teaching 99,000. On the initiative of nationalists, evening schools for adults were established.

(2) Sir Auckland Colvin, The Making of Modern Egypt, pp. 303-308.
In all this, the education of women held as yet but a small place, the proportion of literates among them being no higher than 7% in 1919; but it was no small victory over deep-rooted prejudice that Muslim girls were being sent to school at all, let alone to foreign Christian schools.\(^1\)

Along with the head-start secured by French culture in the preceding period and the general antipathy roused for anything British, the prevalence of non-governmental efforts in education explains why — although until 1905 government schools gave 24 times as much teaching time to English as to French \(^2\) — it is French and not English influences that are apparent in Egypt’s new culture.

As formative, perhaps, as schools and University in this period was the Press. Stimulated by the political struggle, the increase in the numbers of readers, and the continued influx of Syrians, it extended with great rapidity. Thus in 1898, 169 papers and journals were reported to be in existence, and in 1913 the Ṣarrazī collection alone included 282. Some of these were unstable enterprises, and the war reduced the total number considerably, but not a few were publications of importance. Among the literary, scientific, and cultural journals, al-Muqtataf founded by Ya’qūb Ṣarrūf (1852-1927) and al-Hilāl founded by Jurjū Zaydān (1861-1924) take pride of place, and it is worth noting that a number of women’s magazines made their appearance in the last decade of the nineteenth century; such are Hind Nawfal’s Al-Fatāḥ (1892), Maryam Muzhir’s


\(^{2}\) Sir Auckland Colvin, Op.Cit., p. 308

Mir'āt ul-Ḥasanā' (1896), and Alexandra Avierino’s Anīs ul-Jalīs in 1898. Of the newspapers, Al-Ahrām and al-Muqāṭṭam were the most unbiased and informative, whereas al-Mu'ayyad spoke for the conservative Muslims, and al-Waṭan for the Copts; Muṣṭafā Kāmil’s al-Liwā’ was the first political party paper. Not only the journals but also the newspapers are of importance in the cultural history of the country, for they included literary material. Ad-Dustūr, edited by Fārid Wajdī Bey with the assistance of ʿAbbās Maḥmūd ul-'Aqqād (1889- ), was the first to open its columns to literary prose and poetry, and its example was followed by Aḥmad Luṭfī 's-Sayyid's al-Jarīdah; then al-Mu'ayyad took to devoting a regular column to literature, entrusting it again to al-'Aqqād, and soon the literary column became a feature of journalism which no self-respecting paper could afford to ignore. The Press thus provided immense scope for would-be writers, and there is scarcely an author of note in Egypt today who did not at one time or another contribute to it. The schooling it provided - especially as most papers were run by Syrian immigrants of advanced education - is not to be underestimated. But its blessing was not unmixed. Its day-to-day appeal favoured the plausible writer rather than the profound thinker, the demagogue rather than the guide, the jack-of-all-subsjects rather than the scholar.

It is not surprising therefore that a survey of the literary production of this period shows the immense preponderance of a literature of entertainment over serious studies. Azharists like Muḥammad ul-Maḥdī 'l-‘Abbāsī

(1) L. Cheikh Tārikh ul-Aḍāb il-‘Arabiyyah fil-'r-rub‘ il-awwal min al-garn il-‘ishrīn, p.3.


(3) Ibrāhīm ʿAbd ul-Qādir il-Maẓinī, "aṣ-Ṣaḥāfat ul-Miṣriyyah fil-rub‘ qarn," lecture delivered in American University, Cairo, reported in Risālah, XVII, 826 (2 May 1949), p.817
(1888-1897) produced some religious or linguistic books, and some odd travel books and biographies appeared. In the service of the Western sciences, we find not a few writers and translators, such as Dr. Durri Pasha (1841-1900), Hasan Mahmud Pasha, and `Abd ur-Rahman il-Harawi Bey, devoting their efforts to medicine, perhaps because the medium of teaching in the medical school, unlike the others, was not changed to English until 1898; legal works, intended to serve the needs of the reformed national courts, were produced by Shafiq Bey (1856-1900) and `Umar Lufti Bey (1867-1911); and there were writers on astronomy and mathematics, such as Isma`il ul-Falaki Pasha (d.1901) and Liwa` Muhammad Mukhtar Pasha (1835-1897). Scholastic texts in history and geography were translated by Ahmad Zakai Pasha (1867-1927). Interest in ancient Egypt and in Coptic studies was shown by Murqus Bey Kabis (1830-1905), and in Egyptology alone by Muhammad Kamal Pasha (1850-1923). But with the exception of Fathi Zaghlul Pasha (1863-1914) who translated sociological works such as Sirr Taqaddum il-Injiliz is-SaksuniyyIn, by Camilles Desmoulins, and Ruh ul-Litima`, by Gustave Le Bon, as well as Bentham's Principles of Legislation, writers and translators who wished to reach the general public poured their energies almost exclusively into belles lettres, and particularly fiction.

In belles-lettres, we find two main forces at work. On the one hand, there was wholesale imitation of Western, and particularly of French nineteenth century, models. On the other, nationalism and the printing of numerous old Arabic texts directed attention to models from the Arab past. Roughly, it may be said that the Western models dominated ideas, determined literary genres, introduced some new words and expressions into the

language, and strongly affected the presentation of books; interest in
the past dominated linguistic consideration, affected style, provided
subject-matter that was treated in Western fashion, and led to extrava-
gant glorification of Arab, Islamic, or pharaonic forefathers.

Poetry – which as has already been said was most intimately linked
with slow-changing taste, and which had already started on its antiquarian
venture by Barudi, fell more readily than other genres under the appeal of
the past, and perhaps because it remembered that it had once held a proud
office as "the record of the Arabs," it became the vehicle not of individ-
ual, but of national self-expression. In fact, the outstanding Egyptian
poets of the period – Ahmad Shawqi Bey (1868-1932) and Hafiz Bey Ibrâhîm
(1871-1932) – differed appreciably from the Syro-Americans who were emula-
ting Western contemporaries to the extent of experimenting with free verse,
or even from the Syrian Sulaymân ul-Bustânî who sought his model at the
fountainhead of European inspiration, and translated the Iliad into rajz.
These Egyptians, particularly Shawqi Bey, were acquainted with French
literature and did not fail to be impressed by the freedom, the vitality
of its productions; they cried out against the stereotyped expressions and
motifs of their immediate predecessors, and proclaimed that the time had
come to "undo the fetters with which the advocates of the impossible have
fettered us."  

(1) Hâfiç Ibrâhîm, addressing "Poetry":
قد أذالوك بين أناس وكأس
وغرام بظية أو غمّال
وشراء وفتنة وغبال
وسلام ووقفة الأطلال
وإمساح راحت بين الليالي
وستكون الرحال فوق الجمال
تبدلت به دعاء المحال
ودعنا نظم ريح الشمال

وكل كليب وشدة وعتيد
وحتى انتقال للسماء
وقد معلم العالم من حب ليصلى
ويا بكر على عزيز تمسك
ويا ما سموا بكدر يوم
أن يشعر أن نفسك فينودا
فأرجعوا هذه الكمسام عننا

...
But they diagnosed the evil as insufficient acquaintance with the beauties of Arabic, and insufficient faith in its possibilities of development, and Ḥāfiz Ibrāhīm, as mouthpiece of the Arabic Language, exclaimed: "I am the sea in whose entrails pearls are hidden; have they enquired of the diver about my shells?" Consiously and openly, they imitated some of the great poets of the Golden Age of Arabic Literature, sometimes adopting for a poem of their own the rhyme and metre of the classic they were imitating. Even those who were more directly influenced by the West - Khalīl Māturān Bey (1871-1949) and Ismā‘īl Ṣābrī Pasha (1854-1923) - remained attached to traditional standards of poetic expression, so that at the end of his career Khalīl Māturān could look back and say:

I follow the Ancients in retaining the foundations of the language, in refraining from taking liberties with it, and in seeking inspiration from one's true nature. And I widen my scope in means of expression in conformity with what the age demands, as did the Arabs before me.

But my greatest wish was that I should introduce every novelty into our Arabic poetry in such a way that it should not prove uncongenial to it, and that I should succeed in convincing the conservatives that our language is the mother of all languages if it is safeguarded and given the services to which it is entitled...

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1. "I am the sea in whose entrails pearls are hidden; have they enquired of the diver about my shells?"
2. Even those who were more directly influenced by the West.
4. Even those who were more directly influenced by the West.

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(1) انا البحر في أحشائي الدرب كامن نحل سألوا الخواص عن صدقائي
(2) In Ḥāfiz wa Shawqī, Tāhā Ḥusayn has pointed out the following examples:
(a) Shawqī's poem in praise of Muṣṭafā Kamāl, beginning

الله أكبركم في الفتاح من عجب يا خالد الشرك جدد خالد العرب
is in imitation of Abū Tammām's on al-Mu'ṭasim, beginning:

السيف أصدق إبنا من الكتب في خدود الحد بين الجد واللعب
(b) Ḥāfiz, in elegy on Perūdī beginning:

ردوا علي بيساني بعد محمود أبي عبيدة وآخا الشمرجهود
imitates Muslim Uūb ul-Walīd's:

لا تدع بي الشروق اني غير معلوم نبي النهى عن هوى اللياليＡواريد
(4) Khalīl Māturān, Diwān ul-Khalīl, II, Pref.
(3) Born in Lebanon, but settled in Egypt as from 1392.
Within these limits, high standards and great successes were attained, and these successes were not merely imitative. Poets were discovering a new patron: the old one, the personage in authority whose bravery and generosity, real or imagined, were to be immoderately extolled, still existed; but beside him and encroaching upon his importance was now the general educated public. Anonymous and variable, he had to be addressed through the daily press on events of international, national, or local importance - Russia's defeat by an Oriental nation in 1904, the Young Turk Revolution in 1903, the Italian invasion of Tripolitania in 1911, the resignation of Lord Cromer in 1907, the anniversary of the Khedive's accession, or the suicide of a lover whose love was not returned. The public had to be addressed at social gatherings, at religious festivals, at the funeral of a reformer, at the inauguration of an institution, or at a school graduation, and extravagant or calculated opinion had to be expressed on traditional morality, on a high-handed administrator, or on the education of women.

Although the result was necessarily removed from Western ideas of lyricism, conventional patterns were being broken and poets were learning to derive their inspirations if not from their innermost experience, at least from the life that was surging round them. Besides, some of them - notably Khalil Maṭūrān - experimented with narrative poetry and occasionally broke away from the single rhyme of the traditional ode. And mention must be made of the appearance of women in the field, the most important being ‘A’ishat ut-Taymūriyyah (1840-1902), who wrote songs and poems in Persian and Turkish as well as in Arabic, and Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif, known as Bāhīθat ul-Bādīyah (1837-1918), who also contributed prose articles to al-Mu‘ayyad and al-Mahrūṣah.

Prose-writing, in contrast to poetry, was more profoundly influenced by the West. True, the early years of this period were dominated by men who were the natural product of preceding conditions, men like Ḥamzah Fatḥ
Ullah (d.1917), Shawish, and Wali, and they left behind an active and not insignificant line of succession - as in Mustafä Qadîq ur-Rafi‘î - which is now known as the Conservative School. Advanced ideas were not absent from their writings, especially if we reckon Hifri Nasîf (d.1919) as one of their number, and individual variations were considerable. But it is not unfair to sum up the aim of the Conservatives as the preservation of the old culture, with patches of reform. In contradistinction to them, there arose early in the twentieth century a rival school of Modernists who had in view - again with variations between individuals - the establishment of strong bases for culture by means of advanced education along Western lines, and the erection thereon of a distinctively Egyptian component of world culture. From the start, the group included Qasim Amîn and Fathî Zaghlûl, but the acknowledged father of the School is Ahmad Luṭfî 's-Sayyid Pasha, who founded al-Jarîdah in 1907 and later exerted his influence through the Egyptian University, of which he became the head. A man of firm and measured opinion, he has had perhaps less popular recognition than he deserves, for it is often through louder and more extreme disciples that his ideas have gained currency.

Apart from the ideas they spread, the Modernists affected the style of prose-writing in that they favoured direct, flowing, and natural expression, and the logical development of an argument rather than dogmatic assertion; they were also to raise the question whether contemporaries have the right to coin new words, admit evolution in language, perhaps even adopt a distinctively Egyptian variation of Arabic as the language of writing.

The main forms in which literary prose appeared may be termed the article and the narrative.

The article is a convenient name for the wide and overlapping variety of shorter pieces which usually appeared in magazines and newspapers, though they were sometimes collected and reprinted as books.
Egyptian writers and critics seldom differentiate them, and one writer in one collection ranges over so many varieties that they can scarcely be disentangled. They may include the exposition of an idea culled from foreign sources; comments on current events; high-minded tracts advocating some social or cultural reform; polemic writings, often violent, on the issues so raised; a few critiques, and personal essays on the writer's views of Life on his emotional reactions to its problems. These last, in fact, fulfilled a function that might have been expected to fall to poetry: they became the vehicle for romantic self-expression of an excessively tearful sort. Outstanding in this respect was Muṣṭafā Luṭfī 'l-Manfalūṭi (1876–1924), whose two collections carry the revealing titles of an-Nazarat and al-ʿAbarat. Unversed in foreign languages but impressed by the literature which he received at second hand, he combined the medieval ideal of an ornamental prose with a modern taste for smoothness, homeliness of illustration, and imaginative figures of speech. He produced "sparkling essays and racy sermonettes," but he lacked substance. His views were superficial and unintegrated, and he soon fell into sentimental pessimism. Nevertheless, his was "the first really successful attempt to adapt the classical tradition to the new demands of popular literature."\(^1\)

In narration, a number of unconnected lines of advance are discernible. The immense success of translated novels has already been indicated; it must now be stressed that the majority of the novels translated were those that had attained popularity in France in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and these - like Les Misérables, part of which was translated by Ḥāfīẓ Ibrāhīm, or Werther, translated by Ahmad Ḥasan uz-Zayyāt - leaned

\(^1\) H.A.R. Gibb, "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature - II" B.S.O.S., V, Pt.2, pp.316-ff
towards the sombre and the pathetic. Imitators of the Western novel were, however, surprisingly late in appearing. Beginning in the nineties, Jurji Zaydān produced no fewer than twenty-two historical novels, each of which centred on some salient point of Islamic history, but even though nationalism bade that Arab achievements be glorified, his example was not immediately followed by writers of equal importance. Similarly, in 1897 Ahmad Shawqi combined interest in the glory of Ancient Egypt with popular magicians' tales in 'Adhrū 'ul-Hind, a fantastic romance which again found no imitators. The first line of development which shows continuity had the extended maqāmah for its model, and social criticism for its aim. It started in 1907, when Muḥammad ʻIbrāhīm al-Muwaylī (1858-1930) published Ḥadīth ʻIsā 'bn Ḥishām, where a resurrected Pasha from Muḥammad ʿAlī's time is given many opportunities to criticise the changes he now observes. Much the same formula was used by Ḥāfiz ʻIbrāhīm in Layālī Satīh (1907) and by Muḥammad Luṭfī Jumʻah in Layālī 'r-Rūh il-Ḥāʻir (1912). It was not until 1914 that the first novel of contemporary Egyptian life developed on Western lines made its appearance. It was Zaynab, the sad story of a village girl married against her will, torn between duty to her husband and love for another, so stricken when the man she loves is drafted into the army that she develops consumption and dies. It appeared anonymously at the time, but has since been acknowledged by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal Pasha (1888- ) as his own creation.1

In both the extended maqāmah and the early novel, it is clear that the very length of the novel presented special difficulties to the writer of the period. There was as yet in Arabic literature no tradition of

sustained and unified, logically consistent invention; besides, the omnipotent Press did not favour laborious, planned writing. Thus the works of al-Muwaylî and of his imitators were episodic - İşâ'ībn Hishâm was in fact first published serially in Miṣbah uṣh-Sharq - with but a frail overall plan that was soon lost sight of by both reader and writer; and the plot of Zeynāb was thin and not free from diversionary interests. The short story, on the other hand, gave excellent opportunities for observation of different facets of society without the absolute need for an integrated outlook on life, and a successful beginning within its modest bounds was made by Muḥammad Tāmūr (1892-1921).

Meanwhile the theatre had been gaining ground. Shaykh Sałmah Ḥijâzî, an admirer of al-Qabbâni, was the first Egyptian to rise to prominence, especially from 1905 to 1908 when he had his own company performing in his own hall. Then in 1912 Ḫurj Abyaḍ formed a new company of actors who had studied their art abroad. Interested citizens formed a society called Atbāʿul-Masrah, which aimed at raising the social status of actors and at introducing the problem play, and this led to the formation in 1917 of yet another company, headed by 'Abd ur-Reḥmān Rushdi.' Also, late in this period, Najîb ur-Rihanî (1891-1949) started on the road which was to lead to an extremely successful kind of comedy, genuinely rooted in Egyptian life. After an apprenticeship served in amateur and professional companies, he formed an independent one in 1915, in partnership with 'Azîz ʿId. During the war years, he confined himself to the production of Franco-Arabic comedies on the recurrent theme of a wealthy

(1) Ḥusnî Fāḍil, Ad-Dalîl ul-Fannî li 'sh-Sharq il-Awsat, pp.15-17.
village headman's first visit to the city, where he falls prey to many temptations and eventually returns to his village a poorer and wiser man. The character of Kishkish Bey which he thus created was perpetuated in more solid plays, original or cleverly adapted from the French, and was developed into something not unlike the genuine voice of Egypt's conscience: at first sight naive and easily imposed upon, Kishkish Bey was ultimately the mouthpiece of the people's sound and earthy sense.

All these companies depended mainly on translations or adaptations from foreign plays. Although from the start some schoolmasters produced their own dramatisations of religious or historical themes\(^1\) probably in imitation of what the Jesuit fathers were doing in Bayrūt,\(^2\) it is only towards the end of this period that the names of successful playwrights such as Muhammad Luṭfī Jum'ah and Muhammad Taymūr come to the fore.

Both translators and writers for the stage had difficult problems to contend with, the most important of which was whether plays should be in the colloquial or the literary language. Partisans of the classical - and they included some modernists - held that the colloquial was an unworthy corruption, unable to express any but the most lowly sentiments and ideas; the others pointed out that the genre had no grounding in past Arabic literature, and clamoured that it was preposterous to have

\(^1\) in "Yūhā anna...fī miṣr," Ḥilāl, LVII, 7 (July 1949) pp.42-43, Ţāhir ut-Ṭanābī mentions that in 1885 pupils of the Coptic school of Ḥurūt us-Saqqā in performed, in the Opera House, a play about Joseph written by their headmaster, Wahbī Tādrus.

\(^2\) Louis Cheikho, al-Ādāb ul-ʿArabiyyah fī ʿl qarn it-tāsīʿ asḥar, 11, p.70.
characters taken from every day life, perhaps even illiterate peasants, speaking the language of early masters of the language. As a question merely of verisimilitude, the problem applied also to dialogue in novels, and would not have been insuperable, for there are not a few forms of dramatic exposition in European literature - such as opera - in which the medium of expression is not the language of every day. But whereas every one who read a book was necessarily acquainted with the literary language, the theatres could draw audiences which included illiterates, half-literates, and even foreigners who could understand only the colloquial. The law of jungle survival thus favoured the colloquial, but its complete victory would have brought about an unfortunate rift between drama and other literary genres. No satisfactory way out of the dilemma has been found, but in practice comedy turned frankly to the colloquial, and serious drama remained divided between the two, with leanings towards the colloquial in the plays that were to be produced without any measure of official sponsoring. Muḥammad Taymūr, for example, wrote mainly in the colloquial.

Finally, reference must be made to the tardy appearance of Criticism in the Renaissance.

As interest was awakened in the heritage of the past, broad and ambitious attempts to evaluate it were made in the literary histories of ʿImām ʿAlī Naṣīf and especially of Jurji Zaydān.

The edition of ancient texts also involved some textual criticism, which however remained hasty and less reliable than the work done by Orientalists abroad.

As for aesthetic criticism, it had for long consisted of opinions expressed by scholars whose primary interest was linguistic, and who singled out a line or two for praise or disparagement. All too often in the Press, there were extravagantly laudatory articles or vehement attacks on writers, motivated by personal or political relationships.
But out of the rivalry between Conservatives and Modernists a new kind of partisanship arose, partisanship with a cultural bias, which manifested itself in uncomplimentary articles by Ţahā Ḥusayn on al-Manfalūṭī, and by al-ʿAqqād, Ibrāhīm ʿAbd ul-Qādir il-Mīzīnī (1890-1949), and Ţahā Ḥusayn on Ḥāfiẓ and Shawqī. Immoderate as these attacks were, they at least had a broadly consistent literary point of view, and when the interest which animated them was disciplined by university training, it produced in 1914 the first systematic attempt at an all-round valuation of an Arabic literary figure; it was Ţahā Ḥusayn's doctorate thesis on Abū ʿl-ʿAlāʾ il-Maʿarrī.
Chapter Three

THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE

It has long seemed to me that the burst of creative activity in our literature, through the first quarter of this century, had about it, in fact, something premature... And this prematureness comes from its having proceeded without having its proper data, without sufficient materials to work with.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

To say that by 1919 the Egyptian Renaissance was immature would be neither a revelation nor a slur. After so short a journey along so unfamiliar a road, it could scarcely have been otherwise.

Like a volcanic eruption, it was a spectacular movement with considerable repercussions; but it was a movement in the crust.

The inaction of the common Egyptian is so generally accepted that its peculiar character needs to be defined. It is not the inaction of the senseless or the unperceiving. His folk-ballads and his humour - which he is singularly reluctant to reveal to the outsider - show him to be much alive to the realities of his situation, and his observations are sometimes as penetrating as they are pungent. But for centuries and in spite of many changes of foster-mothers he has been nursed on the bitter milk of misery and oppression, so that he has despaired of relief and scarcely considers changes worth an effort.

The educated minority of to-day has risen at no distant date out of these oppressed masses, for there was no aristocracy of birth among Egyptians proper at the outset of the nineteenth century. But the instruction they received, often at the price of staggering sacrifices on the part of their peasant fathers, was completely at variance with their upbringing, and by virtue of imitation of Turk or European the educated soon formed a distinctive class, small but prominent because it
alone was active and articulate. It was this educated minority which adopted Westernisation, while the peasants remained attached to their traditions; it was this minority which clamoured for University education and for educational missions abroad while the vast majority remained illiterate; it was this minority which agitated for independence and constitutional government while the majority were, most of the time, grappling with the problems of bare survival.

Even in this educated minority there was immaturity and unbalance. Social changes were inevitably accompanied by strains and stresses, especially in connection with the position of women. Women who had access to Western culture were if anything more completely won over to it than men, partly because they had more to gain from it, partly because their pursuit of it was motivated not by the need to prepare for a career but by genuine liberalism in them and in their parents. At the same time, their number remained small, and their social status high. Few educated men could hope to find a mate of comparable culture, and as social intercourse between the sexes was as yet greatly restricted, there resulted a deep-seated malaise, of which the least objectionable manifestation was tearful Romanticism.

The education available not only tended to become top-heavy, but produced men who could scarcely see any purpose to it other than qualifying for a government position, and conversely they expected a government position to be created for every educated man. Initiative and drive were scarcely encouraged, so that for long Egyptians fought shy of business and especially of industrial ventures, and economic as well as intellectual developments were retarded. Besides, a loss that is not generally realised was incurred when the Azhar was allowed to slide out of the general system of education, for although its syllabi were entirely out of date, Azharist life had an earnestness of purpose,
a rigorousness of self-discipline, and a respect for learning that were of no small formative value.

Instead, the new learning became the key to all new endeavours. The facts of the new sciences were easily accepted and mastered, but the intellectual freedom of Western scientific methods could not immediately prevail against the dogmatism of the old system.\(^1\) The devotion of one's life to disinterested pursuits was not quite understood. Parts of the one ideal were accepted, and others rejected. Writers who generalised on life, like al-Manfalūṭī, were full of inconsistencies; novelists felt the need to claim that they were writing not for entertainment but for edification; the Fine Arts received practically no attention;\(^2\) and scarcely any study on religion or contemporary history with any claim to academic detachment was produced. And, unimpressed by the need for profound research, writers felt free to range over a wide variety of subjects, so that we find poets like Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm and Khalīl Maṭurān collaborating in the translation of a book on Political Economy.

Beneath it all was a deeper and more dangerous disturbance. For centuries Islam - modified by medieval theology, by Ṣūfism, by popular superstitions and misconceptions - had provided a firm basis for the life of the individual and the community in their every aspect. Now its grip was being shaken loose. The religious authorities were indeed watchful of any open departure from "right thinking", as was soon to be demonstrated when, in 1925, ‘Alī ‘Abd ur-Rāziq attempted a bold revaluation of the Caliphate question in al-Islām wa ʿUṣūl ul-Ḥukm, and was promptly...

\(^1\) H.A.R. Gibb, "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature - II,\) B.S.O.S., v, Pt. 2, pp. 311 ff.

\(^2\) Amīr Buqṭur, "Halānta Muthaqqaf?\) Hilāl, LVII, 6 (June 1949), pp. 16-17.
deprived of his Azharist degree, which was his qualification for the judgeship he held. But change there had to be, and the religious leaders would give no positive lead. Indeed, by their reluctance to concede even secondary points, they helped to compromise fundamentals where only outward manifestations were under attack. Besides, they knew so little of the enemy they had to confront that, unless they were openly challenged, they failed to realise where danger lurked, as when they gave their support to the nationalist movement.

To replace it, there was only the ideal of Westernisation, derided by Conservatism, resented by national and racial pride, and misunderstood by Modernism itself. For - startled by its novelty, hurt by its aggressiveness, and attracted by its worldly success - the Egyptian saw most clearly in the ways of the West those features which most blatantly contradicted his own. Thus the greater freedom with which Western women pursued their interests led to the notion that they were necessarily frivolous, and by syllogistic reasoning rather than from personal experience it was concluded that they were less satisfied as housewives, less companionable as mates, and even less loving as mothers than their Oriental sisters! Again, the open acceptance of materialistic values was a profound shock. To the Muslim, morality had long been strict obedience to divine commands; utilitarian ethics was a non-sense to him, and he was not at all convinced that, once abstraction had been made of God's will, honesty remained the best policy. In the face of the lack of religiosity in the Europeans he met, he could scarcely be expected to perceive that there was in many of them more Christian idealism - perhaps

(1) 'Abbās Maḥmūd ul-ʿAqqād, Murājaʿ āt fī 'l-Adab wa 'l-Funūn, pp. 269-272.
only residual - than they claimed for themselves. He therefore associated the West with a philosophy of unbridled materialism, entirely unconcerned with moral and spiritual values. What is more, he felt that this philosophy bore desirable fruit. In vain he tried to compartmentalise himself, pursuing worldly aims and proclaiming his continued attachment to what he vaguely called "the spirituality of the East". He scarcely comprehended his own problem, and the Renaissance remained imitative, lacking a positive, coherent, and worthy motivation of its own.

It is not surprising, and certainly not to Egypt's discredit, that the Renaissance did not emerge full-grown and fully armed like Minerva out of Jupiter's head. But there were dangers in leaving its development to the action of time alone. True, imitation was necessarily its first step, as it had been for the European Renaissance. But the European Renaissance had been almost entirely intellectual and aesthetic, and by its nature made its first appeal to the finest minds of the time. The Egyptian Renaissance, on the other hand, was intimately linked with technology and practical issues, and its models had a powerful lure for average men. It was not starting from a newly discovered shore and gradually venturing into deeper waters; it found itself swimming and delighting in the swim before it had found out where a secure footing might be gained in case of danger. Hasty and impatient for results, it could advance more quickly in some directions than in others. It could adopt some fully-developed models without enquiring whether they arose from the same source or converged on the same aim. In fact, to the generation that was active at the end of the World War the answers to all its problems seemed crystal-clear, even though arduous in the execution: in the political field, evacuation of British troops; as a solution to all internal problems, social or political, a constitutional
government - for a government of the people by the people could not fail to operate to the advantage of the people; in education, more of everything; in literature, self-expression. At that time, any self-styled leader who cried "Forward!" was assured of a hearing. But forward to what? And what would happen if any of the all too simple formulae believed in failed to yield expected results?

The impetus towards emulation of the West was already overwhelming, and retreat from it unthinkable. But Western culture was intimately entwined with Christianity and coloured by its European environment. Egypt needed to evolve its own variation of it, blended to Islamic ideas, and coloured by its own nature and circumstances. Before this could be done, it required not only a fuller understanding of Western culture and an examination of its very sources, but also an honest reconsideration of Islamic fundamentals and a study of its historical development under varying conditions, as well as some searching and dispassionate national introspection.

It needed leadership, leadership not only zealous and energetic, but also honest and discerning, leadership that could direct and at times restrain, leadership that could steer a constant course amid the squalls of impatient public opinion.

Many claimants to leadership appeared at the end of the World War, in every field of endeavour. One of them was Tāḥā Ḥusayn, whose name has already come to the fore in respect of literary criticism. But his continuous public career dates precisely from 1919. Particularly active in the fields of belles-lettres and education, and through these making his influence felt in many others, he has come to be recognised as the Leader of the Modernist School.

It is the purpose of this study to evaluate his achievements against the background of what the Renaissance had already attained, and his
leadership in the light of what it yet needed.
PART TWO

THE MAN
Chapter Four

HIS LIFE.

Si la fortune veut rendre un homme estimable, elle lui donne des vertus; si elle veut le rendre estimé, elle lui donne des succès.

JOUBERT.

Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn was born in 1889 in the small town of Maghāghah in Upper Egypt. He was the seventh of his father's thirteen children, and the fifth of his mother's eleven. The family was of humble condition, but not so indigent that it could not keep a servant¹ and not so undistinguished that it did not, on occasion, receive the costly honour of a visit from the shaykh of the Sūfī brotherhood to which Ṭāḥā's father belonged.²

It belonged at any rate to the cultural level of the masses, so that when disease struck, it never occurred to anyone to call in a doctor. Thus when he was two Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn contracted ophthalmia; for days nothing was done about it; then, as the condition persisted, he was taken to the village barber for treatment. As a result, he became totally blind.³

To him, the disability first manifested itself in the consciousness that he somehow held a unique position in the household. His mother was at times compassionate and tender, but at times also strangely neglectful and unsympathetic. His father was more uniformly kind, but there were times when his disappointment in the

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(1) Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn, al-Āyyām, I, p. 18.
(2) Ibid., pp. 84-91.
(3) Ibid., p. 115.
child made itself felt. As for Tāhā's brothers and sisters, they observed in their dealings with him a certain caution which he disliked, because he discerned it it pity and contempt. With increasing resentment, he realised that he lacked some advantage that they had, and when at last he understood, this resentment became a deep silent sorrow.¹

But life was not without its interests and delights. The growing boy had his favourite haunts, made friends and gained access to what seemed to him the supremely elegant household of the mulāhīz, sat on one of the boxes outside the shop of Shaykh Muhammad 'Abd al-Wāhid and listened to tittle-tattle about the neighbourhood.² He was particularly fond of listening to itinerant ballad-mongers, and when, in the local kuttāb, the master delegated some of his authority to him, he followed the general practice of accepting bribes, except that in his case the bribe had to be either some delicacy or the relation of a tale.³ In this way he became acquainted with most of the literature available in provincial communities - accounts of the deeds of virtuous men and the exploits of legendary heroes, moralistic fables, devotional Ṣūfī tracts and poems, and books of magic.⁴ His father more than once made use of him in Ṣūfī exercises of intercession, and these were so closely linked with magic that he made some excursions into the black art!⁵

¹ Ibid., pp. 16-17.
² Ibid., pp. 23-58.
³ Ibid., p. 50.
⁴ Ibid., p. 92.
⁵ Ibid., p. 94.
The obvious career for a person in his condition was that of a reciter of the Qur'ān, or at most, as was his father's ambition for him, that of a teacher in the Azhar. It was the text of the Qur'ān that formed practically the whole curriculum of the local kutṭāh to which he went. By the age of nine, Tāḥā had satisfied his half-ignorant teacher that he had memorised it all,¹ although he later allowed himself to forget it, had a most embarrassing experience when his father called upon him to recite parts of it in the presence of friends, and so had to apply himself to the task of memorisation all over again.² Indeed he was soon to become more learned than his teacher, for an elder brother who was studying at the Azhar taught him the Alfiyyah of Ibn Mālik,³ and an inspector of Roads taught him the traditional art of Qur'ānic recitation.⁴ And in 1902 he was sent to Cairo, in his brother's care, to join the Azhar.

He has given us this description of himself at the time:⁵

I knew him at the age of thirteen when he was sent to Cairo to attend lessons at the Azhar. He was indeed at that time a hard-working and diligent youth. He was thin and pale, of neglected appearance, nearer to poverty than to wealth. The eye could take him all in, with his dirty cloak, with his skull-cap which had turned from white to dark black (sic), with his long shirt which showed from under his cloak and which had become multi-coloured because of all the food which had fallen on it, and with his worn-out, patched footwear; the eye could take all that in and yet smile at him when it saw him, in spite of his ragged state and sightless eyes, clear of brow and smiling, hurrying to the Azhar with his guide, sure of step and unhesitating in his walk, without that clouding which usually covers the

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(1) Ibid., p. 25.
(2) Ibid., p. 39.
(3) Ibid., p. 74.
(4) Ibid., p. 111.
(5) Ibid., p. 143.
faces of the blind; the eye could take all that in and yet smile at him and observe him with some sympathy as it saw him in the lecture circle, listening with all his being to the shaykh, greedily gulping down his words, smiling at the same time, uncomplaining, unwearying, and showing no inclination to play while the young lads around him played or yearned to play.

He seems indeed to have started his Azhar career with a receptive soul and high expectations. He had in him a genuinely enquiring mind that was thirsting for knowledge. He also aspired to the same prestige as was conferred upon his elder brother by virtue of his connection with the ancient University. Perhaps also some religious fervour contributed to his zeal, for the death of an elder brother from cholera in August 1902¹ had brought upon him his most intense religious experience, and knowing that his brother had been neglectful of religious duties  Ṭāhā for a time performed his rites twice over, once for his own and once for his brother's sake.²

In his first months as an Azhar student  Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was to experience all the poignancy of solitude and homesickness. His elder brother was not unkind, but he had his own interests, his own studies, and his own circle of friends of like age, and he could not understand - except when he overheard a half-smothered sob³ - that the reticent and undemanding boy ached to share the company of friends even beyond his years, or wished, although blind, that a light be left burning in his room when he was left alone because he could "hear" the darkness closing in on him.⁴ This loneliness was relieved when a young cousin of Ṭāhā's joined him at the Azhar;⁵

(1) Ibid., p. 128.
(2) Ibid., p. 130.
(3) Al-Ayyām, II, p. 105.
(4) Ibid., p. 38.
(5) Ibid., p. 106.
later still, when his brother left for Madrasat ul-Qadā' and his cousin for Dār ul-‘Ulūm, his family provided him with a small black servant to be his cook, his guide, and his reader,¹ so that he increased his independence and freedom of movement.

His personal problems apart, he was living in a community where first-class teachers like Marṣafī were paid only 350 piastres a month (£3.11. 9¼) in addition to a daily allocation of bread.² Tāhā Ḥusayn, his brother, and others shared a room for which they paid from twenty to twenty-five piastres a month;³ and his cousin and he fed themselves on his brother's daily allocation of four loaves of bread, on honey with which they were provided from home, and on whatever else they could buy for one piastre (2½d.) a day.⁴ Such conditions inevitably resulted in "diseases of the body, of morality, and of the mind".⁵ Shoes left unattended in the mosque, for example, were all too often stolen.⁶ Yet one cannot help admiring the self-restraint and the firmness of purpose of so many of the young students left to their own devices. Starved of pleasures, they might find vicarious relief in listening to the obscenities recounted by a half-crazed married man among them,⁷ but if the devil visited them in a prurient dream, be it in the middle of winter, they would purify

(1) Ibid., p. 181.
(2) Ibid., p. 166.
(3) Ibid., p. 73.
(4) Ibid., pp. 111-112.
(5) Ibid., p. 73.
(6) Ibid., p. 148.
(7) Ibid., p. 47.
themselves by a cold bath before the dawn prayer.¹ And they laboured through a twelve-year course with scarcely any check on attendance or progress until the final test, sustained by prospects of social approval and respect rather than of financial rewards. Some lectures started at dawn and others extended into the evening, so that there was a great deal for earnest students to do, and these organised themselves into cliques to discuss and study their lessons together, and to visit their favourite teachers in their home.

It was in his fourth year at the Azhar² that Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn formed such an association with Ahmad Ḥasan uz-Zayyāt, now editor of ar-Risālah and a writer and translator noted for the elegance of his style, and Maḥmūd Ḥasan Zanāṭī (d. 1949), a linguist and textual critic. The activities and temper of the little group, of which Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn was the acknowledged leader, are enlightening. They had their lighter pursuits, taking walks in the suburbs, listening to Zanāṭī's stock of anecdotes, or satirising one another in verse; but even the nicknames they gave one another revealed profound interests: Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn was al-Mubarrad, Zanāṭī was az-Zamakhshari, and Zayyāt was Tha'lab. When they were not attending courses or studying together, they were joining poetry circles, haunting newspaper offices to submit their poems, or taking advantage of the facilities offered by the National Library. Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn and az-Zayyāt later took to studying French, whereas Zanāṭī preferred to rummage among old Oriental manuscripts. And all three made great show of their contempt for traditional Azharist learning, and

(1) Ibid., p. 95.
of their worship of beauty in any form - and "beauty in the life of young men of the Azhar who see nothing but ugliness and hear nothing but heavy, dull speech can be only dream, or imagination, or ideal, or something of the sort".¹

For the boundless sea of learning which Tāhā Ḥusayn had expected to find at the Azhar, and into which he had been prepared to throw himself that he might drink from it as much as he could before he drowned in it,² had proved to him an unqualified disappointment. It was dogmatic, it was dead, and it was carried from generation to generation by teachers whose liveliest interest was in petty intrigues against one another, who differed from the provincial men of learning whom he had already learnt to mock only in greater affectation of speech and manner, and who frequently silenced the objections or questions of a student by a flow of insults or by physical violence.³ All too often, in anger⁴ or indifference,⁵ they taunted the sensitive youth with his infirmity. But such direct wounds to his pride are not the principal cause of his growing disaffection; genuinely inquisitive and self-assertive, he was fundamentally out of tune with the institution. He swears that he began to despise its traditional "learning" from the very first lecture that he heard;⁶ and on his first holiday at home he

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(2) Al-Āyyām, II, p. 17.
(3) Ibid., p. 115.
(4) Ibid., p. 153.
showed that his sympathies naturally lay with the movement started by Muḥammad ‘Abduh when he took to criticising the superstitious practices of the Ṣūfīs, to the great annoyance of family and neighbours.¹

Dr. Ch. C. Adams tends to minimise the influence that Muḥammad ‘Abduh might have had on him, asserting that he joined the Azhar only after Muḥammad ‘Abduh had left it, and that he has absolutely no connection with the Manār line of succession.² In reality, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn joined the Azhar in 1902, and Muḥammad ‘Abduh did not finally resign from it until 1905; and although Ṭāhā Ḥusayn himself did not meet the Imām,³ his elder brother and his circle of friends were close adherents of his.⁴ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn listened intently to their discussions, and even studied with his brother some of the literary texts recommended by Muḥammad ‘Abduh.⁵ Both in his autobiography and elsewhere, he has expressed his sympathy with those Azharist disciples of Muḥammad ‘Abduh who fervently thought of themselves as apostles of renascence and reform, and who spoke of the hope that they might one day teach the sciences as the Imām wanted them taught, of applying his principles in courts, of stamping out bribery and corruption, of abolishing polygamy and restricting divorce, and of reviving the philosophies of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Ṭusād and the Rhetoric of al-Jurjānī.⁶ He has also told us what his

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(1) Al-Ayyām, II, p. 127.
(2) Islam and Modernism in Egypt, pp. 258-259.
(3) Al-Ayyām, II, p. 146.
(4) Ibid., II, p. 33, pp. 64-65.
(6) FI 'ṣ-Ṣayf, pp. 44-45.
His favourite reading during vacations consisted of; it included translations, the articles of the Hilāl and Muqtatāf, legendary tales and novels that portrayed a life different from the one he knew, and the writings of Qāsim Amīn, of Muḥammad Ḥashīd Riḍā in the Manār, and of Muḥammad ʿAbduh himself.¹

Moreover, the Azharist teacher to whom Ṭāhā Ḥusayn acknowledges his greatest debt of gratitude was one of Muḥammad ʿAbduh's protégés, al-Maṣṣafī. It was through him that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn discovered literature, and began to discover himself. The traditional training of an Azharist ʿālim did not include the study of original literary texts as such, and after three years of this training, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was considering whether or not he should discontinue his studies altogether.² But his interest was awakened when he and his two friends took to attending al-Maṣṣafī's new-fangled optional courses on the Mufassāl, the Ḥamāṣah, and the Kāmil, and they soon became staunch partisans and even intimates of his. Al-Maṣṣafī's aim was to develop literary taste in his students. To this end, he encouraged them to read only what he deemed the best - the vigorous, straightforward poets of the Jāhiliyyah and early Islām - and steered them away from the affectations and verbal trickery of Muslim, Ḥabīb Ubn Aws, al-Mutanabbī, or al-Maṣṣarrī.³ When a piece was read, every figure connected with it - the poet, the rāwī, the rhetorician or philologist commenting it - was subjected to unbridled criticism. First the general purport of the piece, then the component ideas, and

(1) Al-Ayyām, II, pp. 175-176.
(2) Ibid., p. 142.
(3) Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlā', pp. 5-6.
finally the artistry of expression were scrutinised and evaluated. And this always led to general reflections on contemporary taste, unflattering observations on the Azharist type of intellect, expressions of revolt against the ties imposed by the Azharist hierarchy, and immoderate attacks on other Azharist teachers.¹

As his loyal and outspoken disciples, Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn and his two friends soon made themselves unpopular in the Azhar. They jeered at all who did not share their views, and attended the lectures of rival teachers only to pick faults and report them to al-Marṣafī.² They roused particular indignation when they expressed the opinion that there was no evidence of heresy in al-Ḥajjāj's remark that those who went in procession round the prophet's tomb and pulpit revered "nothing but decayed bones and a few sticks". They were summoned before the Administrative Council of the Azhar, several members of which had been subject to their attacks, and a pretence was made and kept up for some time that their names had been struck off the rolls of the Azhar. The following day, al-Marṣafī was ordered to discontinue his course on al-Kāmil.³

Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's two friends and al-Marṣafī himself were to varying degrees subdued. Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn, on the contrary, wrote a strong attack on the Azhar and its Rector, and took it to al-Jarīḍah for publication. In his own interest, publication was refused. But the editor had received him kindly, and thereafter the young rebel took to frequenting the Jarīḍah circle. It was a circle of

(1) Al-Ayyām, II, p. 163.
(2) Ibid., p. 162.
(3) Ibid., pp. 169-170.
" trabūsh - wearers", of Modernists imbued with ideas from the West. It was also, by Azharist standards, a wealthy and refined circle.¹ Both intellectual inclination and personal ambition made Ĵāhā Ḥusayn long to earn a place in it. Already he had taken to attending the evening lectures of the Egyptian University from the first week of its creation.² Soon, the frequency of his attendance at the Azhar was reduced to one lecture every week or every fortnight, and it was only for his father's sake that he retained this nominal connection. Finally in 1912 - having previously obtained from two shaykhs he had never met before attestations that he had begun to attend their courses in 1900³ - he was deemed to have completed his course, and presented himself for the ʿālamiyyah examination. He has assured me that he knew his examiners had instructions to make him fail, and fail he did. Years later, after his return from France, there was a suggestion that he might be granted the title without examination, but this he was not prepared to accept.⁴ He owed to the Azhar a close acquaintance with the traditional sciences and a considerable fund of religious and scholastic lore. But on the conservatism and the limitations of life and thought and action that the Azhar stood for, he had resolutely turned his back.

He had brought to the Egyptian University an undiminished thirst for knowledge, and this time he was not disappointed. It was the practice of the University in those early days, before the war and

(1) Ibid., p. 173.
(2) Adīb, p. 11, p. 13.
(3) Al-Áyyām, II, p. 182.
(4) Interview, 11 Sept. 1950.
the need for economy forced it to alter its policy, to import distinguished Orientalists as professors, and Tāhā Ḥusayn has acknowledged his indebtedness to Littmann, Santillana, and especially to the brilliant Professor Nallino. Their scholarly approach was a necessary complement to the enthusiasm instilled by Marṣafī in Tāhā Ḥusayn's literary formation. From these Orientalists he learnt that a critic must study both good and bad writing, that his linguistic equipment should include knowledge of the origins and development of his own tongue and of some others, and that he should also be acquainted with the philosophy, religion, history and geography of the people whose literature he studied, and be versed in social and individual psychology.¹

At the same time he was drawn more and more closely into the circle of Ahmad Luṭfī 's-Sayyid, and his critical articles in the service of the Modernist ideal were assured of publication in the Jarīdah. The effect of this association is shown in an enthusiastic tribute by Tāhā Ḥusayn in which he summarised Luṭfī 's-Sayyid's "philosophy" as a philosophy of renovation, not of rejection of the old; a philosophy of freedom and sincerity in the widest sense of these terms; a philosophy of good taste and economy of expression; and a philosophy of dignity and of recognition of human rights.²

With the possible exception of "economy of expression", this summary forms as we shall see a significantly close approximation to Tāhā Husayn's own principles and ideals.

It was therefore with full consciousness of the departure he was

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(1) Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī '1- 'Alā', pp. 6-8.
(2) Hadīthul-Arbī'ā', III, pp. 56-59.
making in the study of Arabic Literature, and of the service he would be rendering to Modernism, that he undertook to apply Western canons of criticism in what was to be the University's first doctorate thesis, *Tajdid Dhikrā Abī 'l-‘Alā*.

His choice of al-Ma'arrī as a subject, however, must be attributed to personal factors, for al-Ma'arrī's predilection for verbal jugglery was the very antithesis of what the Modernists advocated. In *Adīb*, a strictly factual narration of events,1 Tāhā Ḥusayn admits that he was at the time trying to identify himself with the poet2 who like him was blind, like him was painfully sensitive about his infirmity, and like him appeared to be in rebellion against the bigoted and tyrannical religious authorities of the time.

Pugnacious as ever, Tāhā Ḥusayn did not ensure a safe passage for his thesis. One of his teachers was Shaykh Muḥammad ul-Mahdī, and each had considerable esteem for the other. But in the course of one of al-Mahdī's lectures, he contended that when al-Ma'arrī said: "The days shatter us as though we were of glass, but (of glass) which cannot be re-moulded,"3 no denial of resurrection was implied since the irreparability spoken of applied to glass alone. Tāhā Ḥusayn argued that on the contrary glass could be repaired, and it was humans who could not. He was challenged to prove that the re-moulding of glass was known in al-Ma'arrī's time, and as he could not then quote chapter and verse, he had to retire crestfallen from

(1) Interview.
(2) p. 146.
the affray. But in the course of his research he discovered two lines in which al-Ma‘arri spoke clearly of glass being re-moulded,\(^1\) and he made a point of embodying the point and the circumstances which had led to it in his thesis,\(^2\) knowing that al-Mahdi would be one of his examiners. As a result, the public discussion of the thesis which took place in 1914 lasted three hours, spent mostly in bitter wrangling between Tāhā Husayn and al-Mahdi, and when the examining body retired for deliberation, al-Mahdi prevailed upon his colleagues to qualify the thesis as "Very Good" instead of the "Excellent" which they thought it deserved.\(^3\)

At the time, educational missions abroad had been resumed, and Tāhā Husayn toyed with the curious idea that he might go to Paris as al-Ma‘arri had gone to Baghdād to "complete" his education, and then - again like al-Ma‘arri - return to some Egyptian village to live in disdainful isolation. He was an obvious choice for a scholarship abroad, and he was about to sail in 1914 when war was declared.\(^4\) His departure was postponed until the first German thrust towards Paris had been halted, and then in the spring of 1915 - still in Azharist garb\(^5\) - he sailed away, heading not for Paris but for Montpellier. He was back in Egypt in September, and after he had attended one of al-Mahdi's lectures he renewed the feud between them by publishing in the weekly as-Sufūr a very unfavourable comparison

\[\text{(1)}\]
\[\text{ان الزجاجة لم حظت سبكة وك لاتكسر من درفـما سبكة يسبك المائ" الزجاج ولا }
\[\text{يسبك الـ"ال الزجاجـاج لا يشـتغل.} \]


\[\text{(3)}\] Hadīth ul-Arbi‘ā, III, pp. 49-50.

\[\text{(4)}\] Adīb, pp. 146-148.

\[\text{(5)}\] Fi‘s-Sāzf, Ch. 2.
of it with the lectures he had heard in France. Al-Mahdi sought to have his scholarship cancelled, and he almost succeeded for Tāhā Husayn refused to apologise. But well-meaning friends engineered a meeting between them, and the two no sooner met than they were on good terms again.¹ In December of that year, Tāhā Husayn again left Egypt, this time for the Sorbonne.

With energy and determination, he applied himself to the study of French, Greek, and Latin, read French and classical literature as well as philosophy and ancient history, and in 1919 he submitted a thesis entitled "La Philosophie Sociale d'Ibn Khaldoun". He received the University's doctorate, with mention "Très Honorable" on 12th January 1918, and was given the doctorat d'État the following year.

He was not, however, merely collecting laurels. He was soon made aware of the lack of general culture provided by Egyptian education when he found that - in spite of his Egyptian doctorate - he had to study French school-texts before he could follow the courses of the Sorbonne.² In contrast, he was deeply impressed by the intellectual liveliness, the keen interest in the most recent currents of thought, the powers of subtle critical analysis displayed by Parisians. Eagerly he steeped himself in their atmosphere, and has since retained an immoderate affection and admiration for Paris and indeed for most things French. Paris is to him the capital of the modern world even as Athens was the capital of the ancient world, with this difference that in knowledge, in philosophy, in freedom,

² Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr, pp. 252-253.
and in civilisation Paris has all the immense superiority over Athens which two thousand years of progress have brought about.¹

It is neither idle nor disrespectful to connect his receptiveness to French culture with his marriage to a highly educated French lady. He first met her at Montpellier, on 12 May 1915, when he interviewed her and her mother about her becoming his secretary and reader. It was the first time he had been host to a young lady, and the impression she made on him was as profound as it was immediate; he slept badly that night, and forever after celebrated the anniversary of this meeting. For the next two months, they met every evening to read seventeenth century literature, and occasionally to converse. Then came the summer when she went away, followed by the three months which he spent in Egypt. They were unhappy months when her voice kept haunting him, and he felt himself a lonesome stranger even among his fellow-Egyptians. But when he next went to Paris, she resumed her duties as his reader, but he confesses that he sometimes so lost himself in the music of her voice that he failed to follow the text she was reading. They parted again only for a few weeks when she considered his marriage proposal, and wrote to him signifying her consent. After a year's engagement, they were married on 9 August 1917.² She has since given him a son and a daughter, and has softened so many rough edges in his life that he has described her as the angel who has altered his circumstances from "misery to felicity, from despair to hopefulness, from poverty to

¹ Ivlin Baʿid, pp. 173-174.
² From an article contributed by Tāhā Husayn to al-Ithnayn, reproduced in the Egyptian Gazette, 20 Dec. 1941.
riches, and from wretchedness to happiness and serenity".¹

When he returned to Egypt in 1919, both his Azharist robes and his intention to imitate al-Maʿarrī's seclusion had long been discarded. In the first thirty years of his life, he had, as it were, re-lived two centuries of Egypt's history: he had shared the accumulated treasures of popular lore and traditional sciences; he had rebelled against the stagnancy of intellectual life; he had re-discovered a more vital and vigorous past, and had fallen under the spell of Westernisation. Now, with fewer divisions in himself than in the nation, he could take the lead in working for a happy marriage of the native and the imported components of Egypt's culture. This purpose is constant in his public career from 1919 to the present day, although there have been changes in the stresses laid and the means adopted in its service. Naturally, these changes are closely connected with variations in the mood and temper of the active elements of the nation.

From 1919 to the late twenties, the scene was darkened by a bitter struggle against British domination, and the nationalist will found its spokesman in the intransigent Saʿd Zaghlūl, who coined the motto: "Complete independence or violent death." The delegation (wafd) which he had formed to argue Egypt's case at the Paris peace conference became a party, and he insisted on the recognition of Egypt's independence as a preliminary to negotiations with Britain. Such movements inevitably engender a certain amount of xenophobia, and although the trend towards Westernisation was by no means reversed, too ostentatious an admiration for the ways of the West was

¹ Al-Ayyām, I, p. 146.
out of fashion, and many a Christian who bore a Western name changed it to an Arabic one.

There were some, however, who felt that greater concessions might be obtained from the British by graduated demands than by Sa‘d’s intransigence, and the first split in the nationalist ranks occurred in 1921 when ‘Adlī Pasha, then Prime Minister, agreed to negotiate with Britain. The following year he founded the Liberal-Constitutional party. From the start, Tāhā Ḥusayn supported these moderates, and was a contributor to their daily, as-Siyāsah.

As ‘Adlī Pasha was in power at the time, those who joined his party were open to the charge of currying favour and placing their interests above those of the nation. But it was also a natural rallying ground for intellectuals, especially those educated in the West, who gave a high priority to Egypt’s cultural needs. Clearly Tāhā Ḥusayn was one of these, and his career in this period shows him openly and consciously trying to educate the public in fundamentals.

To do this, he had two powerful means at his disposal: the University and the printing press.

On his return from France, he was appointed Professor of Ancient History, and he immediately came under criticism because the recognition of Islam’s debt to Hellenism was repugnant to many. And when he was transferred to the Chair of Arabic Literature in 1925, he roused even more violent storms of protest by his liberal references to religious matters in his lectures on pre-Islamic poetry. But his eloquence and his boldness made him a hero in the eyes of many students. Besides, his influence in the University is not to be

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measured by his lectures alone. In March 1925, the University was reconstituted as a State institution, and when its Administrative council met for the first time on 12 May 1925, Tāhā Ḥusayn was a member of it, and his friend Aḥmad Luṭfī 's-Sayyid was its President. As an administrator, Tāhā Ḥusayn persistently advocated not only the expansion of the University, but also the affirmation of its independence in respect of the Ministry of Education, and the extension of its control over schools.¹

At the same time, he was reaching a wider public with his translations, articles, and books.

His interest in the social order carried him far beyond party politics, and even as he praised Aḥmad Luṭfī 's-Sayyid for withdrawing from the political arena when active participation ceased to be effectual in order to study Aristotle and publish a translation of the Nicomachean Ethics,² he himself translated the Constitution of Athens in 1921.

His contribution to educational principles at the time appeared in a curious form. He was commissioned by al-Hilāl to translate Gustave Le Bon's Psychologie de l'Education. This was largely critical of the French system which Tāhā Ḥusayn admired, and some aspects of which he wished to transplant to Egypt; so Tāhā Ḥusayn loaded parts of his translation with footnotes flatly contradicting the text.³

In the service of literature, with the express purposes of

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(1) v. infra, p.152.
(3) v. infra, p.145, pp.237-238.
acquainting the public with the best of Western poetry and prose and of exercising Arabic in the expression of finer shades of meaning, he translated excerpts from Greek drama in 1920,¹ and a few French modern poems;² he also published periodically between 1923 and 1927 paraphrases of a very large number of French contemporary plays, later collected in Qisas Tamthiliyyah, Laḥazāt (two volumes) and Sawt Bāris (also in two volumes). At the same time, fearing that the lure of European literature might lead to neglect of ancient poems which made difficult reading, he contributed to as-Siyāsah from 1922 to 1925 a weekly column which consisted of paraphrases and critiques of Jahili, Umayyad, or early ḌABBĀSID poets.³

Of his critiques and reviews on contemporary productions, his articles on Ḥāfiẓ and Shawqi were collected shortly after the death of the two poets in 1932. In these he consistently deprecated conventionalism and verbal ornamentation, and it is not surprising to find him engaged, in 1923, in a violent, and at times unduly personal, polemic with the outstanding exponent of ornamental writing of the time, Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq ur-Rāfi‘I.⁴

His most notorious assault on public opinion, however, was in connection with his view that recorded pre-Islamic poetry was spurious. He first expounded his theory in his lectures at the

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¹ Suhuf Mukhtarah min ash-shi‘r it-tamthili ‘ind al-Yūnān.
² Incorporated in Ḥāfiẓ wa Shawqi.
³ Ḥadīth al-ʿArbi‘ā’, v. II, most of v. I, and approximately half of v. III.
⁴ Ibid., III, pp. 5-23.
University, but in 1926, though fully aware of the reception it was likely to have, he published it in book form. The reaction was violent and immediate, but it was caused not so much by the theory itself as by its religious implications.

Of course, Tāhā Ḥusayn had long resented the braking effect of religious traditionalism on intellectual development. From 1923 onward, with increasing boldness, he had been disseminating his views in articles later collected — together with other miscellaneous material — in Min Baʿṭid. But these were, on the whole, anticlerical rather than anti-religious. In 1925, he had also made a survey of human thought in Ḍaʿat ul-Fikr, in which he had portrayed religion as engaged in a losing battle with Reason; but he had said nothing specifically against Islam, and it is an indication both of his influence in the educational hierarchy and of the lack of discernment of the religious authorities that the book was officially adopted as a reading text in secondary schools. In Fi ʿsh-Shiʿr il-Jāhilī, however, he not only made out that religious motives had contributed to the forging of so-called pre-Islamic poems, but also spoke of the Qurʾanic stories of Ibrāhīm and Iṣmāʿīl as myths. Such a challenge could not be ignored. It was taken up in articles, in lectures,¹ and even in entire books.² Both the Azhar and the Manār

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declared him an apostate. Indeed the Ri'āsah ud-Dīniyyat ul-‘Ulyā tried to have him materially penalised. Two years earlier, it had been enough to deprive ‘Alī ‘Abd ur-Rāziq of his ‘Ālamīyyah to ensure that he would lose his position as a judge. But Tāhā Ḥusayn held no Azharist qualification. The Ri'āsah therefore argued that since the Constitution stated that Islam was the official religion of the State, the Government was under obligation to dismiss him from his position, to bring him to trial, and to confiscate his book. The matter was in fact debated in parliament, and an inquiry was started by the Parquet. But the University, headed by Ahmad Luṭfī 's-Sayyid, adopted the view that its academic freedom was at stake, and took sides with Tāhā Ḥusayn, refusing the resignation which he submitted. Eventually, the book was withdrawn, the reference to the myths of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl was deleted, and the remainder, considerably expanded, was re-published in 1927 under the title of Fi 'l-Adab il-Jāhilī. To Tāhā Ḥusayn, little harm had been done; indeed his prestige with Modernists and especially with students had been enhanced. At the same time, the main thesis of his book had been largely obscured by the polemic on its religious corollaries, and Tāhā Ḥusayn may well have reflected on the unwisdom of compromising essentials by unnecessary thrusts against the most sensitive spots of public opinion. He never recanted, and has never before or since leaned excessively on the side of caution; he did

(1) C.C. Adams, Islam and Modernism in Egypt, p. 259.
(2) Min Ba‘īd, pp. 242-243.
not even, at the time, desist from his campaign against the influence of religious authorities outside their own sphere; but never again did he display defiance to the actual wording of the Qur'ān.

It was not the only change that occurred, and the period from the late twenties to 1944 forms another distinct phase of Ţāhā Ḥusayn's public career.

For one thing, he changed his political allegiance. In 1930, ʻĪsmā‘īl Șīdqī Pasha, a "palace" man, formed a cabinet, imposed a new constitution which provided for indirect representation, founded a new party called al-Ḥizb ush-Sha‘bī, and until September 1933 ruled with a heavy hand. The threat to popular government now made as insistent a call on political emotions as did relations with Great Britain, so that the original cause of the split between Wafdist and Liberal-Constitutionalists lost some of its relative importance, and the two parties temporarily joined forces in opposition to the new regime. The Wafd itself had undergone some changes, for Sa‘d had died in 1927 and had been succeeded by Muṣṭafā ‘n-ʻAḥwās Pasha; and the Party - always sensitive to prevailing public opinion - was making itself attractive to the Westernised intellectuals which the University was turning out in increasing numbers. Ţāhā Ḥusayn began to see in it the only power capable of withstanding autocracy.

The personal element was not absent from this conversion. In 1931, Ţāhā Ḥusayn became the first Egyptian Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Always insistent on the independence of the University, he

soon clashed with İsmet İsa Pasha, the Minister of Education in Şidqî's authoritarian cabinet. The result was that in March 1932 he was transferred by Ministerial decree to the Ministry itself "that he might replace Shaykh Muḥammad ul-Ghamrāwî Bey, Inspector of Arabic, when he (the latter) reaches the age limit on 21 May".¹ The move, which was made without consultation of the University authorities, was clearly intended to assert the Ministry's supremacy and to remove Tâhâ Ḥusayn from a position of influence among students. There were strikes in all Faculties of the University, and several members of the staff, including the President Ahmad Luṭfî 's-Sayyid, resigned; but the Minister remained unmoved.

Taha Husayn became an increasingly active Wafdist, and his second term of office as Dean of the Faculty of Arts, from 1936 to 1938, was almost entirely coincident with the life of a Wafdist cabinet. Succeeding administrations also made use of his gifts in a number of cultural positions, but it was when the Wafd again returned to power in February 1942 that he became most active in government service. By 1944, he had combined the positions of Technical Adviser to the Ministry of Education, Acting Rector of the Fārūq University which he had helped Najîb ul-Hilālî Pasha to create, member of the Administrative Council of the National Library, member of the Committees on Egyptian State Broadcasting and on Cultural Exchange, and member of the Fu'ād Academy for the Arabic Language, and of the Alexandria Municipal Commission. In addition, he held several positions not controlled by the Government, such as the

(1) As-Siyāsah, 4 March 1932.
Presidency of the Egyptian Institute and of the Association of French Language Teachers, and he was on the Committee of the Igра publications. Most of these positions were unpaid, so that his income from public moneys was only L.E.1050 for his services as Technical Adviser to the Ministry of Education, and a nominal L.E.300 p.a. as Acting Rector of the Fārūq University. Nevertheless, he was set up by other parties as an example of preferential treatment under Wafdist administration, and in October 1944, a few days after the Cabinet had been dismissed by the King, he resigned from Government service.

Whether in or out of office, he had attained considerable personal prestige in Egypt, in the Arab world, and even in Europe. At home, he was a celebrated writer and an authoritative critic, and in 1936 King Fu'ād had conferred upon him the Order of the Nile, which carried with it the title of Bey. He was a member of the Arab Scientific Academy of Damascus, and he held the Lebanese Order of the Cedars. He had gained recognition even in Europe, for he was a corresponding member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres of Paris, a member of the French Asiatic Society, a doctor (honoris causa) of the University of Lyon, an officer of the Légion d'Honneur, and a Commander of the Order of Leopold.

This was also a period when Egypt scored some spectacular successes on the international scene with the 1936 treaty, the abolition of capitulations, and its admission into the League of Nations. The Egyptian Renaissance was attracting attention in the West, and some of its products - including some of Tāhā Husayn's

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(1) Bourse Égyptienne, 30 March 1944.

(2) Progrès Égyptien, 22 June 1942.
books - were even being translated into European languages. It seemed as if the time for reaping had come, and Tāhā Husayn's earlier works, dedicated to educating the Egyptian reading public in fundamentals, now gave way to others of more immediate intrinsic appeal, reflecting self-confidence and even self-satisfaction.

In the service of education, he wrote Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr (1938) which propounded a vast and detailed programme of reform, and he collaborated in the production of a number of school-texts in literature.¹

He did not forget his aim of acquainting the public with the best of literature; in 1935 he translated Andromaque, and in 1944 paraphrased a number of difficult passages from al-Maʿarrī in Sawt Abī 1-ʿAlāʾ. He also collaborated in the edition of a number of old texts.

As a critic, however, both in his longer works, such as Maʿ Abī 1-ʿAlāʾ fī Sijnih (1930) and Maʿ al-Mutanabbi (1936), and in his innumerable lectures and articles,² he was less obviously concerned with the relevance of his subject to modernistic writing than with its intrinsic values; and especially in his references to contemporaries, he assumed a tone of authority which some resented, and which was contributory to short-lived quarrels with Tawfīq ul-Ḥakīm and with his old friend az-Zayyāṭ.³

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(1) e.g. al-Mujmal fī Tārīkh il-Adab il-ʿArabī (1930), al-Muntakhab min Adab il-ʿArab (1931), al-Tawjih il-Adabi (1941).

(2) Most of them are to be found in the following collections: Min Hadith ish-Shiʿr wa 'n-Nathr (1936); Hadith ul-Arbiʿāʾ, III (1945); Fushūl fī 1-Adab wa 'n-Naqd (1945).

(3) See al-Wādi and ar-Risālah, 1935.
Finally, to this period belong those of his works which are farthest from didacticism and nearest to personal or entertainment values: his autobiography, a volume consisting mainly of reminiscences and personal essays, and all his longer narratives.

Since 1944, Taha Husayn has received innumerable marks of recognition from abroad. The University of Montpellier made him a Doctor (honoris causa) in April 1946; in November 1947, when the U.N.E.S.C.O. held its Congress in Bayrut and the Egyptian Government did not include him in its delegation, the Lebanese government invited him to attend in his personal capacity; in 1949 he was invited to lecture in Madrid, at the Sorbonne, and in London, his name was put forward for the Nobel prize in literature; in 1950 he visited Rome where he received an honorary doctorate, France where he received the Grande Médaille de la Langue Francaise from the Academy, and Britain where he received an honorary D.Litt. from Oxford University; and in March 1951 he received yet another doctorate from the University of Athens.

In Egypt, however, especially during the first four years after his resignation from government service, the authorities were markedly inimical to him, and he to them. In June 1945, a suggestion that he might be invited to lecture at the Egyptian

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(2) Fi 's-Sayf, 1933.
(3) 'Alā Hāmish is-Sīrāḥ: I (1937), II (1939), III (1943); Adīb (1934); al-Qasr ul-Mashūr (1936); Du‘ā’ ul-Karawān (1941); al-Hubb ud-Dā‘īt (1942); Ahlām Shahrazād (1943); Shajarat ul-Bu’s (1944).
University roused storms of protest in Parliament. In 1948, he was forced by the government of the day\(^1\) to liquidate the al-Kātib ul-Miṣrī publishing house which he had been directing since 1945. In 1949, he was awarded the Fu'ād prize for literature and was placed on the committee set up to edit the works of Ibn Sīnā in celebration of his millenary; but the reprinting in book-form of some stories and articles strongly critical of social conditions, under the title of al-Muʿāḥḍḥabūna fī 'l-Ard, was forbidden in Egypt, and had to be carried out in Lebanon; and as late as on 20th December 1949 Prime Minister Sirrī Pasha openly opposed his nomination to the Presidency of the Journalists' Union.\(^2\) Three weeks later, however, the Wafd had swept the polls at the election, and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was Minister of Education. He immediately plunged into a programme of vast expansion at all stages of formal education, and has pursued it with unflagging energy ever since. Its benefits and its costs cannot yet be judged objectively, but it has earned him a formal vote of thanks from his colleagues in the Cabinet,\(^3\) and the title of Pasha from the King.

He has written nothing in the last year, so that his latest literary contributions all belong to the five years when he was in disfavour. They include Jannat uṣḥ-Shawk (1945), a volume of epigrams, attempted with the purpose of introducing a new genre into Arabic literature; translations of André Gide’s Oedipe and Thésée (1946); a historical study on ‘Uthmān (1947); and al-Waʾd ul-Haqq

\(^1\) Interview.

\(^2\) Al-Ahram, 21 December 1949.

\(^3\) Ar-Risālah, XVIII, 903 (23 Oct. 1950), p. 1188.
(1950), consisting of stories on the early martyrs of Islam - all of which have claims to be considered disinterested intellectual exercises, submitted to the public because of their inherent qualities. All his other works, however, bear the clear imprint of his relationship with the authorities. In his preface to his translation of Voltaire's Zadig, he makes it clear that he has chosen it because of its references to tyrannical government, and that there are parallels to be drawn with present times. Rīḥlat ur-Rabī' (1948), Mir'at ud-Ḍamīr il-Ḥadīth, al Muṣadhdhabūna fī 'l-Ard, and Jannat ul-Ḥayawān (1949), as well as his innumerable articles in the daily and periodical press consist mainly of sketches, short tales, and essays depicting the sufferings of the Egyptian masses on one hand, and on the other the greed, the callousness, the selfishness, the lack of principle prevalent among rulers, would-be rulers, and their sycophants. Naturally, not a few of the epigrams in Jannat ush-Shawk are in the same vein, and the concern with opposition to a misguided ruler in 'Uthmān and with resistance to oppression in al-Wa'd ul-Haqq is not unconnected with it.

Much of his production, therefore, is thinly disguised propaganda against the men in power, and he has admitted that during those dark years writers had to disguise their intentions and pretend to editors, censors, and government spies that what they wrote was "pure literature, unconnected with real life or government policy".¹ Much of it is actuated by a deep personal disappointment which sometimes comes up to the surface as when, leaving Egypt on a visit to Greece he announces that he will find in literature, art, and music

consolation from the ugliness of politics and self-interest, of intrigues and treachery; and he even suggests that he is disowning Egypt even as Egypt has disowned him.¹

But is there only personal resentment behind it all? Ḥas Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn allowed five years of literary production to be permeated by the venom of party politics? If so, his future work should show a reversion to earlier trends. But it seems to me that the change has been deeper. The fretting over the stationary conditions of the masses is genuine, and there are signs of a swing to the Left and an unprecedented concern with moral issues, as though his earlier faith in the inevitable success of simple but fundamental formulae—liberty, parliamentary democracy, natural evolution—had ended in disillusionment. Even his febrile activity as a Minister, when the causes of personal disappointment had been removed, strengthens this impression. He now compares ignorance to a consuming fire, which must be put out with whatever water is at hand, even if it has not been distilled.² It is a far cry from his earlier determination to educate the public in fundamentals.

I shall have to return to each of these symptoms. Meanwhile, this third phase of Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's career may be characterised as the period of impatience.

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(1) Riḥlat ur-Rābī', p. 21.
(2) Al-Ahrām, 23 January 1950.
Chapter Five.

HIS CHARACTER.

If it is a sign of greatness of heart to have borne ill-fortune philosophically after overcoming all disabilities imposed by nature and time, surely none can have a better title to greatness than the present honorand.

PUBLIC ORATOR, Oxford Univ., presenting Dr. Tâhâ Husayn for admission to hon. D.Litt.

Time was when Tâhâ Husayn, the poor blind villager who had risen to Cabinet rank, would have been set up as an example of the man who by hard work and determination conquers his infirmity. His achievements remain admirable, but modern psychologists have made it painfully clear that one may compensate for one's infirmity, but one never really conquers it.

Within himself, Tâhâ Husayn is manifestly a man with an intense and painful problem. No one who has read his autobiography can doubt that he is inclined to be more of an introvert than an extrovert — his lonely games with pieces of iron, his delight in reading, his small and intimate circle of friends at the Azhar all bespeak it. But he is an introvert to whom solitude can be a torture, and who thinks that introspection should not be too searching, "for it seems to me that the civilised, cultured man ought not to strip himself naked, even before himself, if he can avoid doing so; and it seems to me that the pudicity of the cultured man in respect of himself is the best form of pudicity and the highest of its stages." He shies away from being left without food for thought of some licit distraction, for the mind never ceases to function, and left entirely to itself, it will - like an empty

(1) Al-Ayyâm, I, p. 22.
(3) Al-Ayyām, II, p. 52.
(4) Adīb, p. 97.
stomach - digest and destroy itself. The reason is that if one examine oneself one can only discover how trivial and unworthy of life one is; "one's loathing grows little by little, until it becomes anger, ill-temper, and pessimism."\(^1\)

The monster that lurks in his self-consciousness is not difficult to identify, and his efforts to escape from it help to explain why once he has dictated a passage he does not want it read back, so that it is usually a friend who undertakes to correct proofs of his books;\(^2\) and why in his autobiography he speaks of himself in the third person, as though he had since become a different person. Together with his desire for self-assertion, it helps to account for the abundance of his literary production and for his drive and energy as an administrator and public figure.

For in his dealing with other people he is constantly aware of an inferiority which must be compensated for... In a series of generalisation which he makes, characteristically, with reference to al-Ma'arrī, he says:\(^3\)

A blind man in the company of those who see is isolated, and though he surpass them in culture and science and excel them in sagacity and intelligence, yet they may joke at his expense by a gesture of the hand, by winking, by shaking a head, while he remains oblivious of it all, precluded from it. And if an obvious movement of an audible sound reveal it, his plea against them is insecurely grounded, and theirs against him is triumphant; and he reaps nothing from this but a pain which he keeps silent and a sorrow which he hides.

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(1) Min Baḫd, pp. 151-152.
(2) Interview, 11 September 1950.
(3) Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlā, pp. 120-121.
And if he be of great intelligence and wide ambition, his need of people will be the greater, and their services to him the more numerous; and the trace which cumulated services and continued favours leave in the soul of one who is powerless but perceptive is gratitude adulterated with sorrow, and praise mingled with sadness. ...

The place which a blind man holds in the hearts of wife and children is less exalted than that of one who sees; their respect for him is limited, and their obedience restricted to that of which he happens to be mindful.

He is moreover precluded from the enjoyment of a sensation which people value highly, and his ignorance of it multiplies its importance to him. ...

He is in addition to all this inactive when others go to join battle or to war...a burden to people in everything, a dependant in both his physical and his moral life.

Despair is therefore better suited to him than hope, and death preferable for him to life, except he have an excess of the virtue of patience and of steadfastness.

He compensates most directly for this inferiority by developing his other senses, and he has described with vividness and precision lengthy itineraries from his lodgings to the Azhar\(^1\) or from the University to the house of a friend\(^2\) in terms of noises, smells, and sensations.\(^3\) Sometimes, however, he uses these senses not in their own right, but as substitutes for seeing; thus he once could "hear" darkness as a noise not unlike the humming of a mosquito, only louder and coarser,\(^4\) and in an Alpine resort he could "feel" the horizon extending splendidly before him.\(^5\)

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(1) \textit{Al-Ayyām}, II, pp.8-15.

(2) \textit{Adāb}, pp.13-16.

(3) \textit{v. infra.} pp. 279-281.

(4) \textit{Al-Ayyām}, II, p.58.

(5) \textit{Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Mīr}, p. 395.
There is, in his work, no systematic, conscious attempt to deny his infirmity. Visual descriptions are not rare in his narratives and essays, but he is not unaware of his limitations in this respect; among the generalisations he makes about the blind man is that "if he should attempt poetry or description, his deprivation will entail the poverty of his imagination and prevent him from emulating poets and descriptive writers in their competitive pursuits, except as an imitator or a follower."¹ Once indeed, immediately after a comparison of Bruges and Venice, in which he remarked that Bruges is usually wrapped in fog, not flooded with light like Venice, he seemed to realise the futility of what he was attempting, and added: "I might wish to tell you about the monuments and art treasures there are in this city, but I am utterly incapable of doing so, and I daresay you are not ignorant of the cause of this incapacity."² Such acceptance, however, is comparatively easy when he is dictating, creating, imparting information to others, and therefore already compensating for his inferiority. It is not so when he is engaging in a more passive occupation, and it is revealing that for the process whereby he creates he invariably uses the verb "to dictate" (umlā), in which his infirmity is implicitly acknowledged, but for the process whereby he acquires information he uses the verb "to read," (aqra'), a term well-suited to what psychologists mean by "compensation" in that the process denoted

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(1) *Tajdid Dhikrā Abī al-'Alā*, pp. 120-121.
(2) *Min Ba'īd*, pp. 109-110.
would normally involve the use of both eye and tongue, and in the departures from the normal, function of the one organ might be sub-consciously added on to that of the other.

Self assertiveness, in fact, is discernible in nearly all phases of Tāhā Ḥusayn's relationship with other people. Its negative manifestations is that he carefully avoids placing himself in a position of inferiority. "The most hateful thing to him was that he should ask anybody for anything." As a child, he would participate in the games of his companions in imagination only, and thus came to know many games that he never played. As a young man, he would not eat anything for which the use of a spoon was required, would not drink at the table, and abroad - until his wife altered his habits - he made all possible excuses to have his meals alone; he developed stomach trouble, yet he considers that his actions at that time were evidence of a strong will. When he has no control over circumstances, he must needs be stoical, and even as a very young child when his mother put collirium into his sightless eyes he bore its sting without crying "because he hated to be like his young sister, plaintive and tearful." In his experience with magic, he pretended that a jinn had answered his summons rather than admit failure.

Indeed the one weapon he fears is ridicule. As a child, he

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(1) Al-Ayyām, II, p.33.
(2) Al-Ayyām, I, p.23.
hated an uncle who used to make fun of him because, for fear of appearing gluttonous, he ate by very small mouthfuls.\(^1\) As a university student eager to dissociate himself from the Azhar, he had only to be taunted with still being an Azharist, and his remonstrances to a friend who was looking forward to a life of dissipation were silenced.\(^2\) As a writer, he has confided to a small note-book his impressions of what he thinks the outside world is like; but if those who see were to read them, some would laugh and others would take pity,\(^3\) so they must remain unpublished.\(^4\) Dignity must be maintained, and its importance to him is such that it colours even his judgment as a critic; thus al-Māzīnī once wrote a humorous article on one of the poorer quarters of Cairo, in which he described himself as so terrified by what he saw that he took to his heels; reviewing it, Tāḥā Ḥusayn admitted that he was much amused by it, but felt it was wrong of the writer to paint so undignified a picture of himself.\(^5\) He little realised that as al-Māzīnī was lame, his reference to running was of much the same order as Tāḥā Ḥusayn's concern with apparent dignity.

Again, in order to make up for the assumptions of superiority which he suspects in his entourage, he feels the need to make his mark upon it. Although he strongly protests that he does not consider any of his writings meritorious and is always surprised at the reception they are accorded,\(^6\) his desire to be a recognised leader is obvious since the days when he used to collect his sisters around him and


\(^{2}\) *Adīb*, p.32.

\(^{3}\) *Ma‘ Abī ’l-‘Alī fi Sijnīth*, p.11.


\(^{5}\) *Fuṣūl fi ’l-Adab wa ’n-Naqd*, p.61.

\(^{6}\) *Interview*, 11 Sept. 1950.
exchange stories with them, himself enthroned on a chest; indeed he confesses that his vanity was injured when, on his first visit home in Azharist garb, he was not given the marks of respect which he had expected.

In speaking to an individual or to an audience, he sometimes palpably plays upon his hearer's sympathies in order to establish rapport: Thus in welcoming delegates to the Arab Cultural Congress held in Egypt in 1950, Tāhā Ḥusayn could forget his theory that Egypt is not an Oriental country at all and speak of it as part of "the Arab mother-land" which extends "from the Nile to the Euphrates;" and in the course of my interview with him at a time when all he knew of me was my connection with a British University, the one subject which he himself introduced was that of his high regard for English literature.

In this, however, he is obeying an impulse common to all men, and in his stormy career there is evidence enough that he is not prepared to curry favour at the expense of his principles or ideas. In fact, for the purpose of "making his mark," opposition is as good a starting-point as adulation - perhaps even a better one. "There is nothing I like better," he writes, "than to be criticised, disapproved of, or defamed. I find in it a pleasure which is almost a disease, and the cause of it is that I know myself better than others know me, and that those who criticise, disapprove of, or defame me know only the lesser

(1) Al-Ayyām, II, p.91.
(2) Ibid, p.122.
(3) v.infra. pp. 110-112.
(4) Al-Ahrām, 22 August 1950.
part of my defects." The statement is not to be accepted at face
value, for the intention behind it is revealed a little later when he
adds: "I know that among those who criticise and disapprove of me there
are some who will find themselves at a loss when they read this. For
they write in order to hurt me; but what if I swear to them that they
are doing me good, and that I strenuously beseech them to criticise,
blame, and defame me all the more?" In fact, Tāhā Ḥusayn has never
conceded a point to his critics, and never failed to answer them with
vehemence. It is in answering his opponents that he finds "a pleasure
which is almost a disease." The opportunity for self-assertion which
such opposition affords him sometimes drives him to more extreme posi-
tions. He has admitted as much in respect of his attacks on Ṣūfī
practices and superstitions in his native town, his strictures on
Azharist teachers opposed to al-Marṣāfī, and his early polemic writings
on Ḥārīz and Shawqī and on al-Manfalūṭī. Such recantations, however,
always came after the issue had been played out. On the whole, the
controversial views which he has placed before the public he has defen-
ded with constancy, with vehemence, and with undoubted courage; and when
the quarrels took a personal turn, he yielded to none in violence and
acerbity, so that in the course of his quarrel with ar-Rāfī’ī he wrote,

(1) Min Ḥadīth ish-shīr wa ’n-Nāthr, p.6.
(2) Al-Ayyām, II, p.122.
(3) Ibid., pp.162-163.
(4) Ḥārīz wa Shawqī, pp.175-178.
(5) in the course of a broadcast reported in ar-Risālah, XVII, 836
alleging that ar-Rafi'i importuned critics for favourable reviews and alluding to his heavily ornamented style: 1

Of what value is praise which a man gives in order to rid himself of a wearisome solicitant as he might give a coin not in charity or out of love of charity, but to rid himself of a beggar who dogs his footsteps in the street or bars his road? It is such praise that you covet; if you receive it you are happy, and if not you are like that importunate beggar who, despairing of a donation, pursues the one who denies him with insults and curses ...

Be reasonable! Understand that pure praise unmixed with criticism is like water in which a great deal of sugar has been melted, so that to drink it in excess upsets one. It is better for you and for your health that you should add to the water and sugar a third element which will prevent you from vomiting. For it is of no benefit, great or small, to you or to others, that you should periodically vomit to them "letters of sorrow" or anything resembling "letters of sorrow."

It is not contended, however, that all of Tāhā Ḥusayn's traits and activities can be reduced to manifestations of the problem created by his blindness. Resentment without fortitude, energy without constancy, self-consciousness without self-discipline, aggressiveness without honesty, self-assertiveness without talent could only have made him a pitiable and repulsive misfit. He is not that. A tall, thin man who at rest sits leaning over one arm of his chair as though shrinking away from the world, his fingers knotted knuckle to knuckle as though in anguish, he livens up visibly and rapidly in conversation, and is a public speaker renowned for his charm and eloquence. The lines at the side of his mouth bespeak sensitiveness, and his graying wavy hair sweeps straight back, accentuating the line of an intelligent brow. He has qualities of heart and mind the working of which is

(1) Hadīth ul-Arbī‘fī, III, pp.144-146.
sometimes impeded and sometimes accelerated, but not simply caused, by
dents in his psychological fly-wheel.

Prof. Guillaume succeeded in characterising his mental powers when
he said that his is "a mind which one would be tempted to assert is
Western rather than Eastern, were it not that it is a child who is
impatient with the long isnād and wants to get to the matn of tradit-
ion; or is impatient of long discussions of the self-evident; or wants
to argue when he is told something that his mind instinctively rejects."
At the same time impatiently curious and critical, Ţāhā Ḥusayn first
shocked and amused his entourage when, as a child, he determined to
find out what would happen if he picked up his food with both hands, in
defiance of age-long etiquette; he has since travelled a long way from
such simple experiments, but he has not ceased to accumulate informa-
tion in his notoriously retentive memory and to question assumptions
that had long stood unchallenged. His searching curiosity stops short
only of his inner self; unfortunately this is much the same as to say
that it stops at the threshold of all ultimates.

His is also a vibrantly sensitive, emotional nature. His
reaction to any show of sympathy is strong and immediate. Of this,
the beautiful pages addressed to his daughter who had burst into tears
when he told her of the blind Oedipus being led by his daughter
Antigone are evidence enough. But he has also paid handsome tributes

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pp.230-231.

(2) Al-Ayyām, I, p.18.

(3) Al-Ayyām, I, p.142.
to his wife, to many of his early teachers, to friends, and even to his secretary Farîd Shihâtah, for his solicitude and understanding and for the "silent frankness" that is between them; if these tributes hide a secret sorrow, they hide it well, and they are none the less creditable to both originator and recipient.

Emotional moments live long in Tâhâ Ḥussain’s memory, perhaps because his need for emotional responses cannot always be satisfied except by making these moments do repeated duty; indeed there were times when he had to project his need of affection on to a mere object, as he did with the chest that was sent from home to his lodgings by the Azhar, for - though he dared not sit on it as he did at home - he liked to sit leaning against it and occasionally pass a caressing hand over it.

Indeed emotional reactions account for more of his activities than he usually credits them with: his moral zeal can scarcely be accounted for by his professed philosophy, and his exertions in the service of education are partly motivated by his desire to repay the benefits which he derived from having studied at the Egyptian University and from having been sent on a mission to France.

Finally he possesses to a marked degree that most undefinable of all the faculties, the capacity for aesthetic responses. And he has answered the call of beauty both in music, where his favourite is Beethoven, and in literature, where he has ranged from Sophocles to André Gide, and from Labîd to Tawfîq ul-Ḥakîm.

(1) Rihlat ur-Rabî`, p. 74.
(2) Al-Ayyâm, II, pp. 91-92.
(3) Jannat ul-Hayawan, pp.21-22.
(4) Rihlat ur-Rabî`, p. 20.
PART III.

THE REFORMER.
Chapter Six.

HIS PHILOSOPHY.

Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns.

TENNYSON.

Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn tells us that he finds great delight in reading Plato, Aristotle, at-Taftāzānī, Descartes, Comte, Spencer, Bergson, and even Goethe, Schiller, and Heine; but Kant and Hegel - in fact, most German philosophers - he does not find so palatable, and he admits that he had to refer to French works on them to understand them at all.¹

His own speculations, however, are on a much more modest scale than his reading. His definition of a philosopher is: "a man who has studied, scientifically and thoroughly, the natural, theological, and moral sciences, and has extended their dominion over his practical life and personal behaviour, so that there is no inconsistency between these sciences and his actions."² Clearly, it is a sage rather than a philosopher that Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn has in mind in making such a definition, and he admits that he has little in common with metaphysicians, for he considers them "both subtle and naive" - and he does not think that he is either.³

The starting point of Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's generalisations is a belief in "historic compulsion:" every phenomenon, material or moral, is reducible to social or cosmic forces; poem, oration, or historical event, they are all "a tissue of social and cosmic factors, subject to investigation and analysis, even as matter is subject to chemical action."⁴

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(1) Ḥadīth ul-Arbīʿāʾ, III, p.114.
(2) Tajdid Dhikrā Abī l-ʿAlāʾ, p.250.
(3) Interview, 11 September 1950.
(4) Tajdid Dhikrā Abī l-ʿAlāʾ, p.20.
Now Progress is in the nature of things. We may not comprehend it as it overtakes us, we may even dislike its appearance and try to resist it; but it advances like a victorious army, treading alike on the corpses of its enemies and of its own soldiers. It is constantly resulting from a constant struggle between good and evil. Even in the midst of wars and crisis there is progress, if only in the realisation of the need to prevent their recurrence. Progress acts with the decisiveness and relentless cruelty of a law.¹

This is an empirical conclusion. What the force behind it is, Tāhā Ḥusayn does not profess to know. But humanity has so far been forging steadily ahead, and he can see no reason why it should not go on doing so.²

It cannot be man who directs this progress, but the struggle between good and evil is reflected in him: his leaning towards evil come from his instincts, and a light to pierce the darkness is provided by his mind. Reason, therefore, is to be man's guide, and no matter how small the light or how thick the darkness, it must not relinquish its function.³

It follows that the history of human progress is the history of the increasing role played by Reason, and Tāhā Ḥusayn's survey of human thought in Qādat ul-Fikr may be summarised as follows: First came the poetic age, when imagination was the main instrument of knowledge; its prototype was Homer, whether he really existed as an individual or not. Then came the philosophic age, an age of increasing individualism, when men sought to broaden the basis of government and tried to exploit

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(2) Interview.

(3) "Ayataqaddam ul-‘ālam am yata’akhkhar," Hilal IV, 1 (Jan.1946) pp. 12-13. Also "Alā Hāmīsh iṣ-Ṣīrah, II," pp.49-51. In the latter, the ideas are expressed by a 7th century Christian monk, but the similarity of analysis and imagery with the article above shows him to be Tāhā Ḥusayn's mouthpiece.
nature instead of standing in awe of it; it is represented by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It was followed by the political age, when first Alexander then Caesar tried to unify the whole world under one civilisation. But at the same time that the Greeks were trying to understand and interpret nature in the philosophic way, the Oriental mind was following the more complacent path of religion: it submitted to the soothsayers at its early stages and to the revealed religions later; its outstanding men are therefore prophets, not philosophers. But it would appear that the Greek philosophers were in advance of their time, for after Caesar's bid for world empire we have the Oriental age when, although the West retained its supremacy, it displayed the two main characteristics of the Oriental mind; the first was autocracy, for the Roman Emperors now modelled themselves on the Pharaohs, to the extent of deification, whereas until then autocracy in the West had not been so complete, and had not extended beyond the city state; the second was religiousness, for Christianity triumphed first over the opposition of established authority and then over barbarians, and in the East it was replaced only by another religion, Islam. However, time was to catch up with Greek thought, and in the Renaissance we have a reassertion of mankind's interest in philosophic and political progress. When we come to modern times, however, we can no longer speak of dominant characteristics. The printing-press and other means of communication might have been expected to unify human thought; in reality they have produced multiplicity and rivalry by enabling everything to flourish everywhere at the same time. Progress there still is, of course, but no longer does one genius, or one line of endeavour, or even one nation stand out above all others.

Already the place of religion in Thāhā Husayn's scheme of things has begun to appear. It stands in contradistinction to Reason, along with
the appetites and instincts. Is it therefore one of those forces of
darkness which the light of Reason is to dispel? Not altogether. It
is a need which one feels obscurely but imperiously when one is in com-
munion with nature,\(^1\) it is an emotion which one feels strongly when
one's brother has died.\(^2\) It is "an instinct of the spirit," and as
the wise old monk who is Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's spokesman in `Alā Ḥāmīsh is-Sīrah\(^3\)
tells the Greek youth in search of truth: "I believe, my son, that your
spirit has instincts even as your body has, and that the instincts of
the spirit, like those of the body, do not originate in the mind and do
not derive from it, but originate in one's nature and derive from one's
constitution. And the need of the spirit for faith, my son, is like the
need of the body for food and drink."\(^4\)

While crossing the Mediterranean in March 1923, feeling that his
life was at the mercy of an accident to the ship, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn reflected
on the vanity of both the believer who considers his little self worthy
of God's attention, and the atheist who considers his Reason sufficient
to explain all things. And he wondered wistfully whether man will ever
be able to combine the forces of Faith and Reason, both of which are
necessary to him.\(^5\)

At first, his mind dwelt mainly on the differences between them.
Religion is related to feeling, and is influenced by emotion and imagina-
tion; Reason, or rather what in this context he calls Science,\(^6\) is rela-
ted to the mind, is affected by imagination only to a small extent, and
is interested in emotion only as a subject for study. Religion is the

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(2) Al-Āyyām, I, p. 129.
(3) supra, p. 95., note (3)
(4) `Alā Ḥāmīsh is-Sīrah, II, pp. 55-56.
(5) Min BaʿĪd, pp. 15-17.
(6) He means much the same thing by either term: the acquisition of ideas
by one's own efforts, not by revelation or from authority. He uses
both Socrates and Galile as examples.
more ancient, and at one time governed all human actions; Science later carved out a field for itself which Religion is reluctant to yield. Religion claims for itself permanence and continuity; Science claims for itself change and renewal. Religion is majestic and infinite in its scope; Science is modest, limited, slow, and hesitant. It seemed to him that the two would remain irreconcilable unless either the one or the other resigned its personality.¹

But after he had considered the persecution of Socrates, of Galilé, and of Ibn Rushd, and the protracted struggles between Rome and Christianity, Christianity and Greek thought, Judaism and Christianity, Christianity and Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism, al-Ma'mūn and the Mu'tazilah, and the French Revolution and Religion, he came to the conclusion that the relationship between Religion and Science was only part of the conflict between conservative majorities and innovating minorities. This conflict is constant, because whenever the minority wins, it becomes a majority and adopts the weapons of its former persecutors against a new generation of innovators. It is also a conflict which embraces all fields of human activity, but it takes a violent form only if the issues raised engage the undiscerning emotions of the masses, and if political interests exploit these emotions. Religious issues lend themselves well to such exploitation, whereas artistic or linguistic issues are settled peaceably; but there is nothing intrinsic in Science or Religion to foster intolerance and persecution.²

¹ Ibid., pp.227-228. This was written c.1926.
² Ibid., pp.204-227. Also: Qādat ul-Fikr, pp.248-250.
The divergence between the two remains a reality, deep-rooted and irremovable. But if only they were "disarmed," if only politicians—now that they have a fund of nationalistic emotion to draw on—would refrain from using either of them to rouse the masses, each could confine itself to its proper dominion, and "religious men would proceed with their religious life, scientists would proceed with their scientific life, and the masses would turn to their practical productive life, benefiting from Religion in their relationship with God, and benefiting from Science in the management of their day-to-day concerns; these hateful quarrels would then disappear."¹ A similar partition is to be effected within the individual, who is given this advice: "Trust your mind to some extent, and deny its dominion to some extent; and impose upon it a measure of humility which will enable it to understand and think and manage your affairs in life, and at the same time enable your spirit to have faith and certitude and that form of spiritual food without which you cannot live."²

The compromise, it must be stressed, exists only in words. Religious faith is acknowledged, but only as the satisfaction of an emotional need. Ṭūhā Ḥusayn has read the Bible as well as the Qurʾān, and has found artistry and beauty in both; he therefore advises others to read and study the Holy Books, those of their own and those of other religions.³ But the "spiritual food" thus acquired is not to be transformed

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(1) Ibid., 229-232.
(2) ʿAlā Hāmīsh is-Sīrah, II, p.65.
(3) Fi ʿs-Sayf, Ch.2.
into energy, and humble Reason is yet to retain the entire direction of human actions.

Proceeding from the arbitrary premise of progressive determinism—which fails to explain why Greek philosophy matured "before its time" and was therefore for centuries superseded by the retrograde characteristics of the Oriental mind—Tāhā Ḥusayn's philosophy maintains a measure of consistency only by the most rigid compartmentalisation of Society's pursuits and of the individual's faculties. Even so one may well wonder what guidance is that which comes from the mind if our actions are determined by social and cosmic forces anyway. To what purpose does Tāhā Ḥusayn try to define the proper roles of Faith and Reason if the individual is not responsible even for the degree of belief or scepticism which he exhibits? The answer, presumably, is that what we call Reason in the individual is the piecemeal manifestation of the mysterious and impersonal force of Progress, and that it is this force which determines that some shall involuntarily give advice and that others shall, equally involuntarily, accept it or reject it. Tāhā Ḥusayn's universe can only be likened to a vast clearing house where illusory individual wills are discounted against other illusory individual wills, in a controlled economy which invariably results in a credit balance.

The network of abstractions wears particularly thin when it attempts to cover moral judgments. The logical conclusion from Tāhā Ḥusayn's premises is that there cannot be any, and such indeed was his early pronouncement:

(1) *Min Baʿīd*, p. 47.
In reality, if we analyse the psychological forces in man we can find no alternative to compulsion, for these forces are themselves affected by things which neither the individual nor the community can control. The individual did not bring himself into being, he was brought into being by another; he did not form his own powers, they were formed for him. The time and the climate have a great influence upon them; the social environment has an even greater influence; custom and inherited codes of behaviour have an influence which can scarcely be estimated; and fortuitous events turn them the way they wish and shape them the way they please. From what quarter, therefore, does Man acquire any power of choosing? But choice is an illusion which has possessed people since ever they were, and they are forced to submit to it.

It follows that the individual is not deserving of either praise or blame, and Tāhā Ḥusayn has been able to look upon the actions of some of al-Maʿarrī's or of the Caliph ʿUthmān's contemporaries with a detachment consistent with his avowed principles. But in living issues he has not failed to exhibit the strong sense of right and wrong which one might expect from so sensitive and self-conscious a personality. It is displayed in his personal polemics, as when he haughtily demanded an apology from his old friend Az-Zayyāṭ who had re-published in ar-Risālah, without their author's permission, some of Tāhā Ḥusayn's articles on his short-lived quarrel with Tawfīq ul-Ḥakīm. It has already been pointed out that all his latest writings have borne upon the symptoms of moral disintegration and irresponsibility displayed by Egyptian society. These he has more or less brought into line with his general philosophy by attributing them to "rapid change, which corrupts sane souls and

(2) Ibid., p. 21.
(3) Ibid., p. 154.
(4) ʿUthmān, p. 49.
alters some moral tempers, but soon passes with its good and its evil, leaving nations to return to the kind of life that is compatible with the nature of things.\(^1\) Such complacency, however, is extremely rare in these late writings, and ill accords with the tone of righteous anger to which his condemnation often rises, or with his lofty protestation and re-dedication amid the Athenian ruins when he felt that "the evil and the deceit and the sinfulness" of Egypt had slipped away from him:

There was I calling to me the poets of tragedy and of comedy, calling to me the story-tellers and historians, calling to me Socrates and his symposiasts, Plato and his fellows in argument, Aristotle and his disciples, disavowing before them all evil and deceit and sinfulness, and calling them to witness that I had been true to their ideals, for I had not broken a promise, debased affection, betrayed or besmirched a friend, or cheaply acquired for myself rest and comfort and well-being in return for coins numbered or innumerable. And there was I promising them that I should spend the remainder of my life as I have spent what I have lived of it, loyal to Right, respectful to Virtue, rising above what cheapens a man and demeans his manliness, innocent of the betrayal and besmirching of friends and of the sale of one's conscience for sums large or small.\(^2\).

These are not the words of one who believes that his actions are controlled by social and cosmic forces, and are therefore not subject to moral judgment. Significantly, it is in the course of a discussion on asceticism and Epicureanism and on the question of reward and punishment that Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn is for once led to doubt whether our worldly actions should be gauged solely by what the mind comprehends,

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(1) Mişrāṭ uṣ-Ḍamīr il-Ḥadīth, p.76.
(2) Riḥlat ur-Rabī', pp.11-12.
and he asks this curious question: "Is it not possible, indeed is it not our duty, to ask ourselves whether it may not be, that our actions reach out beyond us, beyond society, beyond our race itself, to affect other creatures which we may or may not know, but which in either case leave us in ignorance of the effect of our actions upon them and upon their destiny?"¹

Such doubts have not led Tahā Husayn to an open reconsideration of his philosophy. At most, one might detect in the latest phase of his life somewhat less sanguine pronouncements on the amount of progress made by humanity. In 1926, for example, he said of the Oriental aspect of the human mind that it had several times been defeated by the Greek aspect, and that "it is now throwing down its weapons and surrendering to the Greek aspect;"² even earlier he had confidently asserted that philosophy had for the first time attained maturity in the modern West.³ But as he became more concerned with practical achievements than with the highest reaches of abstract thought, it struck him that man is at the same time so confident of his mind as to be ruined by his conceit, and so subservient to his instincts as to be ruined by his weakness."⁴

The degree of civilisation displayed by men is therefore "something acquired which does not necessarily mingle with their blood, and run in their veins, or become nature and constitution to them;

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¹ Meā Abī 'l-ʿAlāʾ fī sijuḥ, p.145.
² Qādat ul-Fikr, p.48.
³ Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlāʾ, footnote p.81.
rather, it is something imposed which only a minority believes in and trusts, whereas the greater number use it as a means to avert one another's malice, or may even wish evil to be visited upon one another through it.¹ This condition is not even restricted to any one community: self-interest is part of human nature, and if one were, like Juvenal, to abandon one environment corrupted by it, one would only find oneself in another equally detestable; the wise man can only submit to the situation, for as al-Ma'arrî once said: "Can man escape his Lord's dominion, departing from both His earth and heavens?"²

With Ṭāhā Ḥusayn still professing his belief in determinism and in inevitable progress,³ how are we to explain the discrepancy between his arm-chair views and his reactions to contemporaries and to contemporary situations? How are we to explain the striking difference between the tempered optimism which according to him "belongs to the normal order of things"⁴ and which indeed is the concomitant of belief in inevitable progress, and the extreme pessimism into which prolonged introspection throws him?⁵ It can only be that this word-bound philosophy, is not the real mainspring of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's career; it is a rationalisation - the sincerity of which we need not bring into question - of directions taken when his urge for action found itself impeded by conservatism identifiable with religious prejudice.

¹ Mirāṭ ud-Damīr il-Hadīth, pp. 89-90.
³ Interview.
⁵ V. supra, p. 84.
At any rate, since this study is mainly concerned with the outward directions taken by Tāhā Husayn's activities, this survey of his generalisations will not prove irrelevant.
Chapter Seven.

MODERNISM.

All reform except a moral one will prove unavailing.  
CARLYLE.

What is decreed in the law of the Muslims is that the branches of knowledge which are to be sought are the theological sciences and their tools, i.e. the sciences of the Arabic language; other knowledge is not to be sought, indeed is to be proscribed. And it is well-known that Christians know nothing at all of the theological sciences or of their tools, and that most of their sciences derive from weaving, weighing, and cupping, which to the Muslims are among the meanest trades.

This is part of the reply made by Muḥammad ʿUlaysh, Muftī of the Mālikiyyah about 1880, to a North African ʿĀlim who had declared the wearing of a hat permissible to Muslims studying in Europe.  

Since then, the forces of Westernisation have made such progress that a similar voice would provoke only derisive or angry retorts from the educated, barely tempered by the appearance of respect which, it is uneasily felt, is due religious authorities.

But even today the inroads of Western culture into the Eastern heritage are not universally welcomed, and at the time that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn began his public career there was between Conservatives and Modernists a constant strain which periodically led to heated and even bitter polemics. The issues at stake were often irrational, and the gradations infinite. Broadly, however, it may be said that the Conservatives regarded the aping of the West by their benighted contemporaries as tantamount to the triumph of materialism and immorality over Islām and the supposedly innate spirituality of the East; they held that all new problems had to be solved in accordance with the

Qur'ān and the sunnah as interpreted by early Muslim authorities; in connection with literature, they linked Arabic with the Qur'ān, considering it the "mother" of all languages and a sacred heritage which the moderns have no right to alter in any way, and they favoured the perpetuation of the "elegant", ornate style of writing which had prevailed in Arabic literature after the tenth century. Individual modernists had joined battle with them on several issues, and, even more effectively, had forged ahead in disregard of Conservative objections. So far, their most rewarding tasks had been to demonstrate the benefits of the Western way, and to deride the defenders of the indefensible. But in days of mounting national pride the glorification of a foreign culture scarcely commended itself to the public, and as the louder and more extreme of the Conservatives were silenced, the day would come when it would be necessary to face more fundamental issues, such as the character of Qur'anic inspiration and the relevance of its message to a Muslim country to-day. The struggle waxed hot in the twenties and Tāhā Ḥusayn's share in it earned him recognition as Leader of the Modernists. The originality of his contribution and the quality of his leadership cannot be assessed until the whole of his work has been surveyed, so this chapter attempts only to define the position he has taken.

Tāhā Ḥusayn views the very existence of the quarrel between Ancients and Moderns with satisfaction, for it is a sure sign of vitality.¹ Wherever there is life, two forces co-exist, those of

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¹ Hadith ul- Arbi'ā', II, p. 323.
Development and of Continuity. At times, the balance between them is destroyed; then, if the conservative force prevails we have stagnation, if the progressive we have a revolution. But this can be no more than a passing phase, after which a new blend, a new order establishes itself. Such crises are recurrent, and he finds a parallel to the present Renaissance in the golden prime of the Abbāsid, when the innovations of Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām, and al-Mutanabbī became subjects for stormy debate before they secured general approbation; although the quarrel then was not specifically linked with the word "Modernism", it was nevertheless essentially the quarrel between those who cling to past modes of expression and those who answer the calls of a new life.

It is obvious where Tāhā Husayn's sympathies lie, but he insists that he is not an extremist in his Modernism. The moderate attitude alone is fruitful, he maintains, and he has condemned in the same breath those who belittle past Arabic literature and those who disparage the inspiration that can be derived from Western writings. More often than not, he refers to his creed as one of renovation (tajdīd) rather than innovation (jadīd), and he asserts that the new culture could never stand without the help of the old, and that the good writer must retain what was good in the past as well as pluck the beneficial fruits of the new life around him.

This concession made, however, it is consonant with his philosophy that he should express absolute faith in Modernism: "whoever speaks of

(1) Ibid., III, p.38.
(2) Ibid., II, p.329-330.
(3) Fī 'l-Adab il-Jāhilī, pp.348-350.
(4) Ḥadīthul-Arbi'ā', II, pp.1-6
The Example of the West.

Believe me, reader: Our true patriotic duty after we have realised independence and established democracy in Egypt is but that we should expend what we possess and what we do not possess of strength, effort, time, and money to make Egyptians feel - individually and collectively - that God has created them for honour, not for abasement; for power, not for weakness; for mastery, not for quiescence; for distinction, not for obscurity. We must erase from the hearts of Egyptians, individually and collectively, the criminal, the abominable misconception which causes them to imagine that they have been created of a different clay from that of the Europeans, have been compounded of different temperaments from those of Europeans, have been given different minds from those of Europeans.1

From this passage, it is clear that Tāhā Husayn - in common with most other Egyptians - has associated in his mind the western way with power, prestige, and material prosperity. This in itself is enough to settle the issue for or against Westernisation, for there can be no doubt that Egyptians want its products, and it is therefore idle to dispute whether or not the means are to be adopted.2

Besides, the adoption of these methods should do no violence to the Egyptians. At one time, Tāhā Husayn was content to say that "our very mentality has, for some decades, been changing and becoming Western - or, say, nearer to the Western than to the Oriental."3 Later, shortly after his own party had concluded a treaty of Friendship with Great Britain and Egypt had been admitted to membership of the League of Nations, Tāhā Husayn was carried away by enthusiasm, and throwing

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2 Ibid., pp.45-46.
3 Fi 'l-Adab il-Jāhilī, pp.45-46.
moderation to the winds he branded as an indefensible absurdity the notion that Egyptians are or ever were Orientals at all. They certainly do not belong to the same family as the Chinese or the Indians, whom they would find far less congenial than, say, the French; if there must be some classification, then Egyptians should be included in the Mediterranean family of nations.

The development of this theory is based on Valéry's analysis of the European mind into three components: the Greek element, apparent in literature, philosophy, and art; the Roman element, in politics and law; and Christianity. Táhá Ḥusayn considers that Egypt shares with Europe the Greek and Roman elements; as for the Islam replaces Christianity, and the two are very similar, both having sprung in the Near East and both having subsequently come strongly under the influence of Greek philosophy. It would be useless to counter that Islam does differ from Christianity and that the differences are most significant in this context since it claims for itself the full direction of the practical life of the community, so that it displaced for some eleven centuries the Roman element in Egypt's political and juridical system; Táhá Ḥusayn simply denies it such direction, for human progress has long ago disposed of the notion that unity of religion is the proper basis for the information of a nation, and Muslims themselves abandoned the idea before the end of the second century after the Hijrah, in favour of "practical benefits."

It is in history that Táhá Ḥusayn finds the bulk of his evidence for the congeniality of the Egyptian and the Western mind. Disregarding

(1) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fi Mīr, p.13.
(2) Ibid., p.16.
the Aryan descent of both Greeks and Persians, he points out that from Pharaonic times Egypt proved most uncooperative with Orientals like the Persians, and most receptive to Greek culture. Indeed it was soon to become a centre of Hellenistic culture. Later, under Arab rule, it was not altogether quiescent, and when the Arab Empire began to break up, Egypt was the first to regain its individuality. It adopted Islām, but this did not alter its mentality, for Islām itself became the vehicle of Hellenism. Finally, omitting the Crusades from its historical survey, he makes out that much as the Barbarians came to rule over Europe yet did not alter the basis of its culture, indeed themselves became Christian, so did the Turks long subject Egypt and other Near Eastern countries to their rule yet did not alter their essential culture, and themselves were converted to Islam.

Then, turning to Egypt in modern times, Tāhā Ḥusayn observes that the differences between it and Europe are not differences between East and West, but differences between stages of European development: Egyptian autocrats modelled themselves on Louis XIV rather than on 'Abd ul-Ḥamīd, and the Azhar's educational methods are those of the European Middle Ages. But the Egyptians' ideal of material life and their spiritual life and their spiritual life are similar to Europe's, the trend of their development is irresistibly towards the Western way of life, and had not the Turks so retarded them that their Renaissance occurred in the nineteenth instead of the fifteenth century, they would today naturally and not imitatively have belonged to the Western community of nations.¹

(1) Ibid., pp.9-37.
Such a theory provides a welcome balm to the wounded pride of nationalists reluctant to acknowledge indebtedness to the West. But the patent one-sidedness with which Tâhä Husayn selects his historical evidence to support it makes one doubt whether it is not an exaggeration into which he was temporarily lured by political circumstances, or even a piece of disingenuous propaganda designed to silence objections to Modernism. Remarks made both before and after 1938 are not entirely consistent with a belief in the identity of Egyptian and Western mentalities, and it is particularly difficult to bring such a belief into line with the contention, perpetuated even in Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah, that religions born in neighbouring and equally Mediterranean Palestine are characteristic of the Oriental mind.

However, Tâhä Husayn's Modernism does not depend on this issue. Even if there were no congeniality between Egypt and Europe, he says, Westernisation remains desirable, irresistible rather, and we have the example of Japan to show us that it is possible even for a truly Oriental country to make great strides towards it. Egypt need have no misgivings about following the same course. Some, assuming the West to be immoral and remembering the Kulturkampf against the Church, fear for Islam. But Europe has now struck a satisfactory balance between culture and religion, and it is now realised that the struggle was never against religion itself but against the clergy - and Islam is happily not burdened with a clergy. Admittedly, Western culture is not without blemishes, and some evils may enter Egypt in its train;

(1) v. supra, p.110.
(2) v. supra, p.89. Cf. also D.S. Goitein, Commentary, VII, 2 (Feb. 1949), p.159.
(3) p.23.
(4) Cf. infra, p.117.
but its benefits are greater, and if Egyptians cannot sift out all the evils then they must be ruled by the example of their Muslim forefathers who did not deny themselves the advantages of Greek and Persian cultures for fear of the evils they brought with them. Again, Egypt need have no fear of losing its identity. It has known a long succession of invaders without ever incurring such a loss. Egypt's individuality is determined by its geography, religion, language, and artistic legacy, and Tāhā Ḥusayn's call is not for wholesale imitation of the West, but for drawing upon it to strengthen Egypt's personality until it becomes equal to that of the West, though distinctively its own.¹

Clever as these arguments may be, they do little more than give a reasoned justification of directions already taken, and Tāhā Ḥusayn cannot be said to have risen far above the level of the polemic while he speaks in terms of practical benefits or of a balance between culture and religion. Does he subscribe to the prevailing black-and-white fiction of a materialistic West and a spiritual and moral East?

Fundamentally, it will be remembered,² Tāhā Ḥusayn regards Western culture as the triumph of the Greek mind, which in turn he identifies with Reason, the sceptical reason of a scientist who denies all authority and subjects everything to critical analysis. This is something entirely unrelated to Religion and the latter can exist alongside it only when it is denied any directive function. There have also been times when Tāhā Ḥusayn coupled the West with immorality;

(1) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Mīr, pp. 46-56.
(2) v. supra, pp. 95-96.
for example, when it was charged that his articles on the pleasure-poets of the early 'Abbāsid age, dealing as they did with drinking and homosexuality, were a moral danger to youth, he retorted, "How does what we quote and speak about compare with what young people read and hear and see in European literature, conversation, play-houses, and places of entertainment?" However, charges such as are implied in this question appear only in the midst of a polemic, and seem designed to silence a vexatious opponent by appeal to a popular prejudice rather than to carry conviction. ṭāhā ḥusayn's admiration for the West is too genuine, and his programme of reform too positive, to be founded on rational scepticism alone, and when he discusses the question in its own context he asserts:

It is the depth of ignorance and the worst of error to say that this material civilisation has issued from pure matter. It is the product of the mind, the product of imagination, the product of the spirit, the product of a fertile, productive spirit, the product of a living spirit that connects with the mind, feeds it and makes it grow, and drives it to thinking, then to producing, then to exploiting the produce - not the product of that spirit which revolves around itself, draws the reins upon itself, loses itself in itself, and wastes itself by its self-centredness so that it benefits neither others nor itself, and profits neither others nor itself.

To have realised that there is more than technology in the achievements of the West, to have recognised that the forces of the spirit need not be solely contemplative, these are so many steps nearer to the formulation of a positive principle for the Egyptian Renaissance. It can only be regretted that they do not occupy a more important place in ṭāhā ġusayn's professed philosophy, that they have not been made into trumpet

(1) Hadīth ul- Ārbi'ā; II, p. 51.
(2) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Mīṣr, p. 57.
calls, more often sounded and more often heeded.

The Arab-Islamic Heritage.

Of the second component of Egypt's culture Tāhā Ḥusayn never said that it was anything but Oriental in its origin but he has again minimised its foreign quality by making out that it was generally Hellenised, and to no small extent Egyptianised, at an early date. Islamic culture in Egypt, he points out, has not been the imposition of some ruling dynasty. It struck deep roots from the very first century after the Hijrah, grew as if in native soil, and soon bore worthy fruit; thus it was in Egypt that, towards the end of the second century, ash-Shāfi`ī founded his famous school of jurisprudence. Like Baṣrah and Kūfah, Fustāṭ became one of the great cultural centres of the Empire, never far behind in any branch of knowledge. Indeed, Fustāṭ maintained a more constant standard of culture than that of any other province.¹ There was even a time when Tāhā Ḥusayn rather brazenly maintained that both in the past and in the present, the Arab East derived its life not from North Africa or from Arabia, and only partly from Iraq: it was from Egypt and from Syria that civilisation shone forth.² At any rate, Egypt need have no more misgivings about borrowing from the Islamic past than from the contemporary West.

But what can Egypt borrow from the Islamic past that is relevant to its life to-day? It can hardly receive any guidance from Islām, for Tāhā Ḥusayn has made it clear that what he said of Religion in

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¹ Maṣ` al-Mutanabbi, II, pp. 543-546.
² Hāfiz wa Shawqī, p. 73.
general is applicable to Islam; once, debating the distribution of morality and immorality among religious communities, he stated plainly: "Religions may differ in their essence, but the religious influence in the souls of men is one, with scarcely any variations: there are virtuous, pious men among Christians and idolaters, just as there are virtuous, pious men among Muslims and Israelites."¹

With Islam as it is now practised he can have no sympathy. In his autobiography, he has painted memorable pictures of Sufi shaykhs battering on the credulity and devotion of villagers, and has made them responsible for the mentality compounded of "naiveté, self-denial, and heedlessness" which is prevalent in rural Egypt.² In the early twenties he was bemoaning the fact that the ʿulamāʾ had the narrowest of outlooks, studying only what had a direct bearing on religion, and restricting their contacts with the community to leading it in the performance of specific religious rites; in contrast, he noticed that several of the most prominent members of the 1923 Congress of Historians at Bruxelles were Christian priests,³ and again that priests could run a fun-fair for children in order to raise funds for charity. His conclusion at the time was that since interest in ritual is clearly declining, the ʿulamāʾ must either live with the community, sharing its sentiments and activities, or resign themselves to the coming of a day when what they have to offer will not be wanted, and they will be counted as social parasites.⁴ A few years later, however, he had developed the theory that Religion

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(1) Ḥadīth ul- Arbiʿāʾ, II, p. 85.
(2) Al-Ayyām, I, pp. 84-91.
(3) Mīn BaʿĪd, pp. 114-126.
(4) Ibid., pp. 164-172.
is "an instinct of the soul", and therefore entirely a personal matter, which should not interfere with science or with politics. In complete disagreement with his earlier criticism, he urged that the Azhar confine itself to producing religious teachers and preachers.¹ What he particularly resented was the illiberal influence exerted by the Mashyakhah of the Azhar, which had taken the title of ar-Ri'āsat ud-Dīniyyat ul-ʿUlyā, in the administrative machinery of the State. True, the Constitution declared Egypt to be an Islamic state; but by this Tāhā Ḥusayn understood no more than a recognition of certain existing facts and practices - that the King was a Muslim, that religious festivals were publicly celebrated, and that Waqf funds were spent on the purposes for which they had been created. This did not mean that the State was committed to the defence of Islam or the application of its laws, and it gave the Ri'āsah no ground to urge retrograde steps or to suppress freedom of thought, even if such thought took the form of open apostasy.²

This was, in fact, an issue of personal relevance to Tāhā Ḥusayn, for in Fi 'sh-Shīr il-Jāhilī he showed himself to be at variance with some views long held to be fundamental in Islām. Not only did he injure the susceptibilities of Muslims by representing their forefathers as engaged in literary fraud³ or by mentioning the Prophet without adding some formula of praise, not only did he deny the traditional thesis that the seven accepted variant readings of the Qur'ān had been handed down by Muhammad, but he clearly spoke of the Qur'ān as a product

(1) al-Hadīth, I, 5 & 6, and ar-Rābiṭat uṣh-Sharqīyyah, 1, 2, quoted by Taher Khemiri and Georg Kampffmeyer, Leaders in Contemporary Arabic Literature, pp. 35-36.

(2) Min Baʿīd, pp. 232-246.

(3) Fi 'sh-Shīr il-Jāhilī, pp. 38-40.
of its environment, an Arab book written in the literary language and
dealing with the problems of its time, which otherwise would have
attracted as little interest as an attack on Buddhism would do in
contemporary Egypt; moreover, he impugned its literal veracity when
he said that for Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl to be mentioned in the Old Testa-
ment and the Qur‘ān was no evidence that they ever existed, and that
the story of their connection with Mecca and the Ka‘bah was a myth
probably born when some Jews settled in North Arabia and formed an
alliance with Arab neighbours, and exploited by Islam to emphasize its
kinship with other monotheistic religions. 2

In this he had gone too far, and in order to minimise the unfavour-
able impression he had left, he wrote:

Everyone of us, if he but think a little, can
discover in himself two distinct personalities: one a
reasoning personality, that investigates, criticizes,
offers solutions, changes to-day the opinion it held
yesterday, tears down to-day what it built yesterday;
the other is a sentient personality, that rejoices,
suffers, grieves, sorrows, feels satisfaction or con-
straint, desires, fears, without criticism, investig-
ation, or search for a solution. Both these person-
alities are connected with our constitution and make-
up, and we cannot escape from either of them. What,
then, is to hinder the first personality from being
scholarly, inquisitive, critical, and the second
believing, assured, aspiring towards the highest
ideal?

And when he was questioned by the Parquet he affirmed that as a Muslim
he did not doubt the existence of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl, but as a scholar
he could assent to their existence only as established by scientific
evidence. 3

(1) Ibid., pp. 16-18
(2) Ibid., pp. 28-29
(3) C. C. Adams, Islam and Modernism in Egypt, pp. 257-258
The quotation is from an article of Tāhā Husayn’s, in as-Siyāsah,
17 July 1926.
Such a position is, of course, too schizophrenic to be more than a pretense, and there is an obvious parallel to be drawn between it and Tāhā Ḥusayn's own account of Baudelaire's difficulties over *Les Fleurs du Mal*: the poet was at variance with society, and in an arbitrary and tyrannical regime, the courts condemned some of his poems; Baudelaire then publicly stated that these had been mere literary experiments, but Tāhā Ḥusayn thinks we can now confidently assert that what he had written was truly representative of his inner personality.¹

Tāhā Ḥusayn now needed some plausible compromise which would enable him to pursue his aims without antagonising widespread religious feeling. In 1923, he had disapproved of the well-intentioned efforts of men like Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Muḥammad Bakhīt to show that the Qurʾān was in agreement with modern scientific opinion; such opinion is necessarily variable, and religious commentators who quote chapter and verse in support of a theory today may have to find another chapter and verse to support its refutation tomorrow.² Tāhā Ḥusayn himself never again attempted to explain away or even to question specifically religious material. In what purports to be a history, he reports uncritically a miracle attributed to Muḥammad,³ and is content to justify the Prophet's departures from his usual practice of following the concensus of his Companions' opinion by saying that on such occasions he was inspired

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(1) Ḥāfīẓ wa Shawqī, pp. 59-60.
(2) Min Baʿīd, pp. 49-52.
(3) ʿUthmān, p. 159.
by God.¹ But in dealing with generalities he has been enlisting religious fervour in the service of his cause, by attributing to Islām some of his most cherished ideals. First he pointed out that in its relationship with Science Islām had proved less intolerant than Christianity, and this he ascribed to three causes: that it has not an organised clergy, that it is more "reasonable" in that it does not impose on believers mysteries inaccessible to the mind, and that its political principle since earliest times has been that there should be no compulsion in religious allegiance.² Then in ʿAlā Hāmīsh is-Sīrah he gave the old Islamic view of the miraculous eloquence of the Qurʾān a new twist, to make out that the distinctive feature of Islām is its appeal to, and respect for, human Reason:

Before Muḥammad's prophethood has been proclaimed, an old Christian monk is made to say that so far God has caused miracles to take place at His apostles' hands in order to impress upon man that his Reason cannot comprehend everything, but that the greatest miracle of all is yet to come - the one which Reason will fully understand and greatly honour;³ the nature of this miracle is made explicit in the words of a later character in the tale:

In all that I have seen and known concerning prophets, I have seen nothing stranger than what relates to Muḥammad, God bless him and guard him. He was a man of whom opponents and enemies demanded miracles, but who dissociated himself from their idea and proclaimed to them that he was human like them, and that he was not sent to dazzle minds with great occurrences, but was sent to recite to people a Qurʾān which speaks to their minds and fills them with guidance, and speaks to their hearts and

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(2) Min Baʿīd, pp. 221-223.
(3) v. II, p. 66.
makes them feel compassion and beneficence.¹
A religion which makes its appeal primarily to Reason must be a liberal one, and Tāhā Ḥusayn affirms - in accordance with his progressive ideas - that it is "a religion of evolution and of aspiration towards ideals in both spiritual and material life",² that its main message, apart from monotheism, was for social and economic equality,³ and finally - in complete disregard of the very specific laws which make up a large part of the Qur'ān - that it is "a religion which urges what is desirable and prohibits what is hateful, directs towards good and turns away from evil, enjoins that the affairs of men should be based on justice and be free from tyranny, and beyond this leaves them to their own affairs that they might run them as they see fit, provided only they observe these limits".⁴

Thus it is that Tāhā Ḥusayn now advocates in the name of Islām substantially the same course as he once advocated in the name of Reason, enlightenment, or progress: let the individual believe in order to satisfy his "instinct", but let him be ruled by Reason in his actions; let the Azhar confine itself to training religious teachers; and let the State - Islamic though the Constitution calls it - recognise and foster the religions of its subjects, both Muslims and Copts,⁵ as components of a citizen's national consciousness,⁶

(1) Ibid., III, p. 242.
(2) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Misr, p. 352.
(3) Uthmān, pp. 10-12. Cf. Tāhā Ḥusayn's own views, infra, pp. 139-141.
(4) Ibid., p. 27.
(5) Ibid., pp. 358-359.
(6) Ibid., p. 69.
but otherwise model itself on the Western system of Government.¹

Islamic philosophy cannot be expected to provide much positive
guidance either, for Tāhā Ḥusayn rather sweepingly disposed of it in
a footnote in which he stated that Arab philosophers imitated Greek
models without mastering their language, and their flights of thought
were cramped by religious shackles anyway; one can therefore speak
of the maturity of Islamic philosophy only in relative terms: true
maturity has been reached only in the modern West, and the Muslim
thinkers fell short even of the Greeks.²

Out of the Arab-Islamic heritage, therefore, what is particu-
larly deserving of the attention of the Moderns is the Arabic
language and its literature.

If today the average reader is repelled by ancient Arabic
literature, it is only because there is a flood of new literature,
sufficiently abundant and sufficiently varied to occupy him all the
time, and because he is too lazy - and everything in civilisation
favours effortlessness - to plod through the involved writings of a
different age:

The case of ancient literature is to me like that of a garden
left long and continuously neglected, yet from which the matter
of life is not gone; its trees and bushes have continued to
grow without order...until it has become difficult for you and
your like to find in it the way to what you desire - to sport
and rest, to the beauty of flower and tree. You are used to
gardens which the gardener tends in the morning and tends in
the evening, arranging them and plotting the paths for you...
You wish to roam in gardens without being impeded by the
involution of the trees and the intertwining of the boughs,
without such obstacles as those who know the art of promenade
and appreciate free beauty delight in. You want the pleasure

(1) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Misr, pp. 76-77.
(2) Tajdid Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlā', p. 81.
of art to be prepared for you, you want food to be placed in your mouth and knowledge to be put into your heart. But I know some who prefer these free gardens, old and long-neglected, to those gardens of yours that are arranged, ordered, and prepared for you.¹

Ṭahā Ḥusayn is among those who find themselves impelled to wend a laborious way through the neglected gardens of the past, and he is convinced that the Arab heritage is one that is to be cherished and protected, not only as a matter of sentimental attachment, not only to ensure that the personality of the Egyptians is not swamped by accretions from Western culture, but also and above all because it forms a suitable basis for modern culture and has valuable contributions to make to it.²

This has been one of Ṭahā Ḥusayn's most genuine and most constant views, and it is in keeping with it that, both in his books and at meetings of the Fuʿād Academy, Ṭahā Ḥusayn has consistently and vigorously opposed any suggestion that colloquial Arabic should be recognised as a literary language; he considers it a corrupt dialect, unsuitable as the medium of expression of advanced intellectual life, and he cannot entertain the thought that the literary heritage of the Arabs should suffer the least measure of neglect, as it would if the classical language were allowed to fall into disuse. Rather, he would like to see the masses enabled to understand and appreciate the classical language, by simplifying the teaching of it and by extending education.³ This he considers to be

(1) Ḥadīth ul-Arbiʿāʾ, I, pp. 9-10.
(2) Ibid., I, pp. 5-7.
(3) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Misr, p. 236.
"true democracy";\(^1\) but to those who - like Āḥmad Amīn - brand his position as undemocratic he simply retorts: "We are as jealous of our literary aristocracy as we are of our political democracy."\(^2\)

In fact, Tāḥā Ḥusayn's attitude to the Arabic heritage is at least superficially parallel to that of the Salafiyyah towards the religious heritage. What he objects to in the Conservatives is their slavish imitation of the Arabs of a decadent age. He would rather Egypt took example on the Arabs of the first centuries of Islām, who built up their literature and their linguistic sciences by original research and by borrowings from the Persians and Greeks. Thus he would like to see the door of linguistic ījtiḥād reopened, by reasserting the right of Moderns to completely unbridled freedom in the coining of new words to meet the requirements of dynamic life.\(^3\) With regard to literary style, he wishes Moderns to break away from degenerate writers who are slaves to rhyme and must have verbal adornment at all costs. After the stormy debates of the twenties had died down, he did say that he was neither entirely for nor entirely against verbal ornamentation in itself:\(^4\)

I should like young writers and poets to resist somewhat the violent revolution which we brought about against attention to wording; they should consider that words have - if we may use such terms - intrinsic values which the ear appreciates and which produce in one a peculiar musical delight which the man of letters ought not to neglect, indeed to which he should give as

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(1) Fūsūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, p. 21.


(3) Discussion at Fu'ād Academy, 26 Dec. 1949, reported in Risālah, XVIII, 863 (16 Jan. 1950), pp. 84-87.

(4) Ma' Abī 'l-`Alā fī Sijnih, p. 110.
much attention as he can, on condition that this does not spoil the meaning and does not drive him into prating and esotericism. But the ideal he seeks is one that would combine the beauty of ancient literature - its fullness, its directness and simplicity - and the charm and imaginativeness that one finds in modern literatures; for this also he finds models in al-Jāḥīz and other writers of the first four centuries after the Hijrah.\(^1\)

The Egyptian Spirit

Is Egypt, then, merely to make the best of two cultures, both congenial but both imported? No, for Ṭāhā Ḥusayn sees, running through the different phases of Egypt's history like a thread through the beads of a necklace, a constant spirit that is distinctively Egyptian and that is also indestructible. Even in Egypt's darkest hours, this spirit never failed her. Both culturally and politically, she sometimes slumbered, but she never died.

When did this nation ever die? Was it dead when it absorbed Greek philosophy and stamped it with its special stamp? Was it dead when it absorbed the Christian religion and stamped it with its special stamp? Was it dead when it absorbed Islām and stamped it with its special stamp? Was it dead when it harboured the civilisation of the Greeks and the Arabs, and the literature of the Greeks and the Arabs?\(^2\)

The fact that these manifestations of culture keep recurring in Egypt in spite of historical vicissitudes in itself indicates that these manifestations are not fortuitous, not straw fires lit by some particular ruler and dying with him as happened in Aleppo under Sayf ud-Dawlah; rather, they are torches lit by Egypt's eternal nature.\(^3\)

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(1) Falsafat Ubn Khaldūn al-Ijtīmāʿiyyah, pp. 28-29.
(2) Hadīth ul-Arbīʿāʾ, III, p. 111.
To analyse this eternal nature is a delicate task. At different times, according to the particular thesis which he happened to be developing, Ṣāhā Ḥusayn has ascribed to Egyptians widely divergent traits. When arguing for a vast extension of education, for example, he asserts that nothing is so opposed to Egypt's nature as "short hopes and small aspirations"; but when it is countered that Egypt's educational resources would spread thin over such numbers as he contemplates admitting to schools, his reply is that Egyptians have long been known to be frugal and content with little. The latter observation occurs in a context which can be taken humorously, but there are many instances in which Ṣāhā Ḥusayn has commented upon the asceticism of Egyptians, their smiling acceptance of adversity, and their apathy even towards rulers who despoil the country. Perhaps all these are phases of that Egyptian spirit of which Ṣāhā Ḥusayn says that "it springs forward, but then slows down and may from time to time stop altogether to look backwards". Ṣāhā Ḥusayn also speaks of the Egyptian taste, which is "neither all smile nor all frown, but something in between the two, in which there is a great deal of rejoicing and also a little unhappiness", and which finds expression in a form of irony, not particularly violent or caustic, but extremely effective. But above all he considers the

(2) Jannat ul-Ḥayawān, p. 17.
(3) Ṣuṣūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp. 101-102.
(6) Ṣuṣūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, p. 102.
Egyptian character to be marked by calm and moderation, a moderation born of the mildness of Egypt's climate, a moderation which "dislikes idle rumbling and does not boast to exaggeration about such good fortune as life may chance to bring it",¹ and which "will not allow Egyptian life to reach extravagance in innovation".²

If this estimate genuinely represents Táhā Ḫusayn's opinion, it is a personal one, and may not command the agreement of other observers. Some may question whether the apathy and resignation of which Táhā Ḫusayn speaks are peculiar to Egypt. Others will be more than a little surprised to hear that Egyptians dislike ostentation. The Egyptian brand of irony, often deriding social evils yet apparently accepting them as ineradicable, is indeed often met with in the humorous stories of the people, but has it seeped into the literature written in the lofty language of the classics? Has any Egyptian characteristic marked literary production before the present age? Táhā Ḫusayn asserts, but does not elaborate, that the Egyptian stamp is unmistakable "in any of the varieties of science, literature, or art which are studied in Egypt and to which Egyptian scientists, men of letters, and artists contribute".³ In some instances indeed, as in the poetry of Bahā' Zubayr, it is more distinctive than in the literature of today.⁴

So it is that, to the satisfaction of national pride, Táhā Ḫusayn is able to speak in terms of an Egyptian culture. All

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¹ Me. al-Mutanabbi, II, p. 546.
² Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr, p. 392.
³ Ibid., p. 392.
⁴ Fushūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp. 101-102.
culture, he says, is at the same time human, national, and individual, for the nature of man is such that it generalises the particular and particularises the general: knowledge is international, but it no sooner settles in one place than it is coloured in a way which will enable it to reach the hearts of the people; a statue typically Egyptian is conceived, but it is no sooner exhibited than it is acclaimed by cultured people everywhere. Contradictory though they may be at times, the ancient Egyptian heritage, the Arab-Islamic heritage, and the daily acquisitions from the West blend on Egypt's soil and form a culture which may truly be called Egyptian.¹

The assertion is commendable as the expression of a hope and an aim if not as the description of an actual accomplishment. Even so, an important qualification must be borne in mind. These components may indeed eventually blend, but even in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's work they do not play equal or even similar parts. He admitted it early in his career when he wrote: "In this modern age, we have taken to following the European way in all branches of life, and to turning away almost completely from our old life."² The subject-matter of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's work has of course been primarily Arabic literature and Egypt's needs, and his upbringing has undoubtedly left residual traces in his mentality. But his approach and his methods, his initiatives, the impulses and directions he has given to the Renaissance, are traceable mainly to the West. As to the Egyptian colouring, it comes to the fore only in the expression of specifically national aspirations.

(1) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Misr, pp. 391-394.
(2) Qādat ul-Fikr, p. 52.
If the three components of Modernism were to enter into business partnership, the Egyptian would provide the name of the firm, the Arab-Islamic would provide the capital, and the Western would have the managing directorship.
Chapter Eight

THE SOCIAL ORDER

By reducing Egypt's modern culture to a neat, simple formula in agreement with nationalistic leanings, Tāhā Ḥusayn has facilitated its acceptance by the reading public, but he has tended to under-stress the profound changes which it necessitates in the conditions and outlook of all classes of Egyptian society.

Always sensitive to his environment, however, he has not failed to comment on the characteristics and the problems of the nations he has come to know. In the course of a sea-journey in 1923, for example, he noted with surprise the joviality of English fellow-passengers, for he had imagined the English to be "more inclined towards seriousness than towards jesting, towards frowning than towards cheerfulness, towards quietness and gravity than towards movement and light-mindedness"; and he has made innumerable observations about the French, about their lively curiosity, their critical and irreverent attitude towards politics as towards art and literature, the excess of cultural refinement to which he ascribes

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(1) Egypt's watchmen have fallen asleep, (unmindful) of its foxes; these are surfeited, but the bunches (of grapes) are not exhausted.

(2) Min Baʿīd, p. 16.

(3) Fī ʿs-Sayf, Chs. 3, 6, 7.
their defeat in 1942, their loss of respect for legal authorities and their pessimistic scepticism about all previously accepted values, resulting from the German occupation and its aftermath. But it is with conditions in Egypt that he is naturally most concerned, and it is with his views on these that this chapter proposes to deal.

Like other nationalists, Tāhā Ḫusayn would like Egypt always to be presented to the outside world in a favourable light. This bias took rather petty forms when he attended the Congress of Historians at Bruxelles in April 1923, for he noted with pride that he was the only Egyptian there to wear a ṭarbūsh, and he admitted that a report on the recently discovered tomb of Tut Ankh Amen had displeased him because all the credit went to Englishmen, whereas he "should have liked Egypt to receive some honourable mention in this matter, even though she did not deserve it since she had done nothing towards the discovery of the tomb". It is also discernible in a subtler form in the somewhat complacent article which he contributed to Islam To-Day. Tāhā Ḫusayn has stated his views unequivocally in this respect in a review of Qit 'ul-Qulūb's Harem, a novel written in French which depicted intimate and uncomplimentary aspects of the life of women in Egypt. Tāhā Ḫusayn said that he thought the book

(1) Fuṣūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp. 235-238.
(2) "Ghaybat us-Sultan," Ahrām, 30 Sept. 1948.
(4) Min Ba-Td, p. 82.
(5) Ibid., p. 133.
(6) Edited by A. Arberry and R. Landau.
good from the artistic point of view, but as an Egyptian felt bound to point out that there are other aspects of Egyptian life, equally true, which could be presented to foreigners without giving them cause to deride Egyptians; he would not have objected had the book been written in Arabic with the intention of guiding Egyptians towards improvement, or even if it had been first published in Arabic and then been translated into European languages, to show that Egyptians were capable of self-criticism; "but that these shortcomings should be depicted directly in a foreign language, not in order that we should be made aware of them but in order that others should - that is what I view with misgivings, and it is certain that I shall not embark upon it. Let people say that I am weak - I favour this sort of weakness."¹

Within the Egyptian family circle, however, Tāhā Ḥusayn gives its dirty linen a vigorous rubbing, and when a reporter from al-Miṣrī asked him which of Egypt's problems he considered the gravest, he replied that the whole of Egyptian life is a problem, and he quoted two lines of al-Mutanabbi's: "Fate has directed so many misfortunes against me that my heart now has a covering of darts; so that when (more) arrows strike me, their shafts but break upon the shafts."²

In his autobiography, in several of his novels, and in a multitude of short tales and sketches, Tāhā Ḥusayn has given us vivid pictures of this life which is one vast and anguish problem -

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(1) Fuṣūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, p. 69.

rural communities weighted down by poverty, ignorance, superstitions, and outmoded traditions; children who learn in their school-days to submit to the tyranny and corruption of those in authority;¹ men who cling to their old ways until they are engulfed by a rising tide of novel conditions which they do not comprehend,² and others who allow themselves to be carried away by this tide only to find themselves afloat but morally adrift.³ In their simple truth, these pictures are the most powerful appeal to reform that could be made.

His analysis of the situation, however, does not go much beyond breaking it up into the sad trilogy of disease, poverty, and ignorance against which every newspaperman and every orator in Egypt inveighs. In connection with the prevalence of diseases, Ţāhā Ḥusayn has done no more than point out the "vicious philosophy, and even more vicious science" which village women apply to their sick children, especially in large families: during the first days of an illness, no attention is paid to the moaning child, for what child is that who never complains? And when eventually the need for treatment becomes obvious, the doctor is never thought of, and it is to some old wife's remedy or to the barber's services that the mother resorts.⁴

As for poverty, it is not the meagreness of Egypt's total resources which has attracted Ţāhā Ḥusayn's attention, but the

(1) Mainly in al-Ayyām, I, and al-Muʿadhdhabūna fī 'l-ʾArq.
(2) See Shajarat ul-Bu's.
(3) See Jannat ul-Ḥayawān and Mirāt uq-Damīr il-Ḥadīth.
(4) Al-Ayyām, I, p. 115.
inequality of their distribution. His sympathy has always been with the underprivileged. Even in 1920, he was explaining the bacchanalia as opportunities which the common people seized to enjoy earthly pleasures of which they were ordinarily deprived by aristocrats and tyrants, and to forget in drunkenness the misery of their daily life.¹

A few years later, speaking of Ḥāfiẓ ʿIbrāhīm, he remarked that the poet belonged to "one of those families of which Egyptian towns and villages are full, which have become accustomed since the days of the Mamlūks or earlier than the days of the Mamlūks to suffer that others might be happy, to work that others might be idle, to undergo pain in silence and to endure the unpleasant with patience and resignation".²

But it is in the last six years that he has made economic inequality and its moral implications the special object of his attention. Society, he observes with bitterness, is built on a solid foundation of self-interest,³ and this favours the self-seeking, the hypocrite, the turn-coat, and the venal. Political parties are locked in an endless struggle for complicated interests, and those who wish to take advantage of this struggle for their own advancement need only be clever, plausible, nimble, cunning, and discreet.⁴ Meanwhile the common man finds no champion, and his fundamental needs are ignored. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn made his bitterest denunciation at the time of Egypt's cholera epidemic in the autumn of 1946. At one time, he wrote,

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(1) Ṣuḥuf Mukhtārah min agh-Šiʿr it-tamthīlī ʿind al-Yūnān, intro, p. 21.
(2) Ḥāfiẓ wa Shawqī, p. 188.
(3) Al-Muʿadhḏhabūna fī ʿl-ʾArq, p. 61.
(4) Jannat al-Ḥayawān, p. 34.
Egyptians believed in a heaven and a hell which would be the abode of the good and of the evil after their death. They now know that there are a heaven and a hell upon earth, and that entry into either is not determined by one's merits. But perhaps the epidemic has reversed some injustices: the earthly hell is a slow fire, and the added fuel may now bring deliverance through death to its damned; on the other hand, the earthly elect might, in their fear of death, be turned away from thoughts of luxury, and they might come to realise that they are living in "an atmosphere of envy, odium, spite, rancour, and resentment, and that they do not spend a single dirham or dinār but it is reckoned against them by the people around them".1

Over the whole of Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's career, however, the problem which he has kept most constantly to the fore is that of ignorance. It is to him a two-fold evil. In itself it represents an injustice, a failure on the part of the community to give the citizen his due, for knowledge is "a right belonging to Man by virtue of the fact that he is a living, thinking being, who must be given opportunities to think even as he is given the possibility to acquire his share of food, water, and air".2 But ignorance is also a contributory cause to the other evils of Egyptian life, for the ignorant villager does not make use of the medical services available, and even if he has

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(2) "Ath-Thaqāfah wa mā hiya" talk given to Nādi 'l-Kharrijīna 'l-Misrī, reported in Risālah, XVIII, 867 (13 Feb. 1950), pp. 198-200.
some wealth he does not necessarily use it with any concern for refinement or good taste.1 All of Egypt's problems therefore need to be attacked together, but the most effective weapon against them all will be the spread of enlightenment.2

Precisely how are these problems to be attacked, and by whom? Tāhā Husayn's answer is unfortunately tangled in the mesh of his political creed and his party allegiance.

He has long professed to be a democrat, and has consistently shown that concern with the welfare of the masses which, in popular usage and sometimes in his own, is synonymous with democracy. During the twenties, he was understandably dazzled by the more blatant manifestations of democracy that he had encountered in Europe. There was something fascinating about the irreverence with which the French spoke of their rulers, and when the Belgian Royal family entertained members of the Congress of Historians in 1923 and conversed informally with them, Tāhā Husayn concluded enthusiastically though somewhat naively that democracy had penetrated even royal palaces, and that even kings understood that "the monarchic system has become unsuitable to this age because it is a relic of the past which has no meaning now except when there is no difference whatever between kings and presidents of republics, except when the thrones of kings rest upon the hearts of the people, and not upon the strength


(2) Statement made to al-Ahrām, 23 Jan. 1950.
of the army or the strength of ancient tradition". For years, the problem seemed to be the simple one of transplanting the Western system of Parliamentarism into Egypt, and Táhá Ḥusayn unequivocally declared the English system to be "the truest democracy that History has known".

Táhá Ḥusayn placed his faith in a simple formula: Democracy is and has always been "government of the people by the people for the people; this means that the people should freely choose their rulers, freely supervise them to find out if they are ruling for the people's welfare or for their own, and remove them if not satisfied with their rule". As such, democracy goes hand in hand with his theory of Progress, which in turn he identifies with the increasing role of Reason, i.e. individualism and personal freedom.

In the twenties Táhá Ḥusayn held that "modern Government in the civilised countries of the world to-day stands on the purely political basis of economic and civic benefits, no more and no less," and that any modern government which claimed that it was founded on a religious or philosophic idea would be laughed to scorn by its own subjects. It seemed obvious at the time that if people were given the direction of their affairs they would relieve their own misery, and Táhá Ḥusayn was content to give them a translation of the Constitution of Athens, to educate them in fundamentals, and then let

(1) Min BaʿId, pp. 103-104.
(2) Fuşūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, p. 42.
(3) ʿUthmān, p. 28.
(4) Min BaʿId, pp. 230-231.
them work their own salvation. The emphasis was on government by the people.

But the years rolled by and the plight of the people remained unrelieved. With a pessimism the finality of which is unusual in his writings, he recorded in 1946 that, like others before it, the movement for reform had failed "because the mind has not yet attained control of Will and Instinct", and he seemed to doubt whether it ever would when he added that the destiny of peoples seems to be a continuous quest for ideals, a continuous inability to fulfil these ideals, and continuous injustice both for the just and the unjust.¹

Because his faith in the democratic formula had been too simple and too hopeful, he now began to doubt the formula itself instead of examining the conditions under which it had been applied. Already in 1943 the theme of his novel Ḥlām Shahrazād had been that it is the duty of a ruler to ensure the welfare of his subjects even when these do not discern where their interest lies.² The direction he was taking was made clear in the book of epigrams which he published in 1945, one of which runs:

The young pupil to his aged master: "What is the matter with So-and-so that he expresses the opinions of an extremist of the Left and acts in accordance with the extremists of the Right?"

The aged master to his young pupil: "He has the mind of a free man and the morals of a slave."³

He still professed his attachment to democracy, of which he said that although it produces many base persons who yield to the call of their

(2) See Appendix II.
(3) Jannat uṣh-Shawk, p. 36.
appetites precisely because of the freedom it gives them, yet its benefits outnumber its evils.¹ In the following years, however, the new direction he had taken was accentuated. In a comparison of different political systems, he said of democracy that it is based on a measure of political justice more apparent than real, in that the will of the majority overrides that of the minority, but then power is delegated to a few individuals some of whom are selfish and some unselfish, some honest and some dishonest; it therefore results in a little freedom, a little equality before the law, but no social justice. Communism on the other hand has given a measure of social justice in that it has destroyed class distinctions, ensured that workers got the fruit of their own labour, and enabled even the invalid to live sheltered from indignity; but to do so it has sacrificed all liberty.² Mankind therefore is faced with the choice between two ideologies which have almost become cults: the cult of Freedom and the cult of Justice. Freedom undeniably has its attractions, but it does not clothe, or feed, or quench thirst, and it is difficult to see how a pauper may enjoy freedom. The establishment of justice on the other hand must be accompanied by much unpleasantness, such as the absement of the rich and powerful, coercion and monotony for all. But the fact is that humanity is ill, and a patient cannot be cured by allowing him to indulge what he likes; besides, there is no reason why Freedom should not be granted after Justice has been established, and the opportunity for treachery

¹ Ibid., pp. 162-163.
² `Uthmān, pp. 6-9.
and for serving selfish interests have been circumvented. Humanity's choice therefore lies between a cure and the acceptance of its present disease, even though it lead to annihilation. After this, Ṭaba Ḥusayn purports to leave the question open with the pious hope that some day some philosopher might discover a formula which will give Justice without coercion, and freedom without injustice.¹

One is reminded of the time when Ṭaba Ḥusayn also expressed the hope for some formula that would reconcile Reason and Religion, and himself later proposed a "compromise" which all but nullified the role of Religion. Here the issue is prejudged by the connotations given to the words "justice" and "freedom": Justice is the recognition of the rights and needs of others on a practical level, not the ultimate justice which must recognise freedom as one of the needs of man; and Freedom is the unbridled indulgence of one's appetites, not the freedom which, integrated in any system of thought, must needs recognise the freedom of others and limit itself by it. To establish that the dice are loaded, it is enough to point out that among the illustrations he gives of the two principles in action is that when the Socialist government of Britain declared its readiness to evacuate Egypt unconditionally, it was taking a step towards Justice; but when it reverted to Conservative imperial policy and set conditions for the evacuation which would nullify it, it was taking a step towards Freedom.²

More in cautiousness than in fairness, it must be stressed that

(2) Ibid., pp. 192-195.
Tāhā Ḥusayn has never explicitly renounced his attachment to democracy, and has even allowed for the possibility that freedom might be "granted" after justice has been established. But at least it will have become abundantly clear that in his political and social creed the emphasis is now on government for the people.

There are cynics in Egypt who say that every party politician is a Socialist when in opposition, and a Conservative when in office. The fact that Tāhā Ḥusayn uttered his loudest cries for social reform after the Wafdist cabinet had been dismissed in 1944 is not without significance. But it has already been noted that his change of attitude was discernible in Aḥlām Shahrāzād, which was published before 1944; and since the Wafd was dismissed not by the people but by the King and undoubtedly retained popular support, Tāhā Ḥusayn was not doing it great service in minimising the role of the people's will. The change, therefore, is a genuine one. Indeed it is difficult to believe that at this stage Tāhā Ḥusayn did not reconsider the whole of his professed philosophy. A political system in which the people asserted their own rights and pursued their own interests was consistent with his fundamental identification of progress with the increasing role of Reason, i.e. with increasing individualism. But in the new order which Tāhā Ḥusayn now contemplates, the Government is to be a benevolent but firm nurse spoon-feeding a patient who might even be refractory. What force would motivate such selfless action?

Apparently, Tāhā Ḥusayn's answer is simply: the recognition of one's duty. Since 1944, the bulk of his writing has been chiding or exhortatory articles, urging generosity, unselfishness,
sincerity, courage and constancy in the performance of duty. Behind it all is a lofty but unexplained belief in the dignity of Man. The people who have, the people in authority, must see to it that others are not reduced to abject poverty and ignorance. It is not out of enlightened self-interest that they are expected to do so: men should not be looked upon as animals or machines, to be well-treated because they would then work better. Even pity falls short of the justice which Tâhâ Husayn wants to see done. Rather, it must be realised that:

It is the people's right, its absolute and sacred right, that equality and justice prevail among all of its sons. Though the historical circumstances of people's lives have brought about gradations of wealth and poverty, and though natural circumstances have brought about gradations in capacity and ability, yet there is one thing which they have in common and in which they do not differ: it is that — in the words of the noble hadith — they are human beings who have been created out of dust and who shall be returned to the dust.

The principle is stated as axiomatically as are its predecessors of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The contrast between it and between earlier beliefs in amoral man or in a social order based solely on "practical benefits" need not be dwelt upon; but the difficulty remains that on Tâhâ Husayn's own observation, prevailing conditions are in direct opposition to what he recognises. Against this, Tâhâ Husayn can only urge a change of heart in those who are in a position to lead, or simply to give.

It need not be stressed that Tâhâ Husayn is not an economist, or a sociologist, or a political scientist. Reviewing Ibrâhîm Madkûr and Mariette Ghâlâ'i's Al-Adât ul-Fukûmiyyah, he himself admitted that he was not qualified to pass an opinion on its

technical aspects. His contribution to the fight against poverty and disease goes no further than his attempt to awaken consciences. On the few occasions when he has ventured further, his suggestions have proved elementary, or even naive and confused. That Egypt's present resources are inadequate for its large population, he simply does not believe. What strikes him is that there are many with an income of L.E.20,000 per annum who could live equally well on L.E.10,000. If they are not willing to forego part of it, they should be made to: "Taxes are very small, smaller than they should be; and salaries are very small, smaller than they should be. Justice demands that taxes be increased manifold and that salaries be increased manifold; that the State should refrain from squandering public moneys, and that the rich should refrain from squandering their private wealth." Particulary naive was Tāhā Ḥusayn's recommendation to the Egyptian Minister of Social Affairs of Giraudoux's Le Pouvoir Absolu on the ground that there was a similarity between Egypt's problems and France's; in connection with demography, for example Giraudoux studied the effects of a declining birth-rate, and Tāhā Ḥusayn argued that although Egypt showed no such phenomenon, its high death-rate led to the same sort of difficulty.

In the struggle against ignorance, however, his contribution has been direct and practical, and deserves special study.

(2) "Man Yūqīq un-Nā' im min Nawmih," Ahrām, 10 Sept. 1948.
Chapter Nine

EDUCATION

Enlighten the people generally and tyranny and oppressions of both mind and body will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.

JEFFERSON.

Once, to explain a difference of opinion between Valéry and himself, Tāhā Ḥusayn said that whereas Valéry was primarily a poet and man of letters for whom a chair was created at the Collège de France, he himself was primarily a teacher who turned to pure literature only when free from teaching duties.¹

Few critics will agree that Tāhā Ḥusayn's career as a teacher is more important than his literary contributions, but the statement serves to emphasise Tāhā Ḥusayn's profound and active concern with education in Egypt. Indeed his faith in the desirability of widespread education as an end in itself, and its effectiveness as a means of reform, is the most constant feature of his public career.

At the outset, his ideas naturally tended to soar above worldly realities, and we find him not only thrusting independent thinking upon University students, but urging, for example, that in schools morality should not be taught to children at all, but that the environment should be so improved that they should find scarcely any examples to follow except good ones.²

Soon, however, as administrator of the University and as an official of the Ministry of Education, he was proposing specific

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¹ Maṣ Abī 'l-ʿAlāʾ fī Sīnīh, pp. 17-18.

² Ruh ut-Tarbiyah, p. 112, footnote.
changes in the existing organisation and curricula of State sponsored institutions. To trace all and each of these proposed changes would be a task more arduous than profitable. Fortunately in 1937, instead of submitting formal reports on two educational congresses to which he had been delegated by the Ministry and by the University, Tāhā Ḥusayn wrote *Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr*, a book which lays down a detailed policy for all stages of education and is a good indicator of the directions in which Tāhā Ḥusayn had exerted his influence until then.

The most striking feature of this programme – perhaps because it leads Tāhā Ḥusayn to advocate somewhat unexpected measures – is the close interdependence of educational and national interests that Tāhā Ḥusayn believes in. Fine words may be said in praise of liberal values, but the schools are clearly intended to inculcate common national loyalties. Conversely, the extension and control of education are both the duty and the prerogative of the State. For two generations at least, the State should bring within its control even the moral and physical upbringing of children, because the Egyptian family is not sufficiently enlightened to ensure them.¹ It should regard education not as a luxury, but as an absolute need, on the same footing as national defence, for which money must be found at all costs,² and of which no national should be deprived merely because of poverty.

Tāhā Ḥusayn therefore views with mixed feelings the existence of

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a variety of schools in Egypt: there are Government lay schools; there are privately-run Egyptian schools; there are foreign schools which are not interested in the culture or prestige of Egypt, but which "regrettably" have higher standards of teaching than the others, and therefore attract Egyptian pupils; and there are religious schools financed by the State, but traditionally exempt from rigid control. Some variety is desirable, but this state of affairs would have led to national cleavages had not Egyptians been united by a powerful Press, by the influence of certain books which were read by all, and by common misfortunes.¹ But now the Government must assume control and ensure that national harmony is perpetuated. It should allow, and indeed encourage, a certain amount of variety in teaching methods and curricula; it should give higher institutions - i.e. the University and the later stages of the Azhar - as much independence as is consistent with the State's authority over all things and with the government's responsibility before Parliament; but in private and in religious schools as well as in its own lay ones, it should lay down curricula, supervise teaching, and conduct examinations connected with the subjects that make for Egyptian patriotism. These subjects are the Arabic language, Egyptian history and geography, and Islam, for so long as Egypt remains officially an Islamic country, its religion must be considered a component part of national consciousness, and even foreign Christian schools must at least make it possible for the government to give Islamic instruction to its nationals.²

¹ Ibid., pp. 62-65.
² Ibid., pp. 66-67.
Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was also dissatisfied with the division of schools into elementary, primary, and secondary. He called it a senseless division, imposed by the British and designed to encourage complacency in the educational ambitions of Egyptians. Although as much education as possible should be made available to as many as possible, a natural division would be: elementary, for all; general, which would cumulate the existing primary and secondary stages and add a tenth year to them, for the average; and higher, for the best, for future leaders.¹

Elementary education, which should of course be universal, compulsory, and free, should give the individual the minimum that is consistent with citizenship of a civilised country, as well as an opportunity to improve himself. The three R's therefore are not enough; a little of each of the subjects which make for patriotism must also be taught, and evening continuation classes must be made available, to ensure that the reading ability acquired does not fall into disuse, or lead to the acquisition, by indiscriminate reading, of bad as well as good ideas. Luxurious premises and elaborate equipment are not necessary in elementary schools, indeed they may only make the pupil dissatisfied with home conditions; but the cultural and social level of the teacher should be improved by giving him a teachers' training course for which the secondary school certificate should be a prerequisite, and by raising his remuneration; and to compensate for his necessarily inferior grade, the planning and direction of elementary education should be entrusted to the best brains in the Ministry of Education.²

(1) Ibid., pp. 99-105.
(2) Ibid., pp. 174-184.
Those in charge of general education should be rid of the notion that it exists only to supply the government service with officials. It should enable students to understand their role in the wider scheme of things, and make it possible for them to extend by their own efforts the confines of the culture they are given in school; it should also prepare a minority of them for University training - and by this is understood not merely that they should qualify for admission to the University, but that they should be able from their first day there to follow and enjoy its courses.

At the time, Tāhā Ḥusayn said that general education was not absolutely essential, and therefore need not be compulsory or - for a while at least - free. But it should be made available to all who can afford it, and meritorious children of poor parents could be partly or entirely exempted from the payment of fees.

The subjects of elementary education should of course continue to be taught, only with greater depth and wider scope, so as to bring into the picture related countries and cultures and lead to an appreciation of the science itself. In addition, a wide choice of foreign languages should be made available - modern languages such as English, French, German, Italian, and Russian for the benefit of all; Oriental languages such as Persian and Hebrew for those who wish to pursue advanced studies in Arabic; and Greek and Latin for those interested in history, geography, philosophy, or pure literature. The teaching of foreign languages, however, should not start until the fifth year of general education. During the earlier years, the pupil's attention should be turned exclusively towards Arabic, because unlike other nations Arabs do not learn their own tongue from their environment. Arabic, in fact, urgently needs to be rescued from the traditions of

(1) Ibid., pp.174-184.
(2) Ibid., pp.105-112.
(3) Ibid., pp.194-227.
Azharist teaching if it is not to become a dead language, abhorred by the pupils. It should be simplified and made attractive: the script should be so reformed as to integrate the short vowels into it; the attention given to formal grammar, accidence, and rhetoric should be greatly reduced, and pupils should be given opportunities to read interesting matter connected with their daily life. To this purpose, courses about foreign literatures and cultures should be given in Arabic. Finally, Tāḥā Ḥusayn had a good word to say about physical training, although he admitted he did not know much about it.

Tāḥā Ḥusayn was aware that curricular changes were not all the reform that was needed, for in Egypt both teachers and pupils suffer acutely from subservience to the "set programme" for which a book is specially set, on which alone the examination is set, on the results of which the pupil's heart is set. He therefore proposed that the Ministry should cease to publish its own chosen texts, but should merely comment on the suitability of texts placed competitively on the market; that the promotion of a pupil should depend not on a rigid system of national examinations, but on trimestrial class examinations set and supervised by his own teacher; and that both teacher and student should be encouraged to read material extraneous to the courses by allowing them more leisure and building up school libraries. The overcrowding of schools should be avoided, and pupils should be individually observed and be given vocational guidance. Tāḥā Ḥusayn also deplored that the Ministry of Education

(1) Ibid., pp. 227-253.
(2) Ibid., pp. 256-257.
was a nest of intrigants, and that its senior permanent officials
had no consistent educational policy, so that much of what one party
did was undone by its successor in power; he therefore advocated a
measure of de-centralisation, and urged that the Ministry become as
"non-political" as the Ministry of National Defence. Above all, he
realised that the key-stone of his proposed edifice of reform was
the formation of teachers.¹

Tāhā Ḥusayn considered that the low salaries of teachers, the
heavy burden of work that was placed upon them, and the rigid system
of examination and inspection which left nothing to their initiative,
made them mere tools in a factory for turning out manufactured
citizens. Besides, their training had been ruined by an inconsistent
ministerial policy, often swayed by political expediency and the
desire to humour the Azhar, although Ministry officials realised that
the Azhar was not abreast of the country's needs. As things stood,
some of the reforms long urged by the University had been made, but
the Maḥād ut-Tarbiyah continued to bring together students with
different educational backgrounds, remained under the direct super-
vision of the Ministry, and maintained lower intellectual standards
than those of the University.²

The evils of this situation were particularly acute in relation
to the training of teachers of Arabic, for here three different
institutions were in competition: the University, the Azhar, and
Dār ul-ʿUlūm. Tāhā Ḥusayn had long deprecated the "scholastic"

¹ (Ibid., pp. 121-174. ² (Ibid., pp. 258-278.
approach to Arabic, which gave emphasis to linguistic considerations and restricted its literary studies to an entirely sterile compilation of petty facts about a writer's life, and of what authorities had said of him. Instead, he favoured a combination of the "ancient" method - the method of early critics at Basrah and Kufah as it was practised by al-Maqrizi at the Azhar - which cultivated aesthetic taste, and of the critical methods of Orientalists.¹

Now it was the scholastic method which prevailed in Government schools, in Dār ul-ʿUlūm, and which had even displaced the ancient method in the Azhar.² The University alone had sufficient contacts with Western thought, sufficient breadth and freshness of outlook, and sufficient means to adopt and foster the alternative; the Azhar was scarcely able to carry out its proper religious mission without additional burdens, and Dār ul-ʿUlūm could be saved only by incorporation into the University.³

The training which Tāhā Ḥusayn proposed for all school-teachers was that each should specialise in the subject he would eventually teach, and should also follow a course of training in teaching methods and related subjects. The specialisation would necessarily involve studying at the University; indeed Tāhā Ḥusayn considered a first degree insufficient, but he admitted that a Master's degree involved too narrow a specialisation, and advocated instead, in addition to the first degree, courses and examinations copied on the

(1) Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlā', pp. 8-10.
(2) Fī 'l-Adab il-Jāhili, pp. 7-14.
(3) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr, pp. 278-297.
French system of agrégation. Training specifically for teaching could be started in a student's third year at the University, but to ensure uniform quality in all his courses the Ma'had ut-Tarbiyah should be incorporated in the University.¹

Obviously, Ţāḥā Ḥusayn intended the University to be the hub of the country's educational system. Not only was it to have a monopoly on the training of teachers, but it should also have a direct say in the formulation of school policy; for example, one of Ţāḥā Ḥusayn's proposals for minimising the unfortunate conditions prevalent in the Ministry of Education was that secondary schools should be run by a Committee consisting of one Ministry official as President, two representatives of the University, and two representatives of the schools.² The University itself should have the widest possible measure of financial and academic freedom. As a State Institution, its budget must of course be approved by Parliament, but bureaucrats in the Ministry of Finance should remember that once the money has been voted, the University should be absolutely free to spend it as it deems best; and Ţāḥā Ḥusayn deplored any interference with its standards, such as that it should have to admit students on the basis of the marks they got in national examinations run by the Ministry.³

With its freedom guaranteed, the University should aim at providing both technical instruction and liberal education; this

(2) Ibid., pp. 145-149.
(3) Ibid., pp. 333-345.
should be true of every Faculty in it, indeed of every course, for some of its graduates will be applying their information in their careers as chemists, teachers, or business-men, but others will spend their life in pursuit of pure knowledge. Furthermore, the University should become a small-scale reproduction of the ideal society, based on love, co-operation, and understanding between all its members. It should create an atmosphere of deep general culture; the activities of its departments should not be compartmentalised, and students from all faculties should be encouraged to mingle in extra-curricular social activities, such as debates and concerts.¹

The Azhar too, as the source of spiritual life for Muslims and as a witness to the glory of Egypt, would have an important role to play if only it would renew its contact with the life of the community and realise that it should be sharing honours with the University, not competing against it by attempting to duplicate its work. In other words, it should confine itself to turning out religious preachers and leaders, but there would be a great deal to be gained if these sought lay knowledge as well, and Tāhā Husayn makes the interesting suggestion that, provided the initial stages of Azharist schooling were subjected to the same sort of control as that of lay schools, the University and the Azhar could co-operate to the extent of having the courses of the one open to the students of the other.²

In addition, since Egypt should be making cultural contributions

(1) Ibid., pp. 307-339.
(2) Ibid., pp. 350-357.
to the world commensurate with its political and economic role, and
since the people are as yet not interested in culture, it falls to
the State to encourage enlightenment beyond the school and University
level. It should organise advanced research, subsidising learned
societies, unifying their efforts by the creation of an Academy
similar to that of France, and offering prizes and rewards for
original contributions. It should create a bureau that would under-
take to translate world classics. It should encourage writers by
offering them cash prizes and freeing them from restrictive censor-
ship. And it should supervise such powerful means of spreading
culture as the Press, the Radio, and the Cinema; this supervision,
however, should be entrusted not to Censors, but to committees of
intellectuals similar to the Niqābat uṣ-Ṣahafiyyīn, which already
exists and renders good service to the Press.\(^1\)

Finally, Egypt should acknowledge its responsibility as the
leader of the Arab world, and should work for the unification of
programmes in all Arab schools, indeed should found schools in other
Arab states that would have a curriculum adapted to local needs and
would be staffed partly by Egyptians and partly by natives.\(^2\)

This, in outline, is the programme which Ṭāhā Ḫusayn advocated
in 1937 and to the piecemeal realisation of which he consistently
directed his efforts and his influence throughout his career as a
Ministry official and a University administrator. Ṭāhā Ḫusayn
worked in particularly close harmony with Najīb ul-Hilālī Pasha,

(1) Ibid., pp. 362-384.
(2) Ibid., pp. 384-391.
Minister of Education in the Wafdist Cabinet which lasted from 1942 to 1944, their most conspicuous successes being the creation of the Fārūq University and the decision to make all elementary and primary government schools free. Nevertheless, he was still far from his goal when his career was cut short in 1944.

In substance, the programme he delineated in Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah remains his ultimate guide to this day. But in the period of impatience which followed the dismissal of the Wafid, he raised his voice more and more insistently for immediate steps to bring education within the reach of all. Education, he said, is an absolute necessity, like water and air. It should not be bought and sold "like leeks and onions"; it should be free, and it should be made available to all who wish it. To this end, the State must seize control of all educational institutions, and proceed relentlessly to expand facilities at all stages. Let it not be said that resources are limited, that this or that reform must be delayed for the sake of another, that this or that section of the population must be denied its rights for the sake of another. Resources must be shared among all; the money can be found, and if enough graduate teachers cannot, then degrees should be dispensed with and anyone who has something to teach should be called upon to do so, for to

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(1) Interview.


(3) From a speech, reported in ar-Risālah, XVII, 855 (21 Nov. 1949), p. 1634.


postpone the extension of education would be like asking the *fallāh* to refrain from drinking until filtered water has been brought to his village.¹

When Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn became Minister of Education in January 1950, he took the paradoxical stand that so long as he was in the Cabinet he would have nothing to do with politics,² mainly because he remembered his earlier criticism of political intrigue in the Ministry, but presumably also because it might embarrass his colleagues if he flaunted some of his political tenets. Instead, he turned to his administrative duties with an energy and decisiveness unprecedented in the history of Egyptian officialdom.

Turning his attention first to the schools, he took the spectacular step of having not the intention but the actual decision incorporated in the Speech from the Throne on 16th January 1950 that all instruction up to University level should be free. It was not made compulsory, and indeed it had to remain selective on the basis of ability,³ but in an effort to meet increased demands, new school-buildings were ordered to be erected, private schools were virtually annexed by directing the overflow from government schools to them and offering to pay the salaries of their teachers,⁴ and public-minded citizens were told that if they placed buildings at the disposal of the Ministry, it would undertake to staff them and run

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(2) *Al-Ahrām*, 18 February 1951.
them as schools.¹ By the beginning of the new school-year, 21,000,000 copies of 200 new textbooks had been printed, 750 new class-rooms had been made available,² and enrolment in schools of all stages had increased, the change naturally being greatest at the initial stage, for the number of pupils in government kindergartens rose from 19,340 to 45,911, and in non-government kindergartens from 23,696 to 32,995.³ For next year, Ţāhā Ḥusayn has already announced that another 1700 new class-rooms will be opened.⁴

Before such a programme of expansion, changes in organisation and curricula must for a time take second place, but Ţāhā Ḥusayn proposes to amalgamate the kindergarten, elementary, and primary stages into one, and to unify secondary, agricultural, and industrial schools in order to wipe out distinctions that have so far existed on social and occupational grounds.⁵ The teaching of foreign languages is to start only at the secondary stage, and a first step towards diversity has been taken by making French the first foreign language in some schools, whereas English retains its priority in others.⁶ He also intends to make curricula simpler and more attractive, and to abolish the rigid system of examinations which governs promotion.⁷

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(4) Al-Ahrām, 18 Feb. 1951.
(5) Al-Ahrām, 6 Feb. 1950.
As for teachers, Tāhā Husayn has raised their status within the cadre of government service and has increased their opportunities for promotion. He has also attached Teacher Training colleges to the various Universities, but for the time being he is content to recruit teachers among University men, Azharists, and any other cultured men who can help him to put out the fire of ignorance.

In principle, even University training is to be free, but this cannot yet be. However, by October 1950 Tāhā Husayn had re-grouped a number of existing Higher Institutes and re-organised them as the Ibrāhīm University, and was working on projects for another two Universities, one to be situated in Upper Egypt and to be named after Muḥammad ʿAlī, the other to be centred in Tantā. In addition, he has promised notables of the province of Daqahliyyah that if they raise L.E.100,000 by voluntary donations he will institute a medical school in Manṣūrah which will be the nucleus for another University, and it would seem that another two provinces of Lower Egypt, al-Buḥayrah and al-Gharbiyyah, wish to emulate the Daqahliyyah. Several new Institutes are also to be added to the Fuʿād University.

Understandably, Tāhā Husayn has not yet given very much attention to the extension of general enlightenment which, he considers, is also part of the government's duty. Existing

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(2) Al-Ahrām, 27 Feb. 1950.
(4) Al-Ahrām, 23 Jan 1950.
(5) Al-Ahrām, 18 Feb. 1951.
ministerial departments which deal with this continue to function, but Tāhā Ḥusayn frankly said that if he could have passed the duty of stamping out adult illiteracy to the Ministry of Social Affairs he would have done so. ¹ He remains watchful, however, of opportunities to assert Egypt’s cultural leadership abroad. He went to Nice in May 1950 to deliver the inaugural lectures of the Muḥammad `Alī Pasha al-Kabīr chair at the Mediterranean Institute, to Florence as head of the Egyptian delegation to the U.N.E.S.C.O. Conference, and later to Madrid to inaugurate the Fārūq Institute of Islamic studies which was brought into being by his predecessor. He has already secured the consent of France, Spain, and Italy to the creation of a similar Institute in Tangier, and is thinking of founding yet another in Istanbul. ² He is also lending Egyptian teachers to other Arab countries, in spite of the acute need for them at home. ³

The cost of these initiatives and reforms has resulted in a rise to L.E.23,000,000 of budgetary appropriations for the Ministry of Education in 1950, as against some L.E.17,000,000 in the preceding year; and as, from year to year, the inflated enrolment of the kindergartens reaches other stages of the school pyramid, more and more money will have to be spent. The easiest criticism that can be directed against Tāhā Ḥusayn is in fact his insouciance to material means. In Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Migr, not one figure

(2) Al-Ahrām, 26 Nov. 1950.
(3) Al-Ahrām, 18 Feb. 1951.
is quoted, and Tāḥā Ḥusayn merely asserts that he does not believe the money cannot be raised.¹ Similarly, as Minister of Education, he states that difficulties over funds and school-buildings are no concerns of his—he simply refers him to the Ministers of Finance and Public Works!² However, there is no scarcity of cautious men in Egyptian government service, and the outsider is tempted to look upon a display of energy and purposefulness, of rashness even, with indulgence and not a little admiration. And indeed the visionary might yet once again prove wiser than the planner.

But the vision itself is not without fault. The example of the West, and particularly of France, is at times too indiscriminately followed; for example, Tāḥā Ḥusayn pleads for the introduction of Greek and Latin in the University and even in schools³ more vigorously than he pleads for the study of Semitic languages, and he makes no mention of Turkish.

The fundamental weakness of his programme, however, is the incongruity of its liberal aims and illiberal means. Unable to free himself from the historic links of the Renaissance with Government initiative, Tāḥā Ḥusayn can think only of official action as a remedy to existing evils. He wishes the University to be an ideal society, but if the students cannot run their Union they should be helped, and if they do not appreciate the value of sports they should be required to participate in them.⁴ If bureaucrats in the Ministry

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(1) p. 127.
(3) Mustaqqbal uth-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr, pp. 207-216.
(4) Ibid., p. 328.
of Education cripple the initiative of school-teachers, or if other bureaucrats in the Ministry of Finance threaten the independence of the University, he scarcely does more than enjoin them not to be bureaucratic. The foreign schools which he admits give better instruction than the government ones he can regard only as an anomaly, and even at the time when he was calling for every possible assistance in the fight against ignorance, he declared that if Egypt was not allowed to open schools in North Africa, he would not hesitate to close French schools in Egypt in reprisal.¹

In fact, Tāḥā Ḥusayn advocates government control over education not merely as an expedient, but as a doctrine. Education, he says, is a two-edged weapon, for it makes Man aware both of his rights and of his duties. As Man is naturally inclined to take more than he gives, an uncontrolled education will cause everyone to demand his rights, but not to observe his duties, and hence will endanger the social order. Governments therefore have the duty to administer, or at least to supervise, education in order to maintain a balance between consciousness of Right and consciousness of Duty.²

"Justice" evidently has much to fear from the free interplay of citizens' inclinations. But State-controlled liberalism is a paradox indeed.


(2) "Ath-Thaqāfah wa ma hiya," address to Nāḍī 'l-Kharrījīnā 'l-Miṣrī, reported in ar-Risālah, XVIII, 867 (13 Feb. 1950), pp. 198-199.
PART IV.

THE MAN OF LETTERS
Chapter Ten.

CRITICISM - THEORIES

... Criticism's most perfect form... is in its essence purely subjective, and seeks to reveal its own secret and not the secret of another. For the highest Criticism deals with art not as expressive but as impressive purely. It treats the work of art as a starting point for a new creation.

OSCAR WILDE.

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's initiatives in the service of education are earning him loud acclamations, and its effects upon the next generation are sure to be immense. But it must be remembered that it was in literature that his rebellious heart first found solace, and that it was as a critic that he first became notorious; and although in recent years his literary efforts have been overshadowed by his concern with social conditions, the bulk of his writings consists of literary criticism, and his hopes for the future are that he may write - apart, of course, from the second volume of Al-Fitnat ul-Kubrā - a volume of personal impressions on Shakespeare and a history of Arabic literature in the East during the first five centuries of Islam. Certainly it is in the field of literary criticism that his pioneering quality - witness Tajdīd Dḥikra Abī 'l-‘Alā' - is most clearly asserted, and as his works are reviewed it will become evident that it is as a critic that he has made his most important contribution to the new culture.

We need not expect to find in Ṭāhā Husayn any well-defined theory of Aesthetics. He has not written a single book about "theories" or

(1) Interview.
"principles", and has consistently opposed any attempt to "legislate" about Art. Nevertheless, from generalisations that he makes in various books and essays, it is possible to piece together a view of Literature and of Criticism that runs parallel to his professed philosophy, even in its inconsistencies and in the divergence he exhibits between precept and practice.

The nearest he has come to defining literature is in the following passage:

It (Creative Literature) consists of those writings wherein the author seeks only to represent the artistic beauty in him, seeks only to describe an emotion or a feeling he has felt or an idea that has occurred to him, in words appropriate either by their delicacy, softness, and purity, or by their awe, violence, and roughness. It is such writings as issue from the author as a song issues from the warbling bird, as the perfume is diffused from the fragrant flower, as light is emitted from the brilliant sun.

I need hardly underline the kinship between this conception of literature and the Romantic ideal in its most popular form: Literature is to be an effusion of emotion or thought, gauged only by its capacity to stir, and untrammelled by any considerations of morality or objective fact.

It was in connection with Baudelaire that Táhá Husayn first asked the questions: "Is Art to enjoy complete freedom in respect of morality, politics, religion, and other such social institutions?" and "Can Art make evil its subject matter and derive from it beautiful artistic images - or, to put it more precisely and more clearly, is there in

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(1) Fī 'l-Adab il-Jāhili, p.37.
evil a beauty that makes suitable subject-matter for Art?" At that
time, Tāḥā Ḫusayn left the questions unanswered, explaining that he
was "neither an artist nor a defender of social institutions." But
he has asserted his own freedom often and vigorously enough to make
his position clear, and once, referring to al-Mutanabbī's satires on
Kāfūr, he frankly stated:  

"When a poet satirises, he is not to be required to
tell the truth; he is required only to be effective in
hurting the one he satirises, to excel in defaming and
debasing him. As to whether he is truthful or un-
truthful, as to whether he satisfies morality or is at
variance with its commandments and its laws, that is a
matter which does not concern Art in any way."

Apparently, no weight is to be given even to the degree of gross-
ness or refinement in the emotion expressed or roused. Indeed this
Art which is to issue from the artist "like a song from a bird" need
not even be sincere: "Some art is hypocrisy in which the artist so
excels that he enchants people without there being any connection
between this art and his heart." Such art is no less admirable
for having sprung from low motives than the flower which has sprung
from manured earth; "is it not wonderful that God brings the living
out of the dead, and the beautiful out of the ugly?"  

Not even as a subsidiary or complementary virtue is truthfulness
to be given any credit: in a review - favourable, by the way - of Farīd
Abū Ḫadīd's Zinūbyā for which the author claimed historical authenticity,
Tāḥā Ḫusayn said that he did not care one whit whether or not the story

(1) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqi, pp. 61-62.
(2) Ma' al-Mutanabbī, II, p. 618.
(3) Mir'āt ud-Damṭr il-Ḥadīth, p. 192.
(4) Ibid., pp. 57-58.
was historically accurate; that would be "matter for the mind", whereas "I do not read his story to learn about research or to find history in it; I abandon history and research to apply myself to his story!".

It is perhaps not very surprising, after this, to find Tāhā Ḥusayn asserting that there is an undeniable similarity between writers and women, both being quick to react, susceptible, and emotional.

Tāhā Ḥusayn goes further. To him, literary creation is a process in which the role of writer's will is, though not totally annihilated, yet reduced to an insignificant minimum: a writer writes for no other reason than that "he is stricken with the disease they call literature," and he can no more refrain from writing that he can refrain from eating, drinking, or smoking. His function, therefore, is but to be intelligent, sensitive, imaginative. He will then react to his surroundings, and something of what he experiences will eventually possess him and force him to express himself. Just as the whole of Mankind is directed by the unidentified force of Progress, so is the writer a tool in the hands of the creative process:

The man of letters is the truest example of a man under compulsion, who has no opinion, no will, no choice in respect of the pure literary creations which he produces. He is most like a tool that is directed and does not know how it is directed; he is most like a mirror which receives images, and does not know how it receives them; he is most like a man inspired who receives revelation and does not know how or whence it comes.

(1) Fuṣūl fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, p. 53.
(2) Ibid., p. 64.
(3) AdĪb, p. 5.
(4) Ḥadīth ul-Ārbiʾā, III, p.236.
(5) Ibid., p. 246.
This does not mean that writing is without effort. The true artist does not simply "draw water from the sea," rather "he carves out of stone."¹ As was the case when al-Maʿarrī wrote his Luzūmiyyāt, "fine art may impose upon the artist burdens and shackles from which he cannot rid himself without utterly ruining his art." Yet if he be a true artist he no sooner takes up the burden of his art that "matters are righted for him, tethers are extended and reins are loosened," and he finds himself "as free as the freest of men."² For the man of letters is indeed truly and completely free, free not only in respect of morality or politics or other aspects of his relationship with others, but free also in respect of himself, free of his own will.³

If Ṭāhā Ḥusayn is not to be suspected of mere juggling with words, he must be assumed to be the victim of an aberration due to excessive abstraction. How far removed from reality he is becomes apparent from the corollary that he who does exercise his will, he who can choose to write or not to write, cannot be a true artist; "he is but a workman, and one of those who make of their work merely a breadwinning device, not a means of satisfying a nature which is fond of art, indeed in which the love of art is innate and which is forced to enter into communication with it no matter what the circumstances may be."⁴

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(1) Ibid., I, pp. 168-170.
(2) MaʿAbī ʿl-ʿAlāʾ fi Sijnīh, p. 133.
(4) Ibid., p. 244.
which I should shrink from applying to the career of a John Milton or a Rimbaud.

How Reason fits into this view of the creative process is not very clear, but it must play an important role, for it is about Life that the man of letters writes, and he must know what he writes about. Some science and some philosophy are part of the necessary equipment even of a poet, for "although artistic excellence is a result of feeling, an aspect of strong perception, delicate emotion, and fertile imagination, yet it is mere prating if it does not derive its true nourishment from Reason and from knowledge." ¹ Presumably, what is intended is that thought and study will make the writer a better tool for the impersonal process of creation to use.

Finally, it must be noted that compulsion extends not only over creation, but also over diffusion. A philosopher must not only think, he must also broadcast his opinion. A poet must not only sing, he must also be heard. ² Tāhā Husayn ridicules the notion that the man of letters creates merely to satisfy himself - if it were so, he would not need to record his creation on paper, let alone have his works printed and distributed. The truth is that literary production depends upon a relationship between writer and reader in which there is not a little coquetry and pretence. Now the public needs to be directed in its reading, and the writer needs to be informed of his public's reaction.

¹ Hadīth al-Arbī‘ā', III, p. 96.
² Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī l-‘Alā', pp. 118-120.
The go-between who fulfills both these functions is the critic.¹

Dr. C.C. Adams was expressing the opinion of the majority of Egyptian readers when he said that Tāhā Ḥusayn was "fearlessly applying Western canons of literary criticism to the study of Arabic literature, in an endeavour to free such study from the trammels of ancient methods of criticism which have heretofore hampered it, and to raise Egyptian scholarship to a level of scientific efficiency comparable to that of Western scholarship."² The statement, however, needs to be clarified and perhaps also to be restrictively qualified. What are the trammels from which Tāhā Ḥusayn has tried to free criticism? Precisely what are the Western canons that Tāhā Ḥusayn has adopted, and how does he understand them?

It was in connection with his controversial views on pre-Islamic poetry that Tāhā Ḥusayn made the often-quoted pronouncement that the course he intended to follow was that of modern science and philosophy - "I wish to apply to literature the philosophical method originated by Descartes at the beginning of the modern era in the search for the reality of things."³ It was made so defiantly that supporters and challengers alike failed to observe how limited its application was to be.

Specifically, what Tāhā Ḥusayn meant was that he intended to make a clean sweep of all previously accepted ideas, and to free the study

*(1) Fuṣūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp.118-120.
(2) Islam and Modernism in Egypt, p. 253.
(3) Fī 'sh-Shī'r il-Jāhili, p. 11.*
of literature from scholastic authority and from religious, racial, and national prejudices.

To accept the authority of Abū’Ubaydah or al-Kisä’I would spare one many doubts and many efforts, but to Tāhā Ḥusayn there is no reconciling the scholastic with the modern approach to literature. He is in sympathy with the lively criticism to which the disputants of Baṣrah and Kūfah were subjected in the second century of Islām, and he does not completely condemn the efforts of the Arab Rhetoricians of the ʿAbbāsid age, but although these efforts are themselves interesting as objects of study, they are worthless as guides. To all appearances, the Ancients had no standard of measurement at all: their pronouncements consist of arbitrary generalisations, strings of high-sounding but obscure terms such as ḥāshiyah, dibājah, adīm, and the like, and assertions that So-and-So was "the most poetic of the Arabs" because he said Such-and-Such, without any attempt to study the personality of the writer or the totality of his works. And when, by dint of extensive reading, one discovers that some of the ancients did have a consistent measuring rod, one is forced to reject it outright because it is a measuring rod determined by the critic's own speciality; philologists like Yūnis Ḫābīb and Abū ‘Ubaydah, for example, preferred Farazdaq to Jarīr, whereas a poet like Bashshār championed Jarīr, and argued that only a poet could judge another poet. Tāhā Ḥusayn concludes: "We can say that our Arabic literature is completely

(1) Fī ‘l-Adab il-Jahili, pp.2-3.
(2) v.infra. pp. 200-201.
(4) Ibid., p. 388.
lacking in true Criticism."

Even more daringly, Táhá Husayn demands that Literature be studied for itself, without the encroachment of religious considerations. So far, he complains, the study of literature has suffered much from its connection with religion, for it has become both sacred and servile. In so far as it is sacred it cannot be subjected to scientific research, which is characterised by doubt; and in so far as it is only a means to an end it is again unsuitable for study, for would it not be worthier to turn one's attention to the end rather than to the means?

Similarly, no national or racial prejudices should be allowed to intrude upon criticism, and we should pursue our study of literature "unanxious as to whether we glorify or belittle the Arabs; unconcerned with vindicating Islam, with bemoaning its ills, or with reconciling it and the results of literary and scientific research; and undismayed if this research leads us to what national feeling resents, or political leanings diverge from, or religious emotion abhors."

This negation of past prejudices is all that Táhá Husayn's Cartesianism may be said to consist of. To find out what new standards of criticism Táhá Husayn erected after the ground was cleared, we need to follow him along a narrowing spiral of conjecture and observation in the course of which his ideas have sometimes changed, and issues have sometimes been obscured by polemics and by overemphasis of such terms as "objectivity" and "scientific methods of research."

(1) Ibid., p. 63.
(2) Fi 'l-Adab il-Jāhili, p. 63.
Tāhā Ḥusayn's first observation is that the relationship of criticism to literature is the closest that can be. In fact, he usually includes them both under the name of "Literature," differentiating them only by the use of epithets; thus Creative Literature is the one that speaks directly of life (even though the creative writer may acquire his knowledge of life from the writings of others, as Goethe proved in what he said of the East), and Descriptive Literature — which Tāhā Ḥusayn also calls History of Literature, or Literary History, or the Sciences of Literature — is the one that deals with Creative Literature and with everything else which helps to interpret or evaluate it, so that it is forced into wider fields than Creative Literature itself. The two necessarily overlap, for if the critic is to assess the creative writer's work correctly, he must master the latter's field, i.e. he must be a student of life as well as of Creative Literature; and whereas an atheist may write a history of religion, or an opponent of the French Revolution give an account of it, no one who is not also a man of letters can write about Literature. Thus in the last analysis the critic is a man of letters in the strictest sense of the word; he requires every one of the qualities called for in Creative Literature, and perhaps some others as well.

It is evident to Tāhā Ḥusayn that Creative Literature is pure art.

(2) Fi 'l-Adab il-Jahili, pp.40, 41.
(3) Tajdid Dhikrā Abī 'l-'Alā', p.88.
(4) Fi 'l-Adab il-Jahili, pp.35-36.
(5) Fuṣūl fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp.8-9.
(6) Fi 'l-Adab il-Jahili, pp.36-37.
(7) Fuṣūl fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, p.9.
But what of Descriptive Literature?

Cursorily, Ţahā Ḥusayn reviews what he considers to have been attempts to reduce Descriptive Literature to a science: Sainte-Beuve's classification of the personalities of writers, Taine's interpretation of literature in terms of environmental influences, and Brunetière's formulation of literary laws of evolution. These have failed, he asserts, and any similar attempts are bound to fail so long as the writer's personality and its connection with the creative process have not been scientifically explained, and so long as Descriptive Literature has not freed itself from the writer's individuality and taste. Nor is anything to be gained from making it into a science: it would only become a dry pursuit, and the reader would be no more inclined to turn to it in his leisure than he would be to a chemistry textbook!

Yet, if Descriptive Literature cannot be reduced to a pure science, neither is it desirable that it should be purely artistic. It calls for equity and objective judgment, and it calls for research and exploration, not merely for the exhibition of one's leanings. Obviously, therefore, it should be partly Art and partly Science.

These two elements, the artistic and the scientific, may be closely intermingled and mutually relevant, but they remain distinct. Thus some branches of Descriptive Literature - such as linguistic studies, rhetoric, the editing and annotating of texts - and part of the critic's preliminary equipment - language, history, the examination of texts - are purely scientific. But that part of Descriptive Literature and of the critical process which consists of ascribing values, that part which is generally understood by "literary criticism" and to which alone Ţahā Ḥusayn applies the term naqd has nothing to do with
science and must needs rest on taste alone.¹ A physicist would say they form a mixture, not a compound, and it will be noted that they correspond to the two complementary but separate stages of Tāhā Ḥusayn's training as a critic - taste-formation under al-Maṣarif and qualification for research under the Orientalists.

The combination, however, fails to answer Tāhā Ḥusayn's own early objections to purely artistic criticism. It is obviously in ascribing values that the need for equity, for exploration and discovery rather than the mere exhibition of one's leanings, can be said to present serious problems. In purely linguistic studies and in textual criticism, it can hardly raise any fundamental issues.

Tāhā Ḥusayn recognises the tyranny and variability of taste, and has criticised the Ancients for the lack of definite bases to their judgments.² At the same time, he has firmly refused to countenance any codification of Criticism. Indeed, in his fight for freedom from rules he sometimes tilts against non-existent tyrants; for example, he twice interrupts the story of Sāliḥ to say that he is defying "rules" first by not giving details about a minor character in the story, and second by revealing one of the operative forces of the plot only towards the end.³ He does not discriminate between arbitrary or outworn conventions, and empirical constations of what has proved necessary in any one genre; he rejects even a modest attempt by Farīd Abū Ḥadīd to define the characteristics whereby a novel might be differentiated from other equally licit forms of literary composition, and

(1) Fi 'l-Adab il Jāhili. pp. 38-57.
(2) Tajdid Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlā', pp.94-95.
(3) Al-Muṭaddabūna fi 'l-ʿArq, pp.11-13, 21.
he asserts that he cannot read, any more than the artist can write, with "rules" in mind: he likes to lose himself in what he reads, and only afterwards collect his wits, look back, and judge.¹

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn therefore sought an answer to the problem of objectivity not in rules, but in the different kinds of taste which he thought he could detect. There is, he observes, a universal taste common to all mankind at all times; but he has little faith in the frequency of its manifestations. Some poets, he concedes, have managed to please Baghdādis of the second century of Islām as well as Egyptians of the fourteenth, but these are very few.² The reason is that the ideal of Artistic Beauty combines the One and the Many: its essence is eternal, but its manifestations vary from one generation to another and from one environment to another. As we cannot separate the essence from its manifestations, all that we can expect of a masterpiece is that it should satisfy contemporary readers, and the scholars of a later age;³ and it is enough for a work to be called "permanent" that it should inspire writers in succeeding generations, even if it cease to be widely read.⁴

Correspondingly, we find that every one of us has - though in varying degrees - not only a purely individual taste, but also a "general" taste, i.e. a taste common to all who belong to one

(1) Fuṣūl fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp. 48-50.
(3) Hāfiz wa Shawqī, pp. 21-24.
(4) 'Alā Hamish is-Sīrah, I, intro.
generation and are subject to the same environment. It need not be on a national basis - in Egypt, for example, Azharists have a taste of their own.\(^1\) Greatly weakening his argument, Tāhā Ḥusayn seems to have confused this common taste with crowd reactions, for one illustration he gives of it is that he first heard Shawqi’s ode in praise of Muṣṭafā Kamāl when he was in a group, and general taste made him join in the group’s enthusiastic approbation; but when he reconsidered it in the company of one friend, his individual taste made him realise that it was ridiculously anachronistic, and a poor imitation of an ode of Abu Tammām’s.\(^2\)

It is these second thoughts that Tāhā Ḥusayn retained as his final judgment, and yet he pinned his hopes of objectivity on "general" taste. Inevitably since he is himself an artist, the critic will display something of his own personality and individual taste in whatever he writes; but in his early writings Tāhā Ḥusayn wished him to display himself only with restraint, appearing only in the distance as it were, "otherwise I resolutely turn away from him and firmly renounce him, feeling that he is trying to coerce me into what he likes, not into what I want."\(^3\) The critic, in fact, ought to be a multiple tool, a flawless mirror reflecting at one and the same time three different personalities: that of the writer whom he is criticising, that of the responsive reader whose "general" taste he shares and represents, and finally his own

\[\text{(1) } \text{Ḥafiz wa Shawqī, p.33-35}\]
\[\text{(2) } \text{Ḥafiz wa Shawqī, pp.36-44.}\]
\[\text{(3) } \text{Fi 'l-Adab il-Jāhili, p.55.}\]
personality as a justice-dealing critic. There are further complications when the author criticised belongs to a former age, for some account ought to be taken of the taste of his contemporaries.

Clearly, this is more easily said that done. The distinction between general and individual taste is easily made in words, but how is the honest critic to disentangle them within himself? How can he be trusted, and how can he trust himself to effect all the complicated necessary adjustments when the whole process is locked up within his mysterious and none too constant self, the self of an artist and of a man?

At one time, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn obviously thought not only that objectivity was attainable, but that he had attained it, for in publishing Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī he said:

I have an opinion about the two poets which I am eager to broadcast, not only because it is my opinion, but because I see in it justice and equity: I think that the generation to which we belong has been misled by ignorance and appetites so that it has been tyrannical and unjust, and it has become the duty of critics to remove this tyranny and injustice.

But in 1937, after he had dictated seven hundred pages on al-Mutanabbi, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn noticed that he had recorded judgments different from the ones he had had in mind when he started. This, as well as the inconsistencies which he found in al-Mutanabbi himself, led him to a momentous conclusion, which he wondered that he had not reached before:

(1) Fusul fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp.8-9.
(2) Fusul fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp.8-9.
(3) Hāfīz wa Shawqī, p. 134.
No writer ever depicts more than fleeting moments of his own life, and no critic ever reflects more than certain moments of his own life when he was preoccupied with certain moments of another writer's life.¹

We may well wonder whether any attempt at criticism on such a basis is worthwhile, or whether - as Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn himself asks - it is fair to the authors criticised that we should record what we think to-day and may deny to-morrow, and what others deny even to-day.² But the answer is taken out of our hands by that nameless compelling power which, even as it robs the creative writer of his will, urges the critic to follow his bent. So "let him who wishes write what he wishes; and let him who wishes criticise what he wishes as he wishes. There is no life for literature except in this". What will determine the worth of a piece of writing is not the critic but "natural selection," i.e. selection by "those forces, manifest and mysterious, which we know and which we do not know, but which work whether we like it or not towards the realisation of God's saying: 'As to the froth, worthless it shall go; and as to what benefits the people, it shall remain in the earth.'³

It is fortunate for the Egyptian Renaissance that Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn felt himself compelled not to discontinue his critical writing, and that his practice is sometimes at variance with his theories. Indeed, his achievements in the field of criticism are far less futile than his survey generalisations would lead one to expect.

What he has brought to Arabic criticism is not the objectivity

¹ Ma`al-Mutanabbi, II, p. 709.
² Ma`Abī 'l-`Alā' fī Sijnih, p. 18.
which he set out to find, but a subjectivity which - in aim, at least - confines itself to literature. It cannot be made proof against prejudice, but its prejudices will be literary, not religious or racial or personal. And when this subjectivity is that of a bold thinker and a sensitive man who has an uncommonly wide acquaintance with both Arabic and Western cultures, it becomes not authoritative, but indicative, suggestive, provoking. We need expect no greater service from criticism.
Chapter Eleven.

SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM.

... the history of a nation's poetry is the essence of its history, political, economic, scientific, religious. With all these the complete historian of a national poetry will be familiar; the national physiognomy, in its finest traits and through its successive stages of growth, will be clear to him: he will discover the grand spiritual tendency of each period, what was the highest aim and enthusiasm of mankind in each, and how one epoch naturally evolved itself from the other.

CARLYLE.

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's final position, the one he holds to-day, is that Criticism can be divided into a scientific or purely objective part, and an artistic or entirely subjective part.¹

The only kind of literary study in which the scientific and the artistic are not mingled is textual criticism. It is entirely scientific, and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn has high praise for the modest and hard working men who spend their life rummaging in libraries and consider themselves well rewarded if they discover some neglected manuscript or ascertain the meaning of an obscure passage. Others seek easy notoriety by publishing pretentious works on the History of Literature, but it is textual criticism which forms the foundation of all critical work. It needs to be of the highest scholarly quality and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn has rightly raised his voice against the practice followed even by the National Library of altering ancient texts in order to make them easier to understand and more acceptable to contemporary taste.²

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(1) Interview.
Of necessity, however, Tāḥā Ḥusayn's own contribution to textual criticism has been small. In 1933, he collaborated with ʿAbd ul-Ḥamīd il-ʿAbbādī in editing Naqd un-Nathr, a manuscript which al-ʿAbbādī had discovered in the Escurial library, and which was attributed to Qudāmat ubn Ja’far, and in 1941 he and ʿAbd ul-Wahhāb ʿAzzām edited Kalīlah wa Dimnah. He also headed the Ministry of Education commissions which were formed to publish the works of al-Maʿarrī in 1944, and Ibn Sīnā’s ash-Shifā’ in 1949, and has been a member of several other Committees. In all these cases, obviously, it was not he who did the spade-work: his collaborators consulted him on points over which they were uncertain, and he wrote a critical introduction to the published work. But it is a measure of his acumen that he decided, on internal evidence, that Naqd un-Nathr was certainly not written by Qudāmah, and in 1948 the discovery of another manuscript in the Chester Beatty collection established that it was in fact the first part of Al-Burhān fī Wujūh il-Bayān, by Abū 'l-Ḥusayn Isḥāq ubn Ibrāhīm abn Sulaymān abn Wahb il-Kātib.

Another form of literary study which may be said to be largely scientific is literary history, although artistic judgment inevitably enters into it.

It must be explained at this point that Tāḥā Ḥusayn speaks of "the History of Literature" as synonymous with the whole of

(1) Fi 'l-Adab il-Jāhilī, pp. 57-61.
(2) Interview.
(3) Introduction (by Tāḥā Ḥusayn alone) of Naqd un-Nathr.
(4) Dr. ʿAlī Ḥasan ʿAbd ul-Qādir, "Kitāb ul-Burhān fī Wujūh il-Bayān," ar-Risālah, XVI, 801 (8 Nov. 1948), pp. 1257-1260.
Descriptive Literature, including the discovery of a text, its verification, its annotation, the establishment of its characteristics in the light of extensive scholarly knowledge, and its artistic valuation. What is here intended by "literary history", however, is what Tāhā Ḥusayn calls its "purely historical function," that which "tells us about literature, about the different phases through which it went, and the various factors which affected it in various epochs and environments."

Tāhā Ḥusayn does not believe that his generation can produce a reliable history of Arabic literature, for many early texts still lie neglected in libraries, many individual writers have yet to be properly studied, linguistic research is still far behind what has been done for European languages, and even the political history of the Arabs has not been soundly established. Nevertheless, he has made observations and generalisations which cover the course of Arabic literature in all its ages and all its centres except North Africa and Spain. At some points, the epochs into which he divides the history of Arabic literature do not coincide with general Islamic history, for he has warned against the temptation to identify political and literary trends too closely - the decline of `Abbāsid central power, for example, resulted in the multiplication of rival Courts where literature flourished - and he has stated explicitly the reservations made mentally by other writers when they name specific dates as marking the beginning or end of an era.

(1) Fi 'l-Adab il-Jāhili, p.56.
(2) Ibid., p. 35.
(3) Ibid., pp. 59-62.
(4) Tajdid Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlā', pp. 37-42.
The theory with which Tāhā Ḥusayn's name is always linked is that of the spuriousness of most of the literature attributed to pre-Islamic Arabs.

Tāhā Ḥusayn was not the first to have raised this question. In the West, Ahlwardt had dealt with the problem in a monograph dated 1872, and so had Sir Charles Lyall in the introduction of the second volume of his Mufaḍḍaliyyāt in 1918. Early Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Sallām, al-ʿAsmaʾī, Ibn Qutaybah, and the author of al-Aḥānī, were aware of the need to distinguish the genuine from the spurious. But for centuries the East had accepted its pre-Islamic heritage as well-nigh sacred, and upon it had built fond theories of the valour of Arab forefathers, as well as a good deal of Qur'anic interpretation. Prof. Nallino, of whom Tāhā Ḥusayn was a student and admirer, may have jogged the complacency of some and given the example of bold reconsideration when he published in al-Ḥilāl in 1917 his theory that the literary language of the Arabs was probably a Najḍī dialect, and was attributed to the Quraysh only out of a desire to honour the Prophet's tribe, but the reader of Arabic was otherwise unprepared for the radical doubts that were to be cast on his cherished heritage.

These doubts were published almost simultaneously in 1925 by Prof. Margolicouth in the West and by Tāhā Ḥusayn in Egypt. Not unnaturally, some of the signs of spuriousness detected by both are

(1) "Bemerkungen ueber die Aechtheit der alten arabischen Gedichte."
similar, but we are assured that the two professors reached their conclusions independently, and indeed Margoliouth's main contention that the advanced metrical forms of the Arabic ode were developed only after the Qur'ān had appeared is fundamentally incompatible with Tāhā Ḥusayn's approach to the problem.

Stressing the scientific character of his investigation, Tāhā Ḥusayn first observed that reputedly Jāhilī poetry did not reflect the linguistic differences that prevailed in Arabia before Islām or the kind of life described in the Qur'ān. He then formulated the hypothesis that it was forged, and suggested a number of motives why it should have been: claims made by or for Islām had to be substantiated; rival tribes, rival groups such as the ansār and the muḥājirūn, and even rival nations like the Persians and the Arabs projected their disputes into the past; the popular taste for stories created a demand for verses with which legendary tales were embellished, and even some of the rāwīs who supplied scholars with material for linguistic studies are known to have been unscrupulous forgers. Next, Tāhā Ḥusayn examined extant Jāhilī poetry in the light of his hypothesis, exposed the absurdity of the legends attached to it, pointed out inconsistencies of language, style, and ideas with conditions that might be presumed to exist in a backward and disunited Arabia, and concluded that with the exception of a few lines from the muʻallagah of Ţarafah which may of course have been composed by someone else, the only poems that cannot be rejected out of hand are

those ascribed to poets contemporaneous with the Prophet and belonging to Muṣar, i.e. to the tribes most closely related to Quraysh, although even these are not above suspicion.

In **FI 'l-Adab il Jāhili**, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn added that some prose may be resumed to have existed in Muṣar, but that we must even be more sceptical of prose texts than of poems handed down, for prose is the product of a more advanced stage of civilisation than poetry, and its oral transmission is more difficult. In fact, we have not a single reliable Arabic prose text anterior to the Qur'ān. Some proverbs may be truly ancient, but they are of linguistic, not literary, interest. As to oratory, it is found only where there is advanced political life, with partisan divisions; Arab oratory may therefore be said to have started with Muḥammad. In 1930, however, we find Ṭāhā Ḥusayn asserting that the only form of prose which may be presumed to have existed in the Jāhiliyyah is oratory.

From the fundamental position which he took in 1925, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn has never retreated, and Ch. Issawi is mistaken when he says that the storm of protest which met **FI 'sh-Shīr il-Jāhili** caused him to revise it radically. Except for the correction of the word for forgery from intihāl (misappropriation) to naḥl (misattribution), for the omission of references to the "myth" of Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl, and for the removal or veiling of appeals to disregard religious considerations in the search for academic truth, the whole of

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(1) pp. 362-370.
(2) **Min Ḥadīth ish-Shīr wa 'n-Nathr**, p.26.
(3) **Egypt.**, pp.186-187.
Fi 'sh-shi'r il-Jähili is reprinted, with additions, in Fi 'l-Adab il-Jähili. He also reaffirmed his theory in the course of articles on early poets which he contributed to al-Jihād in 1935, and he is now under the impression that it is generally accepted and even outdone.

In this respect, he is ill-informed. In Egypt, even admirers like Ahmad ush-Shāyib who praise Tāhā Husayn's presentation of the problem refuse to commit themselves on the theory itself, and school-texts on the title page of which Tāhā Husayn's name appears as that of a joint author ignore it— a fact which does not perturb Tāhā Husayn for his share in these books is the composition of specified sections, and he does not consider himself responsible for the views expressed by his collaborators.

Among orientalists, Prof. Margoliouth was naturally sympathetic, though he felt that the more valuable part of the book was not the constructive one, but that which cleared away erroneous opinions. Others, like Prof. Nicholson, do not appear to have been won over to the radical scepticism of either Tāhā Husayn or Margoliouth, and Profs. Gibb and della Vida have made substantial and express reservations.

In fact, if the issue raised by Tāhā Husayn has been subordinated by Muslims to religious considerations, it may also have been

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(1) Ḥadīth al-ʿArbiʿāʾ, I, pp. 123-137, particularly p.132.
(2) Interview.
(5) Interview.
(7) Literary History of the Arabs, pp.133-140.
(8) Arabic Literature, an Introduction, pp.13-16.
obscured among non-Muslims by the vehemence of his preaching against evils which are irrelevant to them, such as the "sacredness and servility" of the study of Arabic literature. It needs to be underlined that his protest is against the uncritical acceptance of reputed Jahili literature as the starting point of linguistic, exegetic, or historical research; he does not condemn it all as spurious, and he even admits that prose - and presumably also verse - forgeries may give us an idea of the archetype they were endeavouring to imitate.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that he carries his conclusions beyond the point warranted by his evidence. This is manifest in his attempt to discredit the whole of the poetry ascribed to Rabī'ah: he has an easy task in ridiculing the stories attached to poets and poems, but the internal proof of spuriousness which he adduces is usually flimsy; he denies the authenticity of an ode by 'Amr ubn Kulthūm mainly because it is too facile and smooth in expression, yet when he comes across another ode by al-Hārith ubn Hillizah which presents the opposite characteristics, he dismisses it also, explaining that "all it amounts to is that forgers, like the poets themselves, varied in strength and weakness, in violence and mildness."

Tāhā Husayn's real achievement has been to impress upon his contemporaries that there are incongruities in Jahili literature

(1) Fi 'l-Adab il-Jahili, p. 367.
(2) Ibid., p. 246.
(3) Ibid., p. 250.
which need to be investigated. His own theory is but one of several possible conjectures which may help to provide partial explanations. Some forgeries there undoubtedly were, but if they had been on the scale suggested by Tāhā Ḥusayn, it seems strange that we have no trace of a general outcry at least from the southern Arabs, who were at the disadvantage until they mastered the language of Quraysh and gave currency to forgeries of their own. Besides, Sir Charles Lyall pointed out long ago that the advanced metric forms and the similarity of poetic conventions with Old Testament literature indicate the existence of a strong and deep-rooted poetic tradition, that dislocations and lacunae are more consistent with oral transmission than with forgery, and that anomalies in the metre of Imruʿul-Qays's ode support the tradition that it is one of the oldest recorded.\(^1\) The difficulty created by differences of dialects is an imposing one, but it is not impossible to believe that a common poetic language similar to the epic language of Greek bards was evolved before the political supremacy of any one tribe was acknowledged, especially if we connect this with agreed months of truce, with pilgrimage, and with fairs in which poets may have sought recognition of their talent. The absence of a polytheistic sentiment may be explained by expurgation rather than forgery, or by della Vida's suggestion that there was a "stylistic tradition, which substituted honor for religion in a way somewhat analogous to the tradition of European romances of chivalry."\(^2\) Other incongruities

\(^1\) Mufaqqāliyyāt, II, xxiv-xxvi

\(^2\) J.A.O.S. LIX, p. 123.
of outlook may also fall into perspective if it is established that Islam was the crystallisation of ideas and the answer to quests which had already been initiated, but which received only inadequate expression in a poetry laden with tradition.

It is neither an unfair nor entirely an unfavourable summing up to say that Tâhâ Ḥusayn's theory raises more questions than it answers.

It follows from Tâhâ Ḥusayn's view of supposed Jâhilî poetry that most of it really belongs to the early Islamic and Umayyad age. Besides, the Umayyad age was so conservative in literature that Jâhilî life was represented not only in forgeries, but also in the poetry of Farazdaq, Jarîr, Dhū 'r-Rummah, al-Akhtal, and ar-Râ`I.

Earlier, however, Tâhâ Ḥusayn had pointed out that the Umayyad age - the distinctive part of which ends with the first century of Islâm - saw two important innovations in poetry. These are political and love poetry.

Political poetry is to be distinguished from that which reflected Jâhilî tribal feuds in that it praised or satirised not on the basis of adherence to or departure from tribal mores and traditions, but in defence of a political leader, dynasty, or principle. It had an obvious reason for existence in the various splits that occurred in the Islamic body-politic since the beduin tribes tried to recover their independence in the Riddah. In these divisions, poets played the part of party newspapers to-day. They flourished because they

(1) Fī 'sh-shīr il-Jâhilî, p.16.
were still near enough to primitive life recklessly to assert their independence, and because power was still so far from being genuinely centralised that a poet in one province could satirise the Amīr of another with impunity. Some of these poets were genuinely devoted to a cause—these were usually of the Khawārij, who were a small band with no real prospect of success and no outlet except in desperate defiance. Others were professional poets with political convictions, like al-Kumayt and Kuthayyir who belonged to the Shi'ah but of whom the latter praised 'Abd ul-Malik ibn Marwān, for the Shi'ah had considerable chances of success and therefore played the political game with all its deceptions and inconsistencies. Finally there were those who were purely venal, like al-Akhtal, Jarīr, and al-Farazdaq.

As for love-poetry, it is only in the Umayyad age that it was recognised as an independent motif: in the Jāhilī tradition, it was an introductory theme, and among the 'Abbāsids it was only part of the quest for pleasure. Under the Umayyads, however, two schools of love-poets flourished, both confined to Arabia: the one was sensuous and was to be found among city-dwellers descended from the Ansār and the Muhājirūn; the other was idealistic and was to be found among nomad tribes.

Ṭahā Ḥusayn ascribes this appearance of love-poetry in the Ḥijāz to the fact that once power had been seized by the Umayyads and the capital was transferred to Damascus, political ambitions were

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(1) "Ash-Shi'ir us-Siyāsī fi Taṣār Banī Umayyah," as-Siyāsah, 28 Dec.1922, p.5. By an oversight this article was not reprinted in Ḥadīth ul-Arbī’ā."
thwarted in the peninsula and energies sought a new outlet. In the cities men who had been enriched by the spoils of conquest and were now forced into idleness turned to luxury and pleasure; love-songs gained popularity and it became common—perhaps even socially accepted—for poets to write very daringly of the charms of highborn ladies who came on pilgrimage, as when 'Ubaydullah ibn Qays ir-Ruqayyāt wrote of the night of love he dreamt he had had with Umm ul-Banīn, the wife of the future Caliph al-Walîd. But why should the desert have produced a more refined and idealistic form of love poetry? Are not desert people notoriously more earthy and outspoken than city-dwellers? Naively, Tāhā Ḥusayn advanced the theory that the desert tribes were not only politically disappointed, but also impoverished, for the powerful government of the Umayyads now levied taxes from them and put an end to raiding; frustrated in every way, theirs was a poetry of asceticism.

Traditions concerning the poetry of this period are not exempt from Tāhā Ḥusayn's doubts, for he observes that the personalities of most desert love-poets, such as Majnūn Laylā, Jamîl, Qays Ubûn Dhurayh, and 'Urwat Ubûn Ḥizám, are shadowy, and their histories surprisingly similar. They were all pure and constant in love, suffered great hardship for the sake of their love, wrote fine poetry about it, and

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(1) Hadîth ul-Arbi‘ā', I, pp. 234-239.
(2) Ibid., p.327.
(4) Ibid., I, pp. 278-280.
were outlawed by the Caliph or by the local ruler; they differed only in their names and their tribal affiliations, in the kind of hardship they encountered, and in the happy or unhappy ending given to their stories. Because the poetry itself is excellent and sounds sincere whereas the incidents relating to it are often absurd, Táhâ Husayn thinks that the poetry came first and was genuine, but that it was seized upon by the story-tellers of the time and encased in romantic fiction. This means that we cannot be said to know anything about these poets except their names, and some— notably Majnûn Laylā—may be entirely fictitious. At the same time, in the stories told about them we have the beginnings of what, had circumstances allowed it to develop, might have been a separate genre: the Arabic novel.

In consonance with his desire to neutralise religious considerations in academic pursuits, Táhâ Husayn isolates the Qur'ān from the general course of literary development, considering it neither prose nor poetry, but entirely sui generis.

It would seem to follow that unnamed Orientalists were right in giving arabised Persians the entire credit for the creation of a prose literature, but this view Táhâ Husayn considers exaggerated and unjust. Half a century after the rise of Islam, conditions were

(1) Ibid., p. 226.
(2) Ibid., pp. 242-247.
(4) Min Hadīth ish-Shi‘r wa ‘n-Nathr, p. 25.
developing which made the rise of prose literature inevitable. The political problems presented by the administration of conquered territories, and the theological ones resulting from the conversion of foreign races, needed to be discussed; and after their contacts with peoples more advanced than themselves the Arabs were engaged in the formation of a civilisation of their own. The earliest forms in which literary prose appeared were story-telling, designed to glorify the Arab past, and scientific and theological disputations. The first at least of these two was entirely Arab, and although foreign influences thereafter proved extremely important, Arab initiative cannot altogether be eliminated from the rapid extension and diversification of prose-writing which occurred in the Abbasid age.¹

The " Abbāsid age Ṭahā Husayn considers the first of the two great periods of "renovation" in Arabic literature, the second being the contemporary Renaissance. The parallelism between the two is brought out by showing how much the " Abbāsids owed to foreign contacts, and particularly by magnifying the contribution of Greek, i.e. Western, culture, and minimising that of "Oriental" culture. It is well known that the Arabs had Greek works translated and that they were deeply impressed by Greek logic and Greek rhetoric, which affected their own efforts in all branches of science and of literature. The Arabs also came into contact with "orientals", i.e. Persians, Hindus, and Semites; these, however, had already been pervaded with Greek thought - indeed it is the combination of Near Eastern cultural elements with Greek thought that is usually under-

(1) Min Ḥadīth igh-Shīr wa 'n-Nathr, pp. 26-27.
stood by the term "Hellenism",¹ so that even when the Arabs borrowed from their oriental vassals they were being Hellenised. It is true that the Persians did have distinctive cultural features and that they wielded considerable political power under the `Abbāsids; but the culture distinctly theirs was of a lower order than that of the Greeks, and their influence was more clearly marked on the everyday life and manners of the Islamic community than on its literature.² Indeed where the Persians did make their mark, it was not an edifying one: it consisted of unbridled pleasure-seeking and of zandaqah, in which Tāhā Ḥusayn sees not the persistence of an ancient faith, but an assertion of the superiority of Persian over Arab tradition, expressing itself in shameless orgies and in contempt for any form of religion.³

For purposes of study, `Abbāsīd literature should be divided into three main periods: from the beginning of the second century of Islam to the second half of the third, elements of foreign culture were being acquired; from then on to the second half of the fifth century, foreign elements were assimilated, and a brilliant and distinctive literature was produced; only thereafter can one speak of decline.⁴

It will be noticed that part of the first `Abbāsīd period historically falls under the reign of the Umayyads, but Tāhā Ḥusayn

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(1) Min Hadith ish-Shi'r wa 'n-Nathr, p. 90.
(2) Ibid., pp. 28-33.
(3) Hadith ul-Arba', II, pp. 201-207.
(4) Tajdid Dhikra Abi 'l-Ala', p. 44.
argues that it was then that the new trends appeared which contributed to the fall of the Umayyads and which received full expression under the "Abbāsids. The resentment of conquered Persians, the stimulation of philosophic thinking and the opportunities for luxury resulting from early conquests, the change to city life, all militated against the purely Arab rule of the Umayyads, against the persistence of desert traditions and against the simple faith of early Muslims. The whole of the second century of Islām was one of revolution, scepticism and immorality.¹

The second century is well represented in its poetry, which was under strong Persian influence. The political poetry which had been a feature of the Umayyad age came to an end under the powerful, centralised government of the Abbasids, and love-poetry was superseded by a poetry which glorified drinking and licentiousness. In the Jāhili tradition, wine had been a subsidiary theme, and in boasting of his drinking the poet was not flaunting his addiction, but disproving that he was niggardly. For a while in early Islām the theme disappeared altogether, although there is evidence that drinking habits persisted. The Umayyad government, however, was mainly temporal, and not only did Christians like al-Akhtal revive the Jāhili vein, but al-Walīd ʿubn Yazīd himself introduced the new Epicurean trend.² Significantly, he had to import his boon companions - ʿHamīd `Ajrad, ʿHamīd ur-Rawiyah, and Muṭṭī ʿubn Iyās - from Persianised Kūfah,³ and when the seat of power was transferred

(1) Ḥadīth ul-Arbiʿā', II, p. 188.
(2) Ibid., pp. 89-103.
(3) Ibid., p. 201.
to Iraq, the trend was accentuated and found its main spokesman in Abu Nuwâs. He and his like indulged in every sort of pleasure, physical and intellectual: they had access to women-slaves who had had refined training, and they also had access to the stimulating works that were being translated at the time. In the salons of the period, they competently discussed the nicest problems. They mastered the jargon of theologians and logicians, accused their detractors of having little faith in God's forgiveness, and openly flouted or derided everything that was traditional and respected, be it religious, moral, political, or literary. Literature benefited considerably from this freedom and refinement, and at least one entirely new poetic motif was introduced: homosexual love.¹ Yet, ultimately, the changes that resulted from this revolt were not very profound, partly because the censorship of religious men had to be reckoned with and Caliphs repressed in others the irreligiousness which they allowed in themselves, but mainly because poets acquainted themselves with foreign philosophies and sciences, but not with foreign literatures.²

At the same time prose, which embodied both Greek and Persian forces, was gathering strength. Already in the last years of Umayyad rule, History and Tradition, Theology and Philosophy had made their appearance; Arabic had become the language of official records and correspondence; and translations from the Greek had been started. Under the 'Abbâsids, and especially under al-Ma'mûn, great

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¹ Hadîth ul-Arbi‘â’, II, pp. 27-49.
² Ibid., pp. 10-15.
progress was made; sciences multiplied, the language was expanded so that it should express all the subtleties which Greek thought had developed over centuries,¹ and literary prose made its appearance.

For this, too much credit has been given to Persians: of its reputed founders, 'Abd ul-'Hamīd may or may not have been a Persian, but linguistic peculiarities such as his predilection for the accusative of accompanying circumstance and the orderliness of his ideas suggest that he was imbued with Greek culture; as for Ibn ul-Muqaffa², he was certainly Persian, but he had some Greek culture, and anyway he was not a master of Arabic but an "orientalist" whose style is often awkward and whose grammar is strained.² In reality, two different prose literary styles were developing, one under Greek influence, interested in ideas and aiming at straightforward and orderly expression, the other under Persian influence, interested in words and aiming at artifice.

In the third century, this prose was already supple, musical, effective, versatile, and had even invaded fields which had long been considered poetry's own; al-Jāḥiẓ, for example, wrote prose eulogies and satires in at-Tarbī‘ wa ‘t-Tadwīr. In fact, the distinctive feature of the third century is that prose gained precedence over poetry: from then on, poets like Ṣawrān ḥubn Abī Ḥafṣah submitted their efforts to linguists like Yūnus ḥubn Ḥabīb for criticism, whereas previously linguists had made poems the starting-point of their science; others like Ibn ur-Rūmī took a leaf out of prose

¹ Min Ḥadīth igh-Shi‘r wa ‘n-Nadhr, pp. 34-40.
² Ibid., pp. 40-52.
books by writing lengthily and explicitly; yet others like al-Buḥūrī, Abū Tammām and Ibn ul-Mu'tazz themselves tried to write books;¹ and whereas Abū Nuwayṣ had been the outstanding and most representative literary figure of the second century, it was a prose-writer, al-Ǧāḥiz, who was his counterpart for the third.²

Many sciences closely connected with literature were developed in this period. Grammar, for example, reached a stable form with Sibawayh. First steps were also taken towards the formation of an Arabic Rhetoric. In the second century, the need to train amanuenses for government service, and interest in the persuasive powers of disputants in the rival schools of Baṣra and Kūfah led to a lively rather than methodical form of criticism, from which some scattered precepts emerged. It is these precepts that al-Ǧāḥiz collected in his al-Bayān wa 't-Tabyīn, which has earned him the title of father of Arabic Rhetoric although it displays little method or originality.³

The second ‘Abbāsid period, although attended by many political, economic, social, moral, and religious evils, was intellectually the most fertile in all Islamic history, for it saw the fruition of earlier efforts. Theologians like al-Ash‘arī(405,548),(527,591), al-Jubbā’ī, al-Isfirayīnī, and al-Bāqillānī were much divided, and Sūfism was popularising many undesirable practices although it had its sincere leaders and devotees; but that pure philosophy which was unburdened

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(1) Ibid., pp. 56-81.
(2) Ḥadīth ul-Ârbi‘ā’, I, p. 376.
with religious considerations reached relative maturity with al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Historians like al-Masʿūdī, al-Bārūnī, and al-Balkhī, and geographers like Ibn Ḥawqal, al-Fandānī, Ibn Khurdāḥbīh, and al-Iṣṭakhrī were much-travelled and widely read, and their encyclopaedic works attempted to be universal, not only Islamic. The astrology which had formerly been derived from Arab legends and from Indian and Persian sources became the true science of astronomy, based on the works of Ptolemy.

Even after the decline of Baghdad's power, poets found encouragement in the rival courts of many a splendid prince, such as Sayf ud-Dawlah in Aleppo. No new poetic motif was introduced, except in al-Maʿarrī's philosophic poetry; but it was truly and adequately representative of the advanced civilisation of the times, for although the taste for philosophic subtlety made it concise to the point of obscurity, and although the use of verbal artifice became general, it was not carried to excess, and linguistic usage remained sound.¹

Prose also must be considered satisfactory. There were good representatives of Greek taste, like Abu Ḥayyān, and good representatives of Persian taste, like Ibn ul-ʿAmīd and as-Ṣāḥib ubn ʿAbbād;² on the whole, the prose used was entirely suited to the aims pursued, and the charge often made against it that it was more deeply concerned with wording than with ideas is applicable only to the imitative efforts of a later period.

Valuable linguistic research was also carried out, in addition

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¹ Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī ʿl-ʿAlī, pp. 45-92.
² Min Ḥadīth igh-Shīr wa ʿn-Nāthr, p. 81.
to the compilation of earlier scattered material. Al-Fārisī, as-Sayrāfī, and Ibn Jinnī, for example, went beyond the mere sciences of grammar and etymology, and founded a genuine philosophy of language.¹ As for Rhetoric, it plodded heavily and not very satisfactorily under the burden of Greek thought. Greek influence was first introduced by the Muʿtazilite theologians who were interested in the question of the incomparability of the Qurʾān, and by more exclusively literary figures, Hellenic or Hellenised, such as Abū Tammām and ʿAbd al-Ŷāmīd. But when Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetic were translated, Greek legislation for Arabic literature seemed excessive to some, and there was a split in the ranks of Rhetoricians. The "conservative" school, represented by Ibn ul-Muʿtazz and Abū Hilāl, was of course far from being independent of Greek thought, but it tried to keep it within bounds, and some clever assimilation of Aristotelian principles was carried out, which at first sight may appear original; however, the Muʿtazilites were more and more interested in philosophical, less and less literary. The other school was frankly Aristotelian, although it knew no more about Greek literature than the first, and therefore failed to understand the Poetic, and out of Rhetoric understood only the sections dealing with elocution. Its aim was to create a rational Rhetoric, but the attempts of Qudāmah, of the author of Naqd un-Nathr, and of the philosopher Ibn Rushd seem to have had no effect on contemporaries. Even Ibn Sinā failed to understand the Poetic, but he succeeded in analysing and arabising the Rhetoric, and thus prepared

the ground for ‘Abd ul-Qāhir il-Jurjānī, the one Rhetoriastic who
attained maturity, and achieved some harmony between the rules of
Arabic grammar and Aristotle's general ideas on the sentence, the
chapter, and style. Unfortunately, his work was not carried further
forward.1

The third ‘Abbāsid period is simply one of decline, and it
merges with the Dark Ages which followed. Already under the
Hamdānids, the literary centre of gravity of the Islamic empire had
shifted from Iraq to Syria. Now, under attack from invaders and
from ignorance in the East, and under attack from Christians and
from ignorance in the West, talent found a refuge in Egypt, and for
a time flourished there. But a particularly villainous part was to
be played by the Ottoman Turks, who set their hand against two
civilisations: the Byzantine, which fled to Italy, and the Arab,
which buried itself in the Azhar.2

It was when the Ottoman yoke was lifted from Egypt's shoulders
at the end of the eighteenth century that the second great period of
Renovation in Arabic literature began. To the impulse given in
Egypt by the ruling dynasty, an impulse which was primarily
scientific and practical, was added that of Syrian immigrants, who
were interested more exclusively in language and literature.3

(1) Naqd un-Nāhirr, intro., pp. 3-24. "Rapport entre la Rhétorique
Arabe et la Rhétorique Grecque," pp. 241-242. This is the latest
view expressed by Tāhā Husayn on Arab Rhetoric. It revokes
earlier opinions in Tajdid Dhikrā Abī 'l-‘Alā', pp. 96-99, and
Fi 'l-Adab il Jähilī, pp. 29-31.
(2) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī, pp. 182-185.
(3) Ibid., pp. 74-76.
These impulses worked in two directions at the same time. On the one hand, the past was rediscovered, old texts were published, and the public realised that Arabic literature had not always been a stilted exercise by scholars out of touch with contemporary life. On the other, schools, administrative reforms, and haphazard translation familiarised the public with the achievements of the West— the scientific rather than the literary ones.

Almost without exception, the poets turned to early models. The result was that by the end of the nineteenth century poetry had rid itself of verbal shackles; but it also placed a limit on its own progress. Ḥāfīz and Shawqī and their generation merely resuscitated the poetry of Jarīr and al-Parazdaq instead of reflecting the life and sentiments of their contemporaries, and, convinced that all they needed was imagination, they did not keep abreast of modern thought and knowledge, read "signs in the heavens" but would not read a book, so that their poetry lacks substance. The events of the first World War and the national struggle which followed did instil life into them, for they were brought into touch with popular feeling and were encouraged to venture on some innovations, like Shawqī's lyrical dramas. The succeeding generation of poets, however, seeks only facile success, sometimes by taking advantage of political

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(1) Ibid., pp. 1-5.
(3) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī, pp. 24-27.
(4) Ibid., pp. 115-152.
(5) "Al-Adab ul-ʿArabī bayn amsihi wa ghadih," p. 23.
rivalries. ¹

More immediately concerned with social needs than with individual emotion, prose was slower than poetry to adopt the style of early forefathers, but quicker to adopt Western ideas, ² so that in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century writers like Muhammad ʿAbdūh and Saʿd Zāghlūl were struggling painfully to express fresh ideas while retaining the shackles of rhyme and verbal artifice. But the factors of progress were decisive, and by the end of the century the Conservatives themselves had abandoned the defence of such style as al-Jabarti's, and were fighting for the "purity" of the language against the tendency to introduce European or colloquial words and expressions into it. Early in the twentieth century, the advance of knowledge and the political struggle, for which direct appeals had to be made to the people, caused further defeats to the Conservatives. ³

Until the first World War, however, there were no literary achievements of intrinsic worth. Only trivial books and articles appeared, dealing with matters of political or social interest rather than with pure literature, and efforts by al-Muwaylī or Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm to create a novel failed. The theatre presented only poorly adapted borrowed plays. And Criticism remained largely traditional. But the War and the revolution brought about great changes: Education passed to national hands, was expanded and diversified; a certain

¹ Hadīth ul-Arbī‘ā’, III, p. 211.
² Ḥāfiẓ wa Shawqī, pp. 4-10.
³ Ibid., pp. 68-83.
amount of freedom was acquired, and the flame it lit was fanned by rivalries in political, moral, economic, literary, and artistic ideals; and a series of political disasters caused literature to acquire both firmness and malleability. The art of prose satire was revived; rival newspapers encouraged literary studies which were later collected in book form; drama was established on a modest but sound basis when the National Troupe was formed; short stories and novels were written, first in imitation of Western ones, but eventually of a standard that earned recognition even in Europe.¹ The modern East has developed a personality of its own, and can now give as well as take.²

There are apparent inconsistencies, however, in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's pronouncements on the stage now reached by the Renaissance. In a series of broadcasts from the B.B.C. in 1949, he spoke of it with obvious pride and satisfaction. At one time, he said, Egyptians used to debate which of the two foreign influences, the French or the British, was more suitable to them. Now, confident of their own identity, they have opened their doors to all cultures; they translate masterpieces direct from the Italian, German, Russian, or Spanish, and are in touch with ancient Western classics as well as with Oriental thought, Persian, Turkish, or Indian, ancient or modern. The very belatedness of these efforts is an advantage, for had they come earlier, before Egypt's personality had been formed, there would have been the same dislocations in its language and

(2) Rūṣūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp. 87-89.
literature as the Syro-Americans are, in his opinion, suffering from.\(^1\) Instead, Egyptians are safely and progressively widening their horizons; they no longer think only as Egyptians, but as participants in the life of the world, in exactly the same way as Europeans and Americans think and react; in literature, they are contributing to the same genres as are other nations, and some of their contributions are being translated into English, French, and German as well as into Oriental languages.\(^2\)

When writing at home, however, he has almost always been chafingly critical of the shallowness of Egyptian culture. In 1923, he wrote that Egyptians were living as parasites on Europe and America\(^3\) and in 1937 that Egypt's share of culture was scarcely worth mentioning,\(^4\) that it had fallen behind other nations more recently freed from Ottoman rule, and that it was content to be like a mill "that gives out a rumble but no flour".\(^5\) These opinions may no longer be relevant to-day, but even in 1948 and 1949 Tāhā Ḥusayn was complaining of the lack of intellectual vitality even among University students, who look upon their courses as burdens and are no sooner done with them than they return to trivial concerns or pleasures best unnamed,\(^6\) and he was contrasting the intellectual

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(1) "Muqawwimāt ul-Adab il-Miṣrī 'l-Ḥadīth," Arabic Listener, X, 14 (1949), pp. 4-5.
(2) Ibid., X, 16 (1949), pp. 4-5.
(3) Min BaʾId, pp. 53-60.
(4) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqāfah fi Miṣr, p. 364.
(5) Ibid., pp. 372-373.
(6) Mirʾāt ud-Damīr il-Ḥadīth, pp. 113-122.
vigour mingled with a sense of duty displayed by the French, with the "emptiness" of life in Egypt, where idleness or idle pursuits are common,¹ and where men who know and admire Western culture yet act in accordance only with their petty interests; he concluded:²

I almost believe that civilisation and culture in our modern environment are still most like a varnish which cannot withstand the heat of the sun or changes in the weather, and is no sooner put to the test than it melts and reveals what lies behind - old spirits which have not been given a far-reaching upbringing, but which have been given an artificial, casual upbringing unable to withstand the force of benefits, desires, or fortuitous events.

It seems that, as in his representation of social conditions, he wishes to be Egypt's apologist abroad and its mentor at home. When exaggerations in both functions have been discounted, his position is that indicated by his participation in a debate at the American University at Cairo, when he supported the view that "Literature has made satisfactory progress in the last quarter of a century", but added that he derived his satisfaction not from the stage that Literature had reached, but from the fact that it was moving along the right road.³

He is not complacent, but he has hope, and he even ventures a prediction about future development. On the one hand, the trend which has caused writers to be emancipated from patronage and to write in accordance with their own inclinations points towards increasing individualism. On the other, writers will be increasingly tempted to write for the masses because literacy is on the increase.

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¹ Rihlat ur-Rabî`, pp. 92-93.
² Ibid., pp. 85-86.
³ Ar-Risālah, XVIII, 865 (30 Jan. 1950), pp. 141-142.
and because the Radio, the Cinema, and the Press favour hasty writing. Tāhā Ḥusayn has faith that some will manage to combine the demands of fine art and those of the public, and that their works, like highly polished mirrors, will give the people a true reflection of themselves, showing them what is desirable that they might pursue it, and what is undesirable that they might reform it. Thus will Literature lead the people to the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.¹

Considered globally, Arabic Literature exhibits, in the opinion of Tāhā Ḥusayn, the two features which Auguste Comte observed in all social phenomena: stability and change, continuity and adaptation to changing circumstance. Whether because of the nature of the language, or because of the Qurʾān, or because of the innate conservatism of the Arabs, or because of a combination of these and of other factors, the truth is that the desert origins of Arab literature can be detected even in present day writing. One aspect of this traditional element is the language itself, for no writing, no matter how enjoyable, is acceptable to Arabs as literature if it is not in the correct classical language; similarly, certain poetic standards and conventions seem unshakeable,² for although there were quarrels between rival schools of poetry throughout the first four centuries of Islām, they resulted only in changes of relative emphasis on ideas or verbal artistry;³ even prose, though born after Islām, adopted the standards of poetry in relation to language and

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² Ibid., pp. 11-13.
³ Hadīth ul-ʿArbiʿāʾ, II, pp. 6-9.
eloquence, and innovated only in moderation. Yet Arabic Literature has proved its capacity for change and adaptation in the two great periods when it interacted with foreign cultures,¹ and it has succeeded in giving a true picture of each of the ages that produced it.²

Such a literature deserves a proud position among world literatures. If any comparison is to be made, however, it should be based on the achievements of past ages, for modern Western literatures have had centuries in which to accumulate knowledge and reach maturity, whereas the Arabic Renaissance is of recent birth. Ancient Arabic literature should, therefore, be measured against its Greek, Latin, and Persian counterparts; the Hindu and Chinese literatures might also have been included in the comparison if enough were known about them.

It is immediately apparent to Tāhā Husayn that, crude though Arabic literature may have been in the crude environment of the desert, it had inherent qualities which blossomed magnificently as soon as conditions proved favourable. The proof is that it easily displaced even advanced cultures in the conquered territories: Greek disappeared from Syria, and the Persians - though they acquired political power and retained their language for the purposes of every-day life - used Arabic in high intellectual pursuits, even as Mediaeval Europe used Latin. It was Arabic Literature that carried the torch of knowledge throughout the Dark

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(2) Hadîth ul-Arbi'ah, III, p. 85.
Ages, and with it lit the fire of the European Renaissance. In itself, it displayed a continued vitality unequalled by any other, for the spirit of ancient Greece or Rome may be said to live only in writers who speak a different tongue, whereas Arabic has an uninterrupted line of succession from the Jāhiliyyah to the present, and fully answers the requirements of many different nations from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf.

On the other hand, it is often pointed out that Arabic Literature is deficient of both epic and drama. At one time, Tāhā Ḥusayn freely admitted that Arabic poetry was entirely lyrical, and thought that those Conservatives who sought to prove that the description of battle scenes by ‘Antarah was epic, or that the amorous dialogues of Imru’ ul-Qays or Waḍḍāṭ ul-Yaman were dramatic were only spoiling their case. Instead, Tāhā Ḥusayn argued that a literature should be judged only by its attainments in the forms of expression that it adopted, and he pointed out that in Greece the various forms were developed in successive ages, but that at any one time it was one form alone that fulfilled the whole of the poetic function of the nation. Anyway, he added, the Greeks alone had an original epic or drama; they were imitated by some, but the nations that were out of touch with Greek literature - India, ancient Persia, mediaeval Europe, and the Arabs, for example - had neither epic nor drama.

(1) Min Hadith iṣ̄h-Shīr wa ‘n-Nathr, pp. 8-15.
(2) "Al-Adab ul-‘Arabī bayn Amsihi wa Ghadih," pp. 9-11.
(3) Ṣī' al-Adab il-Jāhili, pp. 354-355.
Had the Arabs known about them, they would have emulated Greek efforts.¹

Later, he must have realised that he had been grossly misinformed about mediaeval European literature, and that his reasoning failed to explain why the Arabs did not concern themselves with the literature of the Greeks even after they had gained access to their science and their philosophy, or why the Persians who had the same contacts did develop an epic and the Arabs did not. He therefore took the line that there was an epic element in Arabic literature: he found it in the popular story-telling of the Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsid age, of which he said that they were not inferior to the Homeric epics, and differed only in that they were in prose studded with verse, had no musical accompaniment, and had not the same religious significance as the Greek myths;² he found it also in the popular narratives concerning ‘Antarah and Abū Zayd, which he also raised to the Homeric level; and he took a leaf out of the book of the Conservatives when he asserted that the main characteristic of epic poetry is that it mirrors the life of the community rather than the personality of the poet, and that this characteristic is discernible in Arabic poetry, notably in that of Jarīr, al-Farazdaq, and al-Akhtal.³ On drama he is silent, except when he points out that Ibn ʿr-Rūmī, like the Greeks, conceived even lyric poetry dynamically in that he used to personify abstractions and make them

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(2) FI ‘sh-Shiʿr il-Jāhilī, pp. 90-94; Adab, pp. 164-168.
(3) Min Hadīth ish-Shiʿr wa ‘n-Nathr, p. 16.
perform on the stage of life; he represented, for example, certain defects of a friend of his as women with whom he conducted a dialogue "which would have been equivalent to dramatic dialogue had the Arabic language had the scope for it; but it had not such scope at that time, and he had no choice but to use the terms, 'I said,' and 'they said'."

Ṭāhā Husayn has also protested against the charge made by unnamed orientalists that the Arabic ode has no unity except in rhyme and metre, and has no individuality, so that the lines of one may be mingled with those of another. This, he said, is true only of supposedly Jāhili odes, which are of doubtful authenticity or faulty in transmission. Sound Arabic poetry displays no such weakness, and no liberty can be taken with the order of its lines. As an example of the unified ode, he mentions the mu'allaqah of Labīd, and explains how each of its themes leads on to the next: a deserted encampment reminds the poet of a woman whom he had loved, but who has abandoned him; proudly, he decides not to seek her, but to go his way; he mounts his swift camel, which he compares to a cloud which has shed its burden of rain, to the wild she-ass and her mate hastening to the mountains in winter or to water-springs in summer, and to the hunted antelope; as he is travelling, he describes the desert; he then returns to his beloved to tell her he is not a man to be trifled with: in peace, he is a gay and liberal companion, and in war he is the saviour of his tribe; and he ends his ode with

(1) Min Ḥadīth ish-Shīr wa 'n-Nathr, pp. 141-145.
(2) Fi 'sh-shīr il-Jāhili, p. 145; Adab, p. 228.
a eulogy of the tribe.\(^1\) This example shows that Ţāhā Ḥusayn is in some confusion as to the meaning of unity; what he has shown is that what led the poet from theme to theme was a psychological association of ideas such as can scarcely be absent from any discourse, artistic or otherwise.

However, having presented the case for Arabic literature and rebutted objections, Ţāhā Ḥusayn concludes that it is superior to Persian literature, of which, as has already been pointed out, he holds a low opinion.\(^2\) It is also superior to the literature of the Romans, who had scarcely any originality:

Their orators, and the greatest was Cicero, were pupils of Aristotle and Demosthenes; their historians, and the greatest were Titus-Livius and Tacitus, were pupils of Herodotus and Thucydides; their poets, and the greatest was Virgil, were pupils of Homer; and their dramatists, and there were none great, were poor imitators of the Greek.

Arabic literature, therefore, is second only to Greek literature.\(^3\)

There are innumerable points in this survey at which the student of Arabic literature would be tempted to challenge Ţāhā Ḥusayn's opinion. Except with regard to the theory on Jāhilī literature, which was dealt with specifically and systematically in two books of Ţāhā Ḥusayn's, the temptation has been resisted, mainly because most of these opinions are culled from lectures delivered extempore\(^4\) or from articles intended for the periodical press, and therefore admittedly less exhaustive and precise than truly

\(^{1}\) Hadīth \(\text{ul-Arbi'}\)ā', I, pp. 31-42.

\(^{2}\) v. supra, p. 194.

\(^{3}\) Min Hadīth igh-Shi'ir wa 'n-Nathr, pp. 17-20.

\(^{4}\) Ibid., intro., p. 3.
scientific research needs to be.\(^1\) There is no point, therefore, in questioning matters of detail.

And yet there are anomalies in Ţahā Husayn's approach to different problems of literary history which can scarcely escape notice. He uses the absurdity of Jāhilī legends as a stick with which to beat the poetry; but he does not consider that equally absurd stories discredit Umayyad love-poetry. In placing upon Ottoman shoulders all the blame for the tardiness of the Egyptian Renaissance, he does not take into account that Syria started hers while yet under Ottoman domination. He does not consider worthy of the name of literature any work that is not in the classical language, yet he quotes folk-tales as examples of Arabic epic literature. And in condoning the absence of epic or drama in Arabic literature, when one line of argument collapses it is not his conclusion that he alters but his reasoning.

If, therefore, this summary of Ţahā Husayn's views has been as faithful as it was intended to be, it will have brought out the extent of his information, the lacunae in it, his wilful independence of judgment, and the fact that his presentation of the facts is often that of the chiding don, the devoted apologist, or the skilful debater rather than that of the dispassionate investigator.

\(\) (1) *Fadīth ul-Arbī‘ā‘*, I, intro.
Chapter Twelve

ARTISTIC CRITICISM

To feel the virtue of the poet, or the painter, to disengage it, to set it forth, - these are the three stages of the critic's duty.

WALTER PATER.

It is convenient rather than strictly accurate to speak of Tāhā Ḥusayn's critiques of different literary figures under the heading of "Artistic Criticism", for there is a "scientific" element in these critiques. In studying a poet, Tāhā Ḥusayn tries to cumulate the main principles of Sainte Beuve, Taine, and Jules Lemaître by bringing out first the poet's personality, then his environment, and finally the artistic pleasure that is to be found in his poetry.¹ In fact, it is precisely because Tājdīd Dhiḳrā Abī 'l-ʿAlā' included studies of al-Maʿarrī's life and times and of the whole of his literary and philosophic work that it stood out against earlier fragmentary and unsystematic criticism. Nevertheless, Tāhā Ḥusayn admits that his interest is primarily in the poetry, not in the poet, and that if he studies the man it is in order to understand the poetry better.² In this kind of criticism, therefore, psychology and literary history are adjuncts, and the main purpose is artistic and therefore subjective.

It is in respect of al-Maʿarrī alone that Tāhā Ḥusayn has

(2) Min Hadīth ʾish-Shīʿr waʾn-Natrār, p. 154.
attempted an exhaustive all-round study. It has already been noted that the association between the two has been intimate and protracted. It started when Tāhā Ḥusayn wrote Tājdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlāʾ, a piece of meticulous research which brings together a vast amount of information about the poet and his times, presenting it in well-ordered form and backing most doubtful points with close reasoning, but professing only to be representative, "historical", and therefore declining to pass judgment. As though such restraint had been irksome, Tāhā Ḥusayn later published Maʿ Abī 'l-ʿAlāʾ fī Sijniḥ, most of which is a lively but entirely informal discourse on al-Maʿarrī's personality and philosophy, in which Tāhā Ḥusayn takes full advantage of the poet's warning that his words are not always to be taken literally¹ to speculate freely on the intended meaning of ambiguous verses; then the tone changes abruptly and the book ends with some twenty pages of academic comments on some provoking but disconnected passages from al-Fusūl wa 'l-Ghāyāt.

In these and other contexts, al-Maʿarrī is represented as an excellent man who practised virtue strictly for its own sake, for he had no hope for and no faith in mankind, yet he never ceased to lead a pure life and to do good to others.²

His literary career is divided into three main parts. During the first twenty years of his life, he acquired most of the knowledge available in various Syrian centres; he started writing poetry at the age of eleven, but his efforts then were imitative, immature, and

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(1) لا تقيّد عليّ للفظيّ نسائيّ مثل غيري يتّقي بالجَانِب

(2) Sawt Abī 'l-ʿAlāʾ, intro., pp. 6-7.
too often hyperbolic. Then for fifteen years he lived in proud poverty in his native Ma‘arrah, after which he went to Baghdad and in the space of two years received much recognition for his learning and his talent, but also suffered several humiliations and not a little disillusionment; throughout this period, his prose – which survives only in a few letters – was heavily ornamented and so subservient to rhyme as to be childish in parts; at the same time his poetry improved, affectations and hyperbolae being gradually brought into comparative restraint, but imitations of al-Mutanabbi and of others can be detected, and he sometimes took liberties with grammar. Finally, when he was thirty-seven, his mother died and he returned to al-Ma‘arrah to live a life of self-denial and comparative seclusion.¹

His main prose work during this last period was Risālat ul-Ghufrán, a vision of the hereafter which naturally calls for a rapprochement with the Divine Comedy, but in which Tāhā Husayn sees a vast piece of irony, deriding Islamic concepts when it makes out that God devotes His time merely to devising pleasures for the elect.² In all the prose-writing of his mature years, al-Ma‘arrī’s intense personality burns through the difficult vocabulary which he uses; he discourages the ordinary reader by pursuing an idea into exiguous recesses, but he curbs his exaggerations with a 'but' or an 'almost'; like all his contemporaries, he uses rhyme in most of his writing, omitting it only when he is relating events, but he does not use the shocking terms that were current then, and his command of the

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¹ Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l-‘Alā', pp. 116-199, 228-232.
language is that of a master. ¹

In poetry, one of his distinctions is that he was the first to compose a whole volume on a single subject; this was ad-Dir‘iyyāt, which consisted entirely of descriptions of armours. His main work, however, is the Luzūmiyyāt. In this, al-Ma‘arrī imposed upon himself some arbitrary difficulties of versification, perhaps in order to divert attention from his heretic views, and for the same reason the tendency towards obscurity against which he had struggled for a time now seems to be purposely indulged. In addition, his linguistic standards become extremely stringent, and he is so concerned with exactitude that he almost excludes imagination.² Tāhā Husayn is forced to admit that this leads to some straining and artificiality: the thought is subordinated to the rhyme and the unity of poems is impaired; besides, the pessimism professed by al-Ma‘arrī is repetitious and unrelieved.³ Nevertheless, al-Ma‘arrī attains not a little freedom within his self-imposed limitations, and his poetry has a tone of calm grandeur.⁴ Above all, the Luzūmiyyāt has the distinction of being the only example of philosophic poetry in Arabic.

For al-Ma‘arrī was not merely a coiner of well-turned aphorisms: he shares with Ibn Khaldūn the honour of being the most original thinker in Arabic literature,⁵ and has an elaborate system

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(2) Ibid., pp. 199-228.
(4) Sawt Abī ‘l-‘Alā’, pp. 5-6.
(5) Falsafat ubn Khaldūn al-Ijtimā‘iyyah, intro.
of philosophy purposely made obscure and even contradictory because it was too unorthodox to be openly professed. The starting point of this system was rationalism, but in refusing to accept any guidance except from his reason, al-Ma'arrî became sceptical even about Reason. This, however, did not lead him into complete nihilism, and by painstaking collation of scattered pronouncements Ṣāhā Husayn reconstructed al-Ma'arrî's opinions in four fields of speculation. According to his Natural Philosophy, matter is a constant element with a cycle of transient forms, and time and space are independent of events or of the senses. As an astrologer, al-Ma'arrî believed that the stars have a "natural" influence over the elements, i.e. an inherent power and not one delegated by the Prime Mover; as "signs" to the thinker's mind, they should be shown respect. Al-Ma'arrî also had a system of Natural Theology which asserted the existence of a God omnipotent and wise, denied free will, and considered the soul as the source of evil, but wavered on the questions of immortality and resurrection. Finally, as a "practical" philosopher al-Ma'arrî viewed man as irremediably evil and the world as almost entirely so; with regard to society, he considered the nation to be the source of power, and favoured equal distribution of wealth; he advised men to mistrust women and give them very little education, and he considered marriage desirable for women but undesirable for men; he himself looked forward to annihilation, and it was as acelibate, a vegetarian, and a recluse that he awaited his death. ¹ Al-Ma'arrî's ethics and his opinion on Man make him, in fact, an Epicurean, and he has a marked resemblance to

(1) Tajdīd Dhiqrā Abī 'l-'Alā', pp. 249-303.
Lucretius; both believe that pleasures are to be avoided only because they bring pain in their trail.1 A similar rapprochement is to be made between al-Ma‘arrī and Anatole France, for it is the same fundamental pessimism which finds expression in the gloominess of the one and the irony of the other.2

Stimulating as this review of al-Ma‘arrī’s philosophy may be, Tāhā Ḥusayn does not establish that it is an integrated system rather than a collection of opinions, neither does he communicate to the reader his own confidence in selecting one out of several contradictory passages as representing al-Ma‘arrī’s genuine view. In discussing whether al-Ma‘arrī regarded the body or the soul as the source of evil in man, for example, Tāhā Ḥusayn based himself on a passage where the poet made out that the body was often maligned, for it did no more than obey the commandments of the soul.3 Tāhā Ḥusayn inferred not only that in al-Ma‘arrī’s philosophy it was the soul that was evil, but also that the body was good;4 he later corrected this excess when he said that the body was morally neutral,5 but in neither context does he explain why this quotation from al-Ma‘arrī should prevail over another in which the poet complains that he is in a threefold prison: his blindness, his seclusion, and the confinement of his soul in the wicked body.6

(2) Hadīth ul-Arbī‘a’, III, p. 117.
(3) أعراض جسدي روحى وما زال يخدم حتى ونـاـئـ (3)
(6) أراني في الثلاثة من سجوني فلا تسأل عن الخسر النبيسي
لقدى ناظرى ولزوم بيني وكون النفس في الجسم الخيبيت
Tāhā Husayn has also written at length about al-Mutanabbi, of whom he is notoriously less appreciative than are most other Arabic-speaking critics. In the summer of 1936, after he had given a course of lectures on al-Mutanabbi, Tāhā Husayn left for a holiday in France intending only to write an informal discourse on the poet, and did not even take secondary reference works with him. But he was soon carried away by his subject, and in thirty-three days dictated the seven hundred pages of Ma'al-Mutanabbi; even then, he had dealt only with the poet's life and character and had touched only incidentally upon his art. Al-Mutanabbi is portrayed as none too likeable a malcontent who in early life agitated for social justice but soon despaired of its being attained and turned to opportunism for the satisfaction of his ambition and his avarice; specifically, Tāhā Husayn makes out that al-Mutanabbi was secretly affiliated to the Qarāmiṭah, and he even conjectures that it was because al-Mutanabbi failed his fellow-revolutionaries that he met a violent death. For all that he is renowned for his aphorisms, he is not, in Tāhā Husayn's opinion, a philosopher. As a poet, his consciousness was limited to people - himself first, then others; descriptions of nature or of monuments scarcely have a place in his poetry. He was, however, a master of words, and was often stirred - if only by selfish motives - to great emotions. His early poetry was often in bad taste, but he found his scope in the brilliant, lavish court of the warring Hamdanids; in Egypt, finally, he acquired polish when he discovered that brilliant improvisations were not good enough for a country where culture was long-settled, deep-rooted, and extensive, and he reached greater heights of lyricism.
and of wisdom by the curbing of his worldly ambitions.¹

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn has also dealt in lectures and articles with a number of other prominent poets of the past, belonging mainly to the ‘Abbāsid age. These shorter studies are more exclusively concerned with the artistry of each poet than with his life and character; they set out his qualities and weaknesses in each of the poetic motifs he attempted, in terms that are not always unchallengeable, but precise, significant, and unequivocal.

He made similar attempts at all-round estimates of Ḥāfiz and Shawqī after their death. Ḥāfiz, he said, did not at first seem to have the making of a poet; besides, his culture was poor, for he knew little French although he translated French books, and his acquaintance with the Arab past was shallow and naive. But he patiently built up and imposed a literary personality that was largely derived from others: he could speak like an early Arab beduin, and he could express the sentiments of his contemporary public; he also befriended a large number of people among whom were popular leaders, and in his elegies on these, his personal and his vicarious sentiments united to produce his best poetry.

Shawqī, on the other hand, had by far the more fertile nature and wider culture. He could have achieved much more had he not been intellectually lazy and had he not been so eager to win the ruler's favour that he imprisoned his muse in a gilded cage. It was only when the ruler he had adulated was deposed that, in spite of himself, he became the people's clarion, allowed his muse to soar

into pure lyricism, and attempted to create poetic drama, although even in this he remained the lyricist rather than the dramatist.

The two poets did not, in Ṭāhā Ḫusayn's opinion, innovate a great deal, but they did prepare the ground for the Renaissance by resuscitating Arabic poetry and supplying the East with emotional food. They are indeed the greatest poets Arabic literature has known since the days of al-Mutanabbī and al-Ḥarīrī.¹

During their lifetime, however, Ṭāhā Ḫusayn was not so complimentary to the two poets; he harried them, and especially Shawqī, with accusations of ignorance,² of antiquarianism, of lack of a consistent artistic creed, and even of inconstancy in the choice of a model.³

The succeeding generation of poets does not seem to have built on the ground prepared by Ḥāfīz and Shawqī, but to have swung to the opposite extreme. Partly because of the outcry against verbal artifice and partly because modern schools do not give the same linguistic training as did the Azhar, these poets have come to believe that all that is required of them is emotional exhibitionism, and they neglect craftsmanship.

In the few critiques he has made of these poets, Ṭāhā Ḫusayn adopts the attitude of a schoolmaster returning corrected essays to his class: when he is not completely and immoderately condemnatory - as in his article on Maḥmūd Abū 'l-Wafā⁴ - his critique starts with

(1) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī, pp. 137-224.
(2) Hadīth ul-ʿArbiʿāʾ, III, pp. 94-105.
(3) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī, pp. 13-16.
some qualified praise of features which show promise, and ends with an enumeration of the poet's lapses in grammar, lexicography, or even prosody; such, for example, are his articles on Ibrāhīm Nājī, 1 Ālī Maḥmūd Tāhā, 2 and the Lebanese ḫlyā Abū Māqī. 3

It will have been observed that although Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn considers prose to have taken the ascendency over poetry in both periods of Renovation in Arabic Literature, his concern has been almost exclusively with poets; he has indeed reviewed a few prose works, but has never attempted to study the entire career of a prose-writer.

Behind this anomaly lies Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's differentiation of prose from poetry. Literature, he once said, is to be divided into three main genres: poetry, oratory, and artistic prose. Poetry depends on "metre, rhyme, and music", and has to be heard to be appreciated; in listening to an orator, pleasure is derived both from his voice and from his gestures; prose alone caters for the silent reader. 4 The sensory basis of this division is obvious: the ear is to be the judge of poetry, the eye and the ear jointly judge oratory, and the eye scrutinises prose. If the senses alone were involved in criticism, Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's readier response to poetry than to prose would need no other explanation.

But of course faculties as well as senses are brought into play. The association Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn appears to have made is that one responds

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(1) Ibid., pp. 169-177.
(2) Ibid., pp. 159-168.
(3) Ibid., pp. 220-227.
(4) Min Ḥadīth iṣr-iḥ-Shi'r wa 'n-Nathr, pp. 41-42.
emotionally and immediately to the hearing of poetry, but one quietly considers prose in the light of reason.

It is in keeping with this that he considers poetry an earlier literary form than prose, a product of the childhood and youth of a nation, when imagination is stronger than reason; the apparent restriction of its freedom by rhyme and metre is deceptive, for it is really freer than prose in that it is not bound to represent its subject-matter as it really is.¹ But when the nation has grown and finds that it has thoughts and opinions to express, it speaks in prose, and "poetry which at first was a necessity becomes in the second stage a kind of luxury and ornament".²

The antithesis, however, must not be overdone. Even when it has become a luxury and an ornament, poetry remains indispensable to life,³ so that it is difficult to distinguish it from a necessity. Both in prose and in poetry, the faculties must collaborate: even the scientist makes use of his imagination in formulating hypotheses and planning experiments; similarly, the poets of the Jāhiliyyah were the repositories of all the knowledge of the nation, and in later ages Arab poets did not cease to acquaint themselves with the science of their time.⁴ A poet needs to know his subject-matter and know it well, otherwise he is in the same position as a "sculptor who wishes to create artistic masterpieces, but who is ignorant of

(1) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī, pp. 63-67.
(2) Min Hadīth ʾish-Shīr wa ’n-Nāṭḥ, p. 22.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī, pp. 141-143.
dissection, and consequently of the formation of the human body, and of similar sciences without which there can be no artistic excellence". 1 Correspondingly, what distinguishes artistic prose from everyday speech is that "it has a particular share of beauty or a particular artistic delight". 2 And when it is remembered that whether the subject of Tāhā Ḥusayn's study is prose or verse it reaches his consciousness through hearing, and that he likes to "lose himself" in it rather than exercise his mind on it, 3 one is tempted to conclude that in Tāhā Ḥusayn's view poetry displays in concentrated form the distinctive qualities of literature, and that prose dilutes and restrains these same qualities by considerations of reason, which it shares with scientific and practical pursuits.

Tāhā Ḥusayn is not inclined to tell precisely which qualities he seeks in literature: that would be codifying Art. It is not impossible, however, to disengage his preferences from his actual judgments.

It must first be noted that his subjectiveness - long combated, but ultimately accepted - has led to serious inconsistencies. He admits, for example, that he has favoured Ḥāfīz over Shawqī because of a personal congeniality between Ḥāfīz and himself, 4 and his predilection for al-Ma‘arrī is such that he accepts with a smile strained and artificial lines which he would certainly have condemned

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(2) Min Ḥādīth ish-Shī‘r wa 'n-Nathr, p. 24.
(3) v. supra, p. 175.
(4) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī, pp. 175-178.
if they had been said by any other poet. One may even suspect that the political affiliation to which alone Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn ascribes Maḥ mù d Abū 'l-Wafā's rise to notoriety also helps to explain the violence of Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's condemnation of his work.

However, Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn has made efforts to neutralise these non-literary prejudices. He has praised the literary talent of al-ʿAqqād and of Tawfīq ul-Ḥakîm while he was divided from the one by political, and from the other by personal, differences. He has also mildly criticised on the pages of as-Siyāṣah a book by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, who was then editor of the newspaper.

His purely literary preferences fall into two main fields: wording and content.

He does not diverge as widely as is generally supposed from traditional Arab taste in the importance which he gives to expression. He considers the use of the correct classical language essential to literature, and he readily concedes that rhyme, metre, and choice wording are indispensable to Arabic poetry. He is not averse to verbal adornment: the very effort involved may command admiration, and Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn has approved of the clever verbal jugglery even of a

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(1) Ma` Abī `l-ʿAlā' fī Sijnih, pp. 84-87.
(2) Hadīth ul-Arbiʿā', III, p. 211.
(4) Fuṣūl fī 'l-Adab waʾn-Naqd, pp. 135 ff.
(6) Fī 'l-Adab il-Jāhilī, pp. 343-348.
(7) Ma` Abī `l-ʿAlā' fī Sijnih, p. 87.
contemporary, Wahid, but considered him an isolated phenomenon. In general, however, Taha Husayn calls for economy in the use of such tricks, and what he appreciates most in the artistic use of words is not cleverness but "musical" effects. He finds Ilyâ Abû Madî's use of an unwovelled dâl for a rhyme unpleasant, and his mingling of metres unsatisfactory; but he greatly admires the musical effect achieved by Ibn ur-Rûmî or al-Buhturî when they repeat the same words or their derivatives in the two hemistiches of a line. In fact, it is only harmony that he appreciates, and in ridiculing a line in which Maḥmūd Abû 'l-Wafâ asked: "How fares the song of the nightingale amid the hooping of the hoopoos?" Taha Husayn did not seem to realise that, however misguided, the poet was seeking a special effect by representing audibly the disharmony he spoke of.

It is naturally in respect of ideas that Taha Husayn's taste shows signs of Western influences.

It is not too rash a generalisation to say that traditional Arab taste, or at least the taste that prevailed at the outset of

(2) Hâfîz wa Shawqî, p. 41.
(3) Ḥadîth ul-Arbi`a', III, pp. 224-225.
(4) Min Ḥadîth ish-Shi'ir wa 'n-Nathr, p. 142; e.g. Ibn ur-Rûmî's

تاركتي ولم أكن سئ الظلمان أسي الظلمون بالأسدقاء


اللغة البلابل أين تذ بيبين هدمة المداهم
the Renaissance, was more concerned with clever wording than with the freshness or sincerity of the idea expressed. Ţāhā Ḥusayn, on the contrary, insisted that literature should be living and constantly in touch with the sentiments if not of all mankind, at least of the current generation. But he does not seem to have searched very deeply into the relationship between emotion and art. How rudimentary his gauge is appears from his comment on al-Ǧarrāʾī's farewell to the people of Baghdād: Of a line in which the poet merely states that he is leaving because of concern about his mother and the limitation of his resources, Ţāhā Ḥusayn says that it fulfils all the requirements of Art since it succeeds in touching the sensitive heart.¹

Similarly, Arabic criticism had always tended to be fragmentary, selecting a single self-contained line for praise or condemnation. On the contrary, Ţāhā Ḥusayn has urged that a poem should be considered as a whole,² but it has already been pointed out that his analysis of Labīd's ode shows he does not understand unity in the same way as most Europeans do.

A more subtle difference between Western and Arab critical opinion is that the European expects of imagery that it should be derived from human experience and that it should have aesthetic connotations, whereas the Arab is satisfied with a comparison if only it is apposite. We therefore find in Arabic poetry, along

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(1) Tajdīd Ḍhikrā Abī ʿl-ʿAlāʾ, p. 202:

أثاري عنكم أمراً: والصلة لم ألقها وثراء عداد مسفرتا

(2) Min Ḥadīth ish-Shīr wa ʿn-Nathr, p. 109.
with figures of speech entirely acceptable to Western taste, similes that do not correspond to any reality, as when a warrior in the midst of battle is compared to a moon attacking stars, or that are aesthetically indifferent if not repulsive, as when the crescent moon is likened to the paring of a nail.  

In this respect, Tāhā Ḥusayn has not achieved a happy balance. He once observed of the technical terms of etymology, prosody, or jurisprudence from which al-Maʿarrī derived many of his comparisons that they are "in themselves far removed from the elegance of poets", but he conceded that al-Maʿarrī's comparisons were "correct and good". In fact, Tāhā Ḥusayn is often surprisingly literal-minded in his criticism of figures of speech. Not without justification, he objects to the immoderate use of hyperbolae, but his objections are unduly niggling, for when al-Maʿarrī speaks of a fear that "melts every cutting sword, so that - but for the scabbard holding it - it would dissolve", Tāhā Ḥusayn comments:  

In this line, there is exaggeration in two respects, the first in describing them (the swords) as frightened, the other in describing them as melting; there is also in it an unforgiveable shortcoming... He claims that swords melt with fear while in their scabbards, and but for these would dissolve; what then would their condition be if their blades were drawn? Would they melt away until only the handles remained in their owners' hands? If so, it is an inadmissible impossibility, and an

(1) Ibn ul-Muʿtazz;  
(2) Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī '1-ʿAlā', p. 219.  
(3)  
(4) Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī '1-ʿAlā', p. 198.
abominable shortcoming, for there must be a great difference between the fear felt by swords when they are in their scabbards and when they are drawn. It would then be necessary that they be changed into a vapour...

Similarly, when Ibrāhīm Nājī says: "I went I knew not where, and walked where my foot dragged me," Tāhā Ḥusayn objects that it is for the man to drag his foot and not for the foot to drag the man. Sometimes his quibbling can be singularly undiscerning, for when the authors of Al-Adāt ul-Ḥukūmiyyah develop the argument that social reform is not "an end" but "a fruit", Tāhā Ḥusayn says he can scarcely see any difference between the two terms.

This rigid limitation of words to their denotations is actually a deformation of Tāhā Ḥusayn's intuitive taste. Commenting on Ḥāfiẓ's elegy on Muṣṭafā Kamīl, in which the poet called on the grave to prostrate itself when receiving the corpse, Tāhā Ḥusayn relates:

I asked him (Ḥāfiẓ) - may God have mercy on him - how he imagined a prostrated grave. He said: "Spare me your criticism and analysis; tell me, rather, does not this line ring well in your ear? Does it not instil sadness into it? Does it not picture Muṣṭafā's awesomeness?" I said: "Yes, but..." He said: "Spare me the 'but' and be content, as I am, with this."

Manifestly, Tāhā Ḥusayn was then susceptible to flights of fancy. But he was also suspicious of subjective judgments, and because he could not understand the subtle way in which the connotations of words reached his heart, he came to favour the exact and the explicit...
rather than the evocative. So it is that he highly praises Qays Ubn Ūburayḥ\(^1\) when he says: "Your love is rooted in my heart as fingers are rooted in the palms of my hands;"\(^2\) but when Ḥāfīz speaks of "wine which - they say - was squeezed from the cheeks of the fair on the wedding-day",\(^3\) Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn is charmed at first, but then has second thoughts and decides that he could scarcely bear to drink or look upon wine that was squeezed from human cheeks.\(^4\)

As guardian of the literary citadel, Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn has lowered the drawbridge to admit Western methods of research and the principles of Sainte-Beuve, Taine, and Jules Lemaître; but at the inner rampart of taste the tumult of conflict between traditional and new has not yet ceased.

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(2) لقد رست في القلب مومة كما رست في الراحتين الأصلاع

(3) خمرة قيل إنهم عصرواها من خدود السلاح في يوم عرس

Chapter Thirteen

CRITICISM - THE WIDER FIELD

The business of criticism is simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

It is not only by the example, the stimulation, and the intrinsic value of his own studies that Taḥā Ḥusayn has tried to raise the cultural level of Egyptian writers and readers. Next to his energy, the most imposing feature of his public career is his constant sense of dedication to, of responsibility for, the cultural development of the country. Presumptuous it may be, but it is also active and effective.

It has already been pointed out that in his criticism of younger writers, he is not so much the detached observer as the self-appointed mentor: just as in the twenties he tried to steer writers away from laboured imitations of the Ancients, so in the thirties he tried to correct abuses of freedom, urging greater effort, wider reading, and closer attention to the "tools of the trade".

His role has not been restricted to that of a censor. He has welcomed the participation in literary activities of scientifically trained men, such as the engineer ʿAlī Maḥmūd Taḥā or the doctor Ibrāhīm Nājī, in the hope that literature might benefit from the wider horizons of men who have fed their intellect with science and

(1) Ḥadīth ul-Arbiā', III, p. 162.
their heart with poetry.\(^1\) He has also given practical help and encouragement to promising beginners. He took an interest in Tawfiq ul-Ḥakīm, for example, after he had read his Āhl al-Kahf in 1933, and for some time after that Tawfiq used to submit his articles to him before publication, although Tawfiq ul-Ḥakīm took exception when, criticising his Shahrazād, Ṭahā Ḥusayn paternally suggested that the younger writer should read more philosophy, and there was a short-lived estrangement between them.\(^2\) It is not only towards those who, like Tawfiq ul-Ḥakīm, were swimming for shore that Ṭahā Ḥusayn has extended a helping hand; he is known, for example, to have had a poor blind girl named Ibtīsām Ḥāfīz admitted to the Faculty of Arts of the Fu'ād University because he detected poetic talent in her.\(^3\)

His interest in the literary profession extends beyond mere writing standards to its ethics and dignity. Intellectuals he has pointed out, have a threefold duty - a duty towards culture which demands that fundamental values be asserted even in despite of passing interests, a duty towards their own and towards succeeding generations, who need teachers and models, and a duty towards their conscience. This means that writers must resist the temptation to prostitute their talent to political pressure, popular taste, or national pride.\(^4\) As early as in 1923, Ṭahā Ḥusayn declared that he was fundamentally at variance with those who see in the study of

\(^{1}\) Hadīth ul-ʿArbiʿī, III, p. 169.

\(^{2}\) Fugūl fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp. 119-129.

\(^{3}\) Ar-Risālah, XVII, 815 (14 Feb. 1949), p. 207.

\(^{4}\) Fugūl fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp. 185-194.
history only an opportunity to glorify ancestors, although he con-
ceded that they represented an inevitable phase in the development
of a country renascent but not yet great, attributing to its past the
splendour that it lacked in the present.¹

Similarly, he urges that criticism be fearless, ruthless,² and
impartial,³ and that writers accept criticism with equanimity and
humility, and not importune the critic with requests for a review,
consider him under an obligation to them because they have gifted
him a book, or take offence if he points out weaknesses, or reviews
their book together with someone else's.⁴ Tāhā Ḥusayn himself
professes to be grateful to his critics,⁵ and it has already been
noted that he has tried to rid himself of non-literary prejudices
and has had the moral courage to confess to errors and exaggerations.⁶
The intention and the effort must be reckoned to his credit, even
though he has been more consistent in the fearlessness than in the
impartiality which he advocated.

He has concerned himself even with the material welfare of
writers, for he feels that one cause of the shallowness of culture
in Egypt is that, since the reading public is small, writers have to
put too much effort into the struggle for existence and consequently

(1) ِHadīth ul-Arbīsā', II, pp. 79-86.
(2) ِFuṣūl fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, pp. 7-11.
(4) ِIbid., III, pp. 178-182.
(5) ِIbid., p. 22.
(6) ِv. supra, p. 90.
have not enough time to read.¹ And when al-Māzīnī died, leaving his family destitute, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn clamoured that his children should be educated free, and that his widow be given a pension out of public funds.² Shortly afterwards, he became Minister of Education and prevailed upon the Council of Ministers to give effect to his suggestion, the pension being fixed at L.E.30 a month.³ He has also pronounced himself in favour of a proposed law to protect copyright.⁴

Even more admirable, because at the same time purposeful, sustained, far-sighted, and far-reaching, have been Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's efforts to feed the main streams of Egypt's new culture - the Western and the Arab streams - almost at the source.

He once deplored that the policy of most publishers depended on "neglecting the writer and the reader, sacrificing them for the sake of excessive, sinful additions to the publisher's capital".⁵ When he found himself at the head of a publishing concern, al-Kātīb al-Miṣrī, he determined to serve less selfish ends. He launched a magazine for which he promised that it would be guided by severe artistic standards to the exclusion of light reading and facile writing, and also that it would be guided by these artistic standards alone, favouring no one foreign culture over another and no one school of writers over another.⁶ He also published a number of

(1) B.B.C. broadcast, reported in ar-Risālah, XVIII, 874 (3 April 1950), pp. 389-390.
(3) Ar-Risālah, XVIII, 874 (3 April 1950), p. 389.
(4) "Ḥuqūq ul-Mu'allifīn," al-Aḥrām, 22 April 1949.
(5) Fadīth al-ʿArbiʿa', III, p. 239.
books, mainly translations, on the principle that there are certain world masterpieces with which Arabic must be enriched, even if the public is not prepared to receive them; side by side with these he published other works, more ephemeral and more popular, in order to retain the public's good will and provide the funds needed to finance the more disinterested ventures. It is in line with this that, as Minister of Education, he has ordered the translation and publication of Shakespeare's works at the Government's expense.\(^2\)

The same purpose is, of course, apparent in Tahā Ḥusayn's own translations. In 1920, feeling that it was "unforgiveable that we should live in this century, demanding the same political and scientific independence as is enjoyed by European nations, but remaining dependent upon them for all that feeds mind and feelings - science and philosophy, literature and fine art", he deemed it his duty to lead the public to the very source of modern European life by acquainting it with Greek life.\(^3\) He did not pretend that his translations would do justice to the originals, but intended that they should give some idea of Greek attainments to those who read only Arabic, and entice others to study Greek culture at its sources.\(^4\)

Of the many aspects of Greek genius which Tahā Husayn wished to present to the public, drama seemed to be the one most likely to

\(^{1}\) Appendix I.

\(^{2}\) Interview.

\(^{3}\) Suhuf Muqhtārah min ash-Shīr it-Tammīlī 'ind al-Yūnān, pp. 9-11.

\(^{4}\) Ibid., p. 50.
prove immediately attractive, and Tāhā Ḥusayn decided to begin with it. He planned first to make a study of the rise of drama in Greece, then to deal with each leading dramatist in turn in a biographical sketch followed by prose translations of the highlights in each of his plays, the action between every two selected passages from the same play being very briefly summarised. This was to have extended over three volumes, two devoted to tragedy and one to comedy,¹ but only one volume has appeared, covering the works of Aeschylus and three of Sophocles' tragedies, Ajax, Antigone, and Electra. Much later, Tāhā Ḥusayn published Min al-Adab it-Tamthīlī 'l-Yūnānī, devoted entirely to Sophocles, but it added only Oedipus Rex to the three already in Suhuf Mukhtārah. In fact, after 1921 when he translated the Constitution of Athens with the same lofty purpose of educating the public in fundamentals, Tāhā Ḥusayn translated no more books from the Greek, although it will be noticed that he retained his interest in Greek dramatic themes.

His next important translation, Le Bon's Psychologie de l'Éducation, was chosen for him by al-Hilāl, and Tāhā Ḥusayn seems to be rationalising somewhat speciously when he claims in introducing it that it also is intended to serve the cause of the Renaissance by enabling the public to deduce what evils beset Egyptian education and what the essential principles of a good education are. The book is not without positive values, but the larger part of it is an immoderate attack on the French system of education, and with this attack Tāhā Ḥusayn was clearly out of sympathy. Indeed, since he

(1) Suhuf Mukhtārah, p. 11.
was already taking liberties with the text by omitting most of the supporting evidence and many of the illustrations quoted by the author, and by adding his own opinions in footnotes, Tāhā Ḥusayn might have taken Le Bon's advice that precept should be related to experience and drawn relevant illustrations from conditions in Egypt.

All of Tāhā Ḥusayn's remaining translations are derived from French belles lettres. In the twenties, in the course of a series of articles designed to expose the antiquarianism of contemporary Egyptian poets, Tāhā Ḥusayn translated into prose some of the short lyric pieces of Baudelaire and Sully Prudhomme in order to demonstrate how European poets "feel, how they express their feelings, and how they bridge the gap between their personal taste and their readers' taste". Then he pursued Greek themes in French literature by translating Racine's Andromaque in 1935, and Gide's Oedipe and Thésée in 1946. Finally in 1947 he published his translation of Voltaire's Zadig as the August number of the Al-Kātib ul-Miṣrī magazine; he presented it as one of Voltaire's not only eternal, but eternally young, masterpieces, and particularly one of several dealing with the East and composed after Voltaire had read the Arabian Nights; he contended that it made light but not unprofitable reading, for it dealt with the problem of Predestination and led to the conclusion that although Man's reason cannot comprehend God's will, the individual's wisest course is to do his best according to his lights; but he also clearly intended it to be a form of criticism of contemporary Egypt, for he said that the French

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(1) Ḥāfīz wa Shawqī, p. 45.
appreciated the original because they recognised Paris in the Babylon it portrayed, and "because of this I believe that Arab readers will find in reading this story what will fulfil their need of criticising human life from its political, economic, and social aspects";¹ he may even have seen a reflection of his own experience in the misadventures of the virtuous Babylonian whose good deeds in a corrupt society almost led him to disaster before he was ultimately rewarded.

In his choice of translations, therefore, Tāhā Ḥusayn has almost always vindicated his intention of filling lacunae in Arabic literature, although he has become somewhat less Olympian than he was in 1920, concerning himself more and more with modern literature and with what is of immediate relevance to Egypt.

In their execution also, these translations show a relative change from duty-conscious exactitude to confidence and ease. Tāhā Ḥusayn criticised Ahmad Luṭfī 's-Sayyid because his translation of Aristotle was made via the French,² and his own Greek translations are from the original, although he admits that he made use of French translations to check doubtful passages.³ All his early translations, in fact, including those of the twenties and thirties, show an ever-present concern for accuracy. But he was not unaware that literary translation does not consist simply of substituting the words of one language for those of another. A translator, he said, must first reproduce within himself the author's experience and be

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¹ Zadīj aw il-Qadā', pp. 361-364.
² Hadīth ul-Arbīʿā', III, p. 63.
³ Interview.
moved by his subject in the same way as was the author; he must then express this experience in all its details and in the words most appropriate to it, i.e. he must translate not only the ideas, but the whole personality of the original writer. This is not easy, for Arabic has not the pliability of modern European languages, and its readers are not familiar with certain images common to Europeans; but the solution is precisely to persevere in translation until both suppleness and familiarity with Western images are achieved. Taha Husayn's efforts in this direction are entirely laudable, and sometimes notably successful. His translations from Baudelaire and Prudhomme convey fine nuances with accuracy and smoothness, and his experimentation with changes of tenses heightens the evocative quality of the messenger's account of the battle of Salamis in The Persians.

The difficulties with which he had to contend, however, were not easily circumvented. When, for example, the chorus of the Suppliant Maidens, speaking of the plight of Procris pursued by the vengeful Tereus, tenderly sing:

Haply some bird-diviner in the vale
Of Argolis, perceiving our sad plaint,
Shall think he hears the pity-moving wail
Of Tereus' wife, mourning without restraint,
The hawk-pursued, despairing nightingale,

a delicate touch is lost when the bird-diviner is translated simply

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(1) Introduction of az-Zayyat's translation of Werther.
(2) Hāfīz wa Shawqī, pp. 45-46.
(3) Suhuf Mukhtārah, p. 73.
(4) Aeschylus, The Seven Plays, tr. by L. Campbell, p. 5.
as a sooth-sayer, a kāhin.¹ Sometimes, indeed, there are avoidable gaucheries, for when in *Antigone* the chorus sings of Man's domestication of animals, Tāhā Ḥusayn chooses the word sawābiq, emphasising speed rather than strength, to indicate horses tamed and put to the plough.² He was also often ill at ease in his early translations when he had to represent turbulent emotion, and the agitation of the Suppliant Maidens is scarcely reflected in his somewhat declamatory translation of the opening chorus,³ or in the matter-of-fact words in which Cassandra is made to compare her fate with Philomela's.⁴ He had acquired greater mastery by the time he translated *Andromaque*, and Hermione's reproaches to Pyrrhus (IV, v) have the same fire in the translation as in the original;⁵ but Tāhā Ḥusayn still tended to substitute assertions for exclamations, and Hermione's, "Ah! je l'ai trop aimé pour ne le point haïr," (II, i) becomes, in Tāhā Ḥusayn's translation, a logically developed statement: "Ah! I have loved him to excess, so that now I can only hate him."⁶

The later translations, however, are marked by much greater freedom and confidence. From his precept that one should translate "not only the ideas, but the whole personality of the original

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(1) *Suḥuf Mukhtārah*, p. 62.
(4) *Ibid.*, p. 120.
(5) *Andrōmēk*, p. 61.
writer", Táhá Ḥusayn apparently excludes Gide's blunt references to sex, and in his translation of Thésée constantly resorts to circumlocutions or euphemisms; when, for example, Theseus says of Ariadne: "...son quant-à-soi me parut d'accès si facile que je ne puis croire que j'en fusse le pionnier," Táhá Ḥusayn translates: "It seemed to me that she surrendered so easily that I cannot believe I was the first to please her."\(^1\) Besides, he breaks up and recasts French sentences to avoid multiple subordination, which is always awkward in Arabic, and he even indulges a taste for synonyms in defiance of the text; for instance, Gide's "la terreur s'épandait sur la religion, au point que l'héroïsme souvent semblait impie", becomes, in Táhá Ḥusayn's translation, "Religion was filled with fear, so that people saw in heroism a sin and an abomination."\(^2\)

It must be recorded that these translations, especially the later ones, are not free from error. Surprisingly - for Táhá Ḥusayn speaks French fluently and with only a slight foreign accent in the nasal consonants - some of these errors are indubitably misunderstandings of simple French words or constructions. When Gide describes Minos as holding "une fleur trilobée, semblable à celle de ses colliers et semblablement en or", Táhá Ḥusayn translates "semblablement" not as "similarly" but as "seemingly".\(^3\) Again, when Andromaque addresses the walls of Troy (I, iii) saying: "Sacrés murs, que n'a pu conserver mon Hector," Táhá Ḥusayn translates "Sacred

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(1) Thésée: Gide, p. 48; Táhá Ḥusayn, p. 226.
(2) Gide, p. 16; Táhá Ḥusayn, p. 190.
(3) Gide, pp. 24-25; Táhá Ḥusayn, p. 200.
walls, which have failed to protect Hector". ¹ And when Pyrrhus says
of Astyanax:

La Grèce a-t-elle encor quelque droit sur sa vie?
Et, seul de tous les Grecs, ne m'est-il pas permis
D'ordonner d'un captif que le sort m'a soumis?

(I, ii) Tāhā Ḥusayn translates the second line as "Am I, alone among
the Greeks, forbidden to decide..."² instead of "Am I not, alone
among the Greeks, entitled to decide..." as the context clearly
demands.

Some errors are clearly due to Tāhā Ḥusayn's blindness, and the
responsibility for them may be placed, partly at least, on his
secretary and reader. So it is that when Tāhā Ḥusayn spoke of
"Dyūnūzūs" his amanuensis heard "Dīnū Zīs", with the result that the
choris in Antigone is made to call upon the religion of Zeus instead
of on Dionysus to lead in merry-making;³ again, Oreste's tolerant
judgment on Hermione (III, ii) - "Je vous accuse aussi bien moins
que la fortune" - is changed into its opposite when an emphatic "la"
instead of a negative "lā" is placed before the verb.⁴ Conversely,
Gide wrote that Theseus had found Dedalus "incliné sur des tablettes,
des plans étalés," but what Tāhā Ḥusayn heard from his reader was
"des tablettes de plomb étalées", and he translated accordingly that
Dedalus was poring over tablets of lead spread out before him.⁵

(2) Ibid., pp. 7-8.
(3) Ṣuhūf Mukhtārah, p. 190.
(4) Andrūmāk, p. 36.
(5) Thésée: Gide, p. 51; Tāhā Ḥusayn, p. 229.
These errors are not always so trivial, for Tāhā Ḥusayn's increasing confidence makes him somewhat casual, and his practice of translating one sentence at a time\(^1\) causes him to lose sight of the context and fall into absurdities. So it is that Le Bon's fundamental idea that "toute l'éducation est l'art de faire passer le conscient dans l'inconscient, à quoi l'on arrive par la création de reflexes qu'engendre la répétition d'associations..." becomes nonsensical when Tāhā Ḥusayn, who has heard "qui engendrent" instead of "qu'engendre", translates: "Education is nothing but the art of transforming the conscious into the unconscious. This is achieved by creating a reflex out of which are born repeated associations of ideas."\(^2\) Similarly, when Dedalus says that in our mental labyrinths "tout aboutit à une impasse, à un 'pas plus avant' mystérieux", Tāhā Ḥusayn, oblivious of the punctuation, mistakes the negation "pas" for the word "step" and identifies the dead end with "a mysterious step further".\(^3\) Finally, in an argument for the unity of God, Gide's Icarus makes the point that the plurality of gods leads to discord, and he concludes: "qui dieux a, guerre a;" misled by the silent "x" in "dieux", Tāhā Ḥusayn translates: "Everything that is for God is for war!"\(^4\)

Also serving Tāhā Ḥusayn's purpose of enriching Arabic Literature are his innumerable articles on contemporary French plays, now

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(1) Interview.
(2) Le Bon, Psychologie de l'Éducation, p. 4; Tāhā Ḥusayn, p. 19.
(3) Thésée: Gide, p. 58; Tāhā Ḥusayn, p. 233.
collected in a volume called Qisas Tamthiliyyah, in two volumes called Lahazät, and in another two entitled Sawt Bāris. These are spoken of as critical articles, but the critical element in them is confined to a few sentences, and each article is really the paraphrase in narrative form of some play, and often embodies the translation of a short scene. A few similar articles, no longer dealing solely with drama, also appeared in al-Kātib ul-Miṣrī to prove Tāhā Husayn's continuity of purpose, and this purpose was explicitly stated to be directing the interest of Egyptians towards Western literature, and especially towards drama. At the same time, Tāhā Husayn was conscious of the need to maintain a balance between European and Arab influences, and his Wednesday articles in as-Siyāsah on Arabic literature were intended to counterbalance these articles on French plays, which used to appear in the same paper on a Sunday. Indeed paraphrases of earlier Arabic poems are not unnecessary to the Egyptian public, and Tāhā Husayn's articles on the Mu'allaqāt in Ḥadīth ul-Arbiʿā' are little more than that. In addition, his Sawt Abī 'l-ʿAlā' consists of selections from the Luzūmiyyāt, each followed by an admirable prose paraphrase which retains the meaning and the dignity of the original but brings the language nearer to modern usage and makes explicit the association of ideas between theme and succeeding theme, where all too often in traditional poetry the change is made without transition.

Finally, it was with the conscious purpose of introducing a new

(1) Qisas Tamthiliyyah, intro.

(2) Lahazät, I, intro.
genre into Arabic literature that Taha Husayn published some 150 epigrams under the title of Jannat ush-Shawk. His attempts, he said, would be based on Western models except that they would be directed against social evils instead of personal defects, would avoid the salacious, and would be in prose, not in verse.\(^1\) What he has produced is a number of comments on contemporary society, morality, politics, and arts such as a ready-witted and widely read person might interject in a conversation. In most cases, however, the most striking are those in which he shows a quotation from Juvenal or Martial, from the Qur'\(\text{\textae}n\) or from some Arab poet, to be applicable to present-day Egypt; but such entries are not always epigrammatic. As for those composed entirely by himself, few are entirely unexceptionable, for his style ill accommodates itself to the sustained need for terseness, and he feels the need—perhaps because his public has to be familiarised with much that is common in the West— to make his barbs very obvious; he therefore falls into heavy sarcasm:\(^2\)

The young disciple said to his aged master: "What would you say of a nation whose affairs are run on the basis of the ignorance and folly of youth, and the weakness and stupidity of the old?"

The aged master said to the young disciple: "That it is a rising nation advancing towards glory with rapid strides;"

or else he mares his irony by explaining it:\(^3\)

The young disciple said to the aged master: "Have I not been informed that the government has become more merciful to animals than Abu 'l-‘Ala'?'"

\(\text{\textae}\)

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(1) Jannat ush-Shawk, pp. 21-27.
(2) Ibid., p. 156.
(3) Ibid., p. 114.
The aged master said to his young disciple: "What are you saying? Has it forbidden that animals be slaughtered and eaten, and has it spared the milk of cows and she-goats, the eggs of chickens, and the honey of bees?"

The young disciple said to the aged master: "No, but it has given permission for a musical evening to be held in aid of those who are merciful to animals."

The aged master said to the young disciple: "If animals were given the choice, they would have chosen life and well-being rather than music and dancing."

Imperfect as Tāhā Husayn's critiques, translations, or epigrams may be, the effort and the intention behind them are entirely laudable. It will be noticed how complementary these efforts are. The Arab heritage is revived by the edition of old texts, by critical studies, and by paraphrases. Lacunae in it are filled by translations, paraphrases, and imitations of Western writing, ancient and modern. In this respect, his knowledge of French alone among modern European languages is a disadvantage: in what purports to be a study of the treatment of Greek themes in modern literature, for example, he appears to be ignorant of contributions made by English-speaking authors, such as Eugene O'Neill. But he is not unaware of this disadvantage; he professes great admiration for English literature, and it is his great sorrow that he cannot read Shakespeare in the original, although he has gone through his works three times in translation; he has also been urging Egypt to diversify its foreign contacts and has given a lead in the policy laid down for Al-Kātib ul-Miṣrī, to which magazine he himself contributed the summaries of two books by Richard Wright, an American negro author.

(1) Ḫūdib, Thīyūs, intro., pp. 20-22.
(2) Interview.
One can even see in Taha Husayn's efforts a desire to complement not only Egypt's culture, but his own talents: himself a successful orator and prose-writer, he has given little critical attention to these, but has turned mainly to poetry in the Arab past, and to drama in the West.

The purposefulness so revealed and the services rendered belie his own contention that the writer's will plays little or no part in literary production. And for once the discrepancy between the claim and the achievement is one to be applauded.
Chapter Fourteen

STORY-TELLING

Mere white truth in simple nakedness... Tennyson.

Tāhā Ḥusayn did not turn to narration until the close of the first stage of his public career, i.e. at the time that his devotion to purely liberal and formative values was giving ground to a sense of satisfaction at the rise of his own and of Egypt's fortunes. Although he has made distinctive contributions in this field as well, his stories long and short cannot be regarded as stepping stones laid down especially to speed the literary Renaissance on its way - indeed narration is the field in which Egypt least needed additional efforts. Rather, Tāhā Ḥusayn's stories represent simply his desire for self-expression and for emulation of the best, and then, increasingly, a concern with social conditions.

Of Tāhā Ḥusayn's autobiography, Professor Gibb said in 1929 that it "has a good claim to be regarded as the finest work of art yet produced in modern Egyptian literature",¹ and indeed the charm, the simple truth, the deep emotion of the first volume in particular have not been surpassed as yet. In it Tāhā Ḥusayn has succeeded in conjuring up his early childhood, with its growing consciousness of the world and of his infirmity, and his boyhood with all its lively interests, pleasures, and pains, in a succession of scenes feelingly evoked and faithfully represented. His trick of speaking of the child in the third person and of the narrator in the first - "Yes,

my daughter! I knew your father in that stage of his life. enables him to speak to his reader without projecting his adult personality into the experiences of his childhood. Each memory - and there are some humorous and delectable along with the painful ones - is given its appropriate emotional atmosphere; the deep silent sorrow that was his faithful companion then does not often intrude upon the narrative, but the closing pages, revealing Tāhā Ḥusayn's profound thankfulness that his own child is to be spared his experiences, cause the reader to review in his mind what he has read and invest it all with renewed pathos.

Dealing largely with his Azhar days and with a disappointment that still rankles in the writer's heart, the second volume has less of the charm and winning candour of the first, and the spontaneity of its closing pages, addressed to his son as those of the first were addressed to his daughter, is inevitably suspect. It remains nevertheless a moving story and a revealing personal and social document.

Unfortunately, Tāhā Ḥusayn does not think it likely that he will publish a third volume, for this would involve many living personalities; he would have to be "very angry with the Egyptian Government" before he did so, but that, he adds, may yet happen!²

Tāhā Ḥusayn was still drawing on his memories when he wrote the novel Adīb.³ This story of a gifted but unbalanced individual, avid for pleasures of the body and of the mind, and with a robust but

(1) Al-Ayyām, I, p. 141.
(2) Interview.
(3) See Appendix II.
strangely distorted moral sense, is strictly factual.\textsuperscript{1} One is tempted to see in the unfortunate hero a personification of an entire generation which, by its eager adoption of Western ways, subjected itself to great strains in domestic life and moral outlook; but of course such an interpretation would militate against Tāhā Husayn's own call for Westernisation. The novel is best regarded as a psychological study of intrinsic interest, studded with reminiscences of Tāhā Husayn's early life, and so truthful in its representation of circumstances and events that the reader can observe in it as he might observe in life itself some of the problems which beset modern Egypt. As a story, however, it suffers somewhat from the fact that it starts as an intimate and detailed account but becomes sketchy and hurried towards the end, and the ending is further weakened by the transparency of Tāhā Husayn's motive in mentioning his banishment from the University, a circumstance not only irrelevant to the story but diverting the limelight from the hero to the narrator.

Also factual in every detail except names is \textit{Shajarat ul-Bu's}.\textsuperscript{2} In this, Umm Khalid's prediction that her son's marriage to Nafīsa will "plant a tree of misery" seems to indicate that the novel is an indictment of pre-arranged marriages. But a much wider aim is revealed when Tāhā Husayn points out that what happened to Khalid's family is "what happened to many Egyptian families in that important epoch in Egypt's life, when the last century was drawing to a close

\begin{enumerate}
\item Interview.
\item Interview.
\end{enumerate}
and the present century was commencing, and Egyptian life began its transit from the old stage to the new—violently in some respects and gently in others. Indeed each chapter of the novel is a revealing glimpse into Egyptian provincial life. But the book is only a cumulation of such glimpses. A multitude of characters and incidents are introduced that do not further the plot. The character of certain protagonists alters unaccountably; the symptoms of Nafīṣah's madness range from those of suicidal mania to those of feeble-mindedness, as when she becomes unable to count beyond ten, and the same Salīm who suggested that Khālid and he take up employment with the government and supplement their salary with bribes is the one who decides it is wrong to send his sons to government schools and has compunctions about soliciting the young shaykh's patronage in securing a better job. Besides, so many of the misfortunes that befall Khālid's daughters are fortuitous that the Tree of Misery appears to be not a natural growth but the creation of a malignant deity, and what might have been an Egyptian Forsyte Saga becomes proof that the unselective and undisciplined relation of events is almost the antithesis of the novelist's art.

The only other Egyptian novel that Tāhā Ḥusayn has written, Mīʿāb ul-Karawān, has a basis of fact, but is mainly "poetry."
The title itself refers to the appearance of the mythical bird Karawān at emotional moments of Āminah's life, and to her impassioned addresses to it. Indeed the entire theme of the novel is poetic: in opposition to the tradition which holds that once family honour has been soiled by a woman's fault it must be washed in blood, Thāhā Ḥusayn exalts the victory of love over hatred, of forgiveness over revenge. To reach a dénouement so far removed from the realities of Egyptian life, he must create a most unusual heroine. Āminah is accordingly portrayed as an unusually sensitive girl with unusual opportunities for widening her horizons, for the Ma‘mūr's house she learns how to read both Arabic and French books; even then it is difficult to believe that the young and inexperienced girl should have conceived and pursued so subtle a revenge as hers was intended to be, but when this anomaly is accepted the gradual change of the nature of her interest in the engineer is found to be finely and convincingly represented. It is also "poetically" effective that Hanādī's misadventures should have started when her father committed a similar sin and when the community which later condemned her withdrew its protection from her; but it is no part of Oriental tradition that women should be ostracised because of a kinsman's excesses, and if it were it would become inexplicable that Nāṣir should have taken the women back to the village after Hanādī's disgrace. True representations of Egyptian life do occur, notably the episode of the head-watchman's murder while the women await Nāṣir's arrival, and the description of the household in which Āminah serves after she has left the Ma‘mūr's, but these are entirely alien to the story.
Delicate emotions and fine nuances are less incongruous when Tāhā Ḥusayn chooses not an Egyptian maid-servant but a Frenchwoman for his heroine, as he does in al-Ḥubb ud-Ḍā'ī'. This study of a reserved, sensitive woman whose world is shattered when she discovers that her husband betrays her is certainly not the most original or significant of Tāhā Ḥusayn's novels, but it is the most smoothly executed. There is one serious lapse from credibility when, having hastily read the letter which first reveals to her Maxime's infatuation with Florence, Line who is "broken-hearted" and "despairing" yet says of the letter:

> How great is my sorrow that I did not memorise it, or make of it a copy that I could scrutinise from time to time! It deserves to be kept and recorded, for it portrays weakness and strength at the same time, weakness and strength in their most extreme forms...

Perhaps also the need "to forget her son" before she commits suicide would have been more convincing if it had been left unspoken. In all other respects the characterisation is consistent and subtle, and the heroine commands the reader's sympathy.

Tāhā Ḥusayn's remaining two novels are concerned with the Shahrazād theme. It was through Tawfīq ul-Hakīm that Tāhā Ḥusayn first took an active interest in this theme, for it was over Tāhā Ḥusayn's review of Tawfīq's play on Shahrazād that the two writers quarrelled, and after their reconciliation they wrote al-Qaṣr ul-Mashūr together. This was conceived as a parlour game rather than a novel, for each of them wrote a chapter in turn placing the

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(1) p. 87.
(2) Interview.
other in some embarrassing situation from which he had to extricate himself before retaliating. The result is an amusing and light-hearted tale, although at his "trial" Tawfiq confesses the imperfection of his works and "Time" confirms Ţahâ Ḥusayn's judgment that he is still immature.

Al-Qaṣr ul-Maṣfūr also brings out in a jocular way the very different interpretations which the two writers place upon Shahrazād's character, for Tawfiq is shown constantly trying to escape her, whereas Ţahā always treat her with deference. For in his play Tawfiq ul-Hakim had represented her as the symbol of worldly interests and physical appetites, a somewhat coarse Guinevere who has base intrigues with her slaves and seeks to retain the favour of Shahryār by her blandishments, whereas he, not unlike King Arthur, is in search of ultimate knowledge, wishes to break away from worldly limitations, and eventually disappears into the unknown. With this misogynist's view, Ţahâ Ḥusayn could not agree. He saw in her on the one hand - as al-ʻAqqād had done before him\(^1\) - the woman who had softened a tyrant's violent inclinations, cured his heart of a disease, and taught him kindness, a woman whose soothing ministrations were not unlike those of another who rid her blind husband of the intention to live in self-conscious isolation from the world.

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(1) In a poem entitled "Shahrazād, aw Sihr ul-Ḥadīth," 1916:

عرفت طب داه شهيرة - راز فدعته وهو الشقي صفدة
وكان فؤاداً مغلق النفس كظيمًا لا يستسلم عينه -
فانتشى بالمقاس ناصع من القول ما يليه الحديداً
 وأزه أخلاق الناس من تبيض نحوس متسومة وسعوداً
فرى قلبها وكان فربساً ولم يعد بعد في القلب فربداً
He also chooses to see in her "nothing but the eternal spirit of the common people, seeking refuge in hope from pain, in dream from wakefulness, in sweet imagination from bitter reality".¹

It is this double interpretation that we find in his novelette, Ahlīn Shahrazād. In it, the story that Shahrazād tells represents the people's will and the story that Shahrazād lives represents woman's refining influence, and the two strands are neatly twined together at the end. Except for the fact that its political thesis is rather crude and obvious, it is an effective and distinctive story.

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn has also made distinctive use of material from past Arabic literature in ʿAlā Ḥāmīsh is-Sīrah. This is not a novel or a unified tale, but a collection of narratives connected in one way or another with the life of Muḥammad. The material is culled almost entirely from standard sources such as the Sīrah of Ibn Ḩīṣam, the Tabaqāt of Ibn Saʿd, and the Tārīkh of at-Ṭabarī, but Ṭāhā Ḥusayn has allowed himself much freedom of invention except in respect of the person of the prophet and of religious tenets.²

The credit for first using sacred or semi-sacred material in fiction must be given to Tawfīq ul-Ḥakīm, for his Ahl ul-Kahr (1933) was based on a Qur’anic story, and we know that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was much impressed by the play. Al-Ḥakīm's treatment of his material, however, was philosophic, whereas Ṭāhā Ḥusayn claims that the narratives included in ʿAlā Ḥāmīsh is-Sīrah were dictated for no other reason than that he was captivated by them, and adds that they

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(1) "Shahrazād", Al-Ahrām, 3 September 1948.
(2) ʿAlā Ḥāmīsh is-Sīrah, I, intro.
represent no polished effort and no attempt at scientific research.

This is not altogether true, for it has already been pointed out that the first story in the second volume, entitled Al-Faylasūf ul-Ḥā'ir, is made the vehicle for Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's contention that Islām is the religion of Reason. All the others, however, are dealt with frankly as delightful legends, and no attempt is made to give them a naturalistic interpretation or even to select out of several existing versions the one most acceptable to modern mentality. In the sense that it uses its material mainly for entertainment, Ḍalā Hamīsh is-Sīrah is in fact the most impious of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's books.

But it is also aesthetically the most satisfying of his narratives after al-Ayyām. In keeping with the heroic nature of the theme, the main protagonist in each story is simply and boldly characterised, the action is related with vigour, and the language is resonant and dignified. Besides, although the episodes are self-sufficient and sometimes mutually contradictory - Āminah is said in one context to have found her pregnancy painless,\(^1\) and in another to have complained of the unusual weight of her unborn child\(^2\) - the first two volumes show greater cohesion than some of the novels, for all the stories of the first volume focus on Muḥammad's birth, and all the stories of the second focus on his identification as the Prophet that the world stood in need of. This effect, however, is not sustained in the third volume, for it tells of what happened to certain persons after Islām had made its mark on them, so that the

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(1) v. I, p. 61.

(2) I, p. 180.
effect is one of dispersal, and some of the stories, such as those of Wābah or Muhayrīq, are not in the same heroic or fervid vein as the others.

The same formula is used in al-Waḍ d ul-Ḥaqq, which deals with the early martyrs of Islām, but here there is a moral to bring out. It is that Islām is the religion of social equality and the champion of the underprivileged. In antiquity, History had been an aristocrat, concerning itself only with the powerful; but Islām appeared, and then "History was forced to pay attention to the masses more than it did to the masters and the leaders". Accordingly, a number of early converts to Islām - mostly slaves or poor clients of the Quraysh - are introduced to the reader, and their stories all focus on the torture to which the Quraysh subject them. Emotionally, the climax is reached when they have proved the steadfastness of their faith. But to the social reformer it was important to show that they received their reward in this world, and the fortunes of those who survived their martyrdom is therefore related, the anti-climax being accentuated when it is shown that already under `Uthmān mankind was beginning to disregard the noble teaching it had received.

Out of this book, and with the approval of the religious authorities, Ibrāhīm ʿIzz ud-Dīn - brother of ʿAlī ud-Dīn Bey, a colleague of Tāhā ʿUṣayn's in the Cabinet - has made a film released in April 1951 under the title of Zuhūr ul-Islām.

Tāhā ʿUṣayn has also published a number of shorter narratives of

(1) Al-Waḍ d ul-Ḥaqq, pp. 15-17.
(2) Al-Ahrām, 4 August 1950.
various descriptions. Seven of these are appended to Al-Ḫubā ud-Dā'ī; they are mostly short stories such as abound in Western literature, fictional and integrated accounts of some love affair or other emotional experience. Although they appear commonplace to the Western reader, they are competently told. Other narratives occur side by side with essays, sketches, and journalistic articles in contributions to the Press and in collections intended to waken Egypt's social consciousness.

A few of these narratives are symbolistic; such is Al-Ǧhāniyāt,¹ which relates how "social justice" appeared first to a few and then simultaneously to the whole nation in the guise of fair maidens who spoke in riddles, puzzling Pasha and peasant alike to prove that they are all equal. Others recount examples of generosity or social solidarity as practised by early Muslims,² and point out a somewhat obvious moral for contemporaries. On the border of the narrative field are the sketches of human types,³ often identified with some loathsome animal, which Ẓāhīr Ḫusayn considers responsible for Egypt's evils; these sketches are often clever and convincing, although their unrelieved satire and their repetitiousness - half of the eighteen entries in Jannat ul-Ḫayawān, for example, deal with men who sacrifice friendship and principle to self-advancement - make them somewhat tiresome. By far the most effective are the short tales, palpably true, about the underprivileged in rural Egypt such

(1) Jannat ul-Ḫayawān, pp. 97-104.
(2) Al-Muṣaḏḏhabuna fī 'l-Arḍ, pp. 117-137.
(3) Most of Jannat ul-Ḫayawān, parts of Mīrāt uḏ-Dāmar il-Ḫadīth.
as Ţāhā Ḥusayn remembers them from his childhood days.¹ He often intrudes upon the story, introduces extraneous material, and makes it very plain that his purpose is to confute the "extremists of the Right" who would rather not interfere with the supposedly natural divisions of society.² Yet these intrusions are easily separable from the narrative itself, and the course of the events related is never diverted by the author's bias. In these photographic representations of a life which he intimately knew and accurately remembers, Ţāhā Ḥusayn is unsurpassed, and the reader readily assents when he says of one of them: "I can almost assert that I did not and could not choose to make this story the object of my communication, but that it was the story that chose me as the one through whom it would reach the readers."³

It is clear that Ţāhā Ḥusayn has some valuable assets as a story-teller. Not the least of these is his command of words. He also has to a marked degree the ability to recount his personal experiences with simplicity, truth, and communicative emotion. It need not be pointed out how much of his story-telling consists of reminiscences, and indeed the narrator in him is never very far from becoming a participant: when Adīb jokingly tells him to remove his shoes before entering his sanctum,⁴ he is reminded of a number of mosques which he used to enter barefoot, and of the courses which he

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¹ Al-Muḥaddithūn fī 'l-Ard, the first six entries.
² Ibid., pp. 57-62.
³ Ibid., p. 91.
⁴ Adīb, p. 19.
attended there; he writes long introductions\(^1\) or interrupts a story\(^2\) to state his opinion or even to explain his approach to story-telling; and even in stories intended to be impersonal, such as Ablām Shahrazād, he exclaims "Even if he (Šahryār) open his soul to us, we shall not know whether he is happy or not," or "How do you expect me to describe the indescribable," involuntarily revealing his consciousness both of himself and of his reader.\(^3\) Paradoxically, another virtue of his is the objectivity, the accuracy of his character studies and of his descriptions of the physical or social environment. Except in Du‘ā’ ul-Karawān, which does not profess to be factual, he does not project the thoughts, emotions, and reactions of a Westernised intellectual into rustic characters. The secret of this apparent objectivity is that he seldom creates, or even analyses; he brings individuals and even entire communities to life by cumulative description of their characteristics and activities, much as a television beam reproduces a picture by scanning it spot after spot. Of the many characters made memorable in al-Ayyām, consider 'Amm ul-Ḥājj 'Alī: \(^4\)

'Amū m ūl-Ḥājj 'Alī used to make as ostentatious a display of devoutness and piety as it is possible to make. He began with the expedition which he repeated in the last hours of every night, when he came out of his room clamorously praising God, beating the ground with his stick all the way to the mosque of Sayyidā 'l-Ḥusayn. There he recited a daybreak litany and joined in the dawn prayer, then he returned muttering and

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(1) Al-Mu‘addāhhabūn fī 'l-Ard, 8 out of the 17 pages of "Al-Mu‘tazilah" form such an introduction.
(2) "Al-Ḥubb ul-Yā’is," in al-Ḥubb uq-Dā’īt, p. 121.
(3) Raymond Francis, Taha Husseīn Romancier, pp. 159-162.
(4) II, pp. 46-47.
murmuring and tickling the ground with his stick, to rest awhile in his room. When it was time for the other prayers, he performed them in his room, with the door open, and he recited the Qur'ān and exalted God aloud so that everyone in the building should hear him. Then, when he was alone with his young friends, eating a meal or drinking tea or spending the evening in their company, none was so ready-witted, so amusing, so talkative, so pleasantly facetious as he, nor was anyone so critical of people's shortcomings, or so excessively slanderous. He knew no restraint in language and had no compunction about using untoward words; he did not hesitate to lend his active tongue and loud voice to the most abominable and most lewdly suggestive expressions, to those most indicative of the foulest ideas and most repulsive images.

There is a weakness as well as a strength in this, for although Tāhā Husayn adequately describes personalities, he seldom gives us the key to them, and almost never allows a character to reveal itself simply by its part in the action of the story. When they are not described by an outsider, they must perform feats of introspection; it is Line in al-Ḥubb ud-Ḍā'ī and Āminah in Du‘ā’ul-Karawān who tell us all about themselves. It is because of this that confidants appear so often in Tāhā Husayn's novels: Adīb writes long letters to Tāhā, Āminah addresses her most impassioned words to the Karawān, and Line confides in her diary. And it is by what they say of themselves rather than by the way they say it that these characters stand revealed, for they speak mostly with Tāhā Husayn's tongue. There are indeed exceptions to this, as in this delightful passage from al-Ayyām, where the characterisation is impeccable, and the flavour of the colloquial is deftly transferred to the classical language:¹

Now "Our Master" never discarded his shoes until it was absolutely necessary. He used to patch them on the right side and on the left and on the top and the bottom. Whenever one of his shoes needed patching he would call one of the boys of the school, and taking the shoe in his hand say to him, "You will go to the cobbler who lives near by and say to him, 'Our

(1) E.H. Paxton's translation, pp. 28-29.
Master says that this shoe needs a patch on the right side. Look, do you see? Here, where I put my finger. The cobbler will reply, 'Yes, I will patch it.' Then you will say to him, 'Our Master says that you must choose a strong, coarse, new piece of leather and that you must put it on neatly so that it is invisible or nearly so.' He will reply, 'Yes I will do that.' Then you will say to him, 'Our Master says that he is an old customer of yours, so please take that into account,' and whatever he says to you don't agree to pay more than a piastre. Now go and come back again in the twinkling of an eye."

But such passages stand out by their very rarity, and elsewhere Tāhā Ḫūsayn neglects even elementary tricks of characterisation, as when he interrupts the speech of an old woman to say that she mispronounced a certain letter, but makes no effort to transcribe the words as she pronounced them.¹

In fact, what direct speech there is in Tāhā Ḫūsayn's narratives is mostly monologue or expository dialogue, and the give-and-take of a sharp, lively exchange that carries the action forward is hard to find. He prefers to relate the action, and relate it as something remembered, not as an issue that is being decided in the reader's presence. In other words, his approach is not that of the dramatist but that of a story-teller conscious of his real relationship with the reader. This explains why in spite of his interest in the theatre, he has never written a play of his own.

Besides, his powers of invention are not great, especially where verisimilitude is intended. When he chooses to depart from the factual, his plot is either very simple, as in al-Ḥubb uq-Ḍā'ī, or it flounders, as in Duḥā' al-Karawān. Similarly, he can express

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¹ Shajarat ul-Bu's, p. 87, where Nasīm says:

_image data_
an emotion delicately and effectively so long as he confines himself to describing it or its outward manifestation. But when he attempts to represent it fancifully, his effects are gross, as when, for days on end after Hanādī's murder, Āminah sees a fountain of blood before her eyes. His symbolism also is elementary and commonplace, for he personifies social justice as a beautiful and enigmatic maiden, duty as a determined but understanding companion, wealth, arrogance, cruelty, authority, and mercy also as maidens of different descriptions, and he almost always has to specify what these symbols stand for.

Above all, he is an undisciplined writer. It has already been pointed out that he is impatient with "rules", and sometimes breaks into a story to assert his independence. At other times, he simply abandons the attempt to fill in details, as when Hanādī is told by Nafīsah to take heart in the midst of her troubles, for in the village is "the tomb of our Master So-and-so, who does wonders; there is also a woman called Such-and-such, and she has connections with a Jinn who also does wonders". And his novels suffer most from the fact that he cannot resist including extraneous material if it is intrinsically interesting, and cannot even bring himself to prune superfluous ramifications as in his Shajarat ul-Bū's. From such indiscipline he is saved only when the unity of the plot imposes

(3) Al-Mu'adhdhabuna fī 'l-Ard, pp. 11-15, p. 21.
(4) Duḥā' ul-Karawān, p. 48.
itself, as when it is essentially a character study, \(^1\) when the narrative is itself episodic, as in \(\text{\text{\text{\text{'Al\u00e1 H\u00e1mish is-S\u00e1rah}}}\)\), or when there is no need for a sustained effort, as in his shorter pieces.

Of Tāhā Ḥusayn's narratives, long or short, those with a French setting - for which he had many models - are unexceptionable, but not of outstanding importance. Those dealing with the Shahrazād and Islamic themes are somewhat original in conception and satisfactory in execution. The others, dealing with Egyptian life, are successful and significant in the measure that they are factual and that they escape the need for orderly and selective planning.

\(^{(1)}\) Adīb and al-Ḥubb ud-Dā'ī\(^c\).
Instruction increases inborn worth, and right discipline strengthens the heart. —HORACE.

The most palpable result of Tāhā Ḥusayn’s studies in France is his thesis on Ibn Khaldūn, a book which for its scholarly qualities as well as for its subject matter must stand apart from all the others which Tāhā Ḥusayn has since published.

The bulk of it is a summary of the Prolegomena. In this, Tāhā Ḥusayn retained Ibn Khaldūn’s general framework, but regrouped details in order to present them in a more lucid and more economic form. Here and there he interjected a brief but precise and pertinent comment, showing how this or that generalisation explains or fails to explain some phase of history unknown to Ibn Khaldūn, and how it agrees with or differs from the opinion of some other thinker on the subject—usually Montesquieu or Aristotle.

This summary was preceded by an overall study, equally succinct and precisely worded, of which the main purpose was to determine the nature of Ibn Khaldūn’s innovation in intellectual pursuits. According to Tāhā Ḥusayn, Ibn Khaldūn was in search of a dependable method of checking reportedly historical events. He recognised a number of factors, reducible to three, which might lead a historian into error: the first is partisanship; the second is gullibility, against which Traditionists early developed the technique of at-tajrīḥ wa ’t-ta’dil, based on the character of the narrator and the amount of corroboration from other sources; the third is
ignorance of what is intrinsically possible or impossible in society, and it is this ignorance that Ibn Khaldūn tried to remedy.

He formulated three laws for the guidance of historians: the law of cause and effect, which he was first to apply to History, to the exclusion of chance but not of superhuman forces; the law of similarity, according to which Man's present behaviour may be measured by his past; and finally the law of dissimilarity, which has nothing to do with metaphysics or religion but is entirely empirical, and records the fact that societies differ in accordance with external factors, such as the climactic and topographical environment, and internal factors, such as the stage of economic development reached and the kind of government in power. These factors are always operating in conjunction, so that Society should be studied as a unified whole. In making such a study, Ibn Khaldūn was consciously creating a new branch of knowledge.¹

What he did create, however, was not a sound historian's technique, for the examination of ancient remains, which is the foundation of modern historical research, did not occur to him, nor did he have anything to say about the form in which events, once ascertained, are to be presented. That he tried to consider events in the light of some philosophy is an excursion outside the field of History.²

He was not, as von Kremer called him, a Kulturhistoriker; true, he made a study of some of the problems of civilisation, but only in support of certain views of his.

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(1) Falsafat Ubn Khaldūn al-Ijtimāʿiyyah, pp. 30-51.
(2) Ibid., pp. 47-48, 30-35.
He was not a sociologist either, although Gumplowicz and Ferreiro considered him so. The only kind of society he dealt with was the organised State, and he did not seem to realise that his study might apply to other groups as well. His conception of Society was naive, for he did not differentiate between the behaviour of a group and that of an individual. He considered his study merely ancillary to History, and of no intrinsic value; in fact, he did not make the essential distinction between the Historian, whose duty is to discover and expound past events, and the Sociologist, who must observe and understand Society independently of time. Finally, although his empirical approach was an improvement on that of contemporary thinkers, he did not sufficiently free himself from the practice of his time to be called truly scientific - he sometimes made hasty generalisations from incomplete information, and sometimes even abandoned the empirical for the metaphysical field, as when he compared human knowledge with the knowledge of angels.¹

Severely - for he conceded that most of Ibn Khaldūn's observations are true of phenomena in Islamic history, and that some of them are applicable to all times and places - Ṭāhā Ḥusayn concluded that Ibn Khaldūn's work was not objective enough to be called scientific, but was - like Montesquieu's - a Social Philosophy.²

Such a conclusion is of course dependent on one's definition of terms. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's line of demarcation between sociology and social philosophy seems to be that the sociologist must have a

(1) Ibid., pp. 53-65.
(2) pp. 62, 65.
comprehensive, integrated, and purely scientific (which in turn means empirical), outlook, whereas the social philosopher need only have logical views relevant to some aspect of Society. Others may hold that if Ibn Khaldūn's explanations fitted the evidence known to him, they may well be called scientific; it may also be argued that Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's criterion of comprehensiveness in Sociology is somewhat anachronistic. But there can be no question that Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's position is clear-cut and the steps by which he reached it precise, consistent, and honest.

It cannot escape notice, however, that when Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn speaks of Ibn Khaldūn's lapses from scientific standards, he does not give prominence to religious prejudices. The reason is that Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn early and summarily decided that Ibn Khaldūn was a self-seeking materialist whose religious experiences consisted solely of the performance of rites.¹ He was certainly not uninfluenced by Islamic ways of thinking, leaned heavily on al-Māwardi and others when he dealt with Islamic institutions,² and may even have conceived the Prolegomena as fulfilling for History the function that the Islamic sciences of Uṣūl un-Nahw and Uṣūl ul-Fiqh perform for grammar and jurisprudence.³ But the master that he served was philosophy, and he could not have been sincere when he ultimately proclaimed the superiority of religion.⁴ That his views are never openly at variance with Islamic law is due simply to the fact that

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¹ pp. 24-25.
² pp. 127-128.
³ pp. 33-34.
⁴ pp. 158-160.
he used every possible ruse to avoid condemnation by religious thinkers.¹ This may be demonstrable, but considering Ibn Khaldūn's high standing as a Mālikī jurist, it needs to be less casually documented.

The book closes with the gratuitous assertion that if the East did not build on the foundations laid down by Ibn Khaldūn, it was because of the supremacy of the Turks, who reduced Islamic civilisation to dust.² It does not invalidate the thesis, but is the more deplorable as it could easily have been omitted.

In spite of this blot, La Philosophie Sociale d'Ibn Khaldoun is, by virtue of its conciseness, precision, orderliness, and erudition, the best demonstration of Tāhā Ḥusayn's scholarly ability.

For some years after his return to Egypt Tāhā Ḥusayn was Professor of Ancient History, and to one of the Committees of the Congress of Historians held at Bruxelles in 1923 he read a paper claiming to have established the text of a treaty of alliance between al-Malik ul-Ashraf Khalīl Ubūn Qalāwūn and the King of Aragon, concluded in 1292 A.D.; a corrupt version of it was included in Subḥ ul-ʿāshrāf, and Tāhā Ḥusayn had checked it against the Latin version.³

But even then, Tāhā Ḥusayn's heart was really in belles-lettres, and for years after his professorship of History had come to an end, his production was devoted entirely to them and to education, except

(1) p. 128.
(2) pp. 164-165.
(3) Min BaʿĪd, pp. 77-80.
for an occasional comment on democracy, on imperialism, or on world events.

The agitation for social reform in which he has been engaged in recent years cannot come within any definition of social study. One needs to record, however, that one form of propaganda adopted by Tāhā Husayn has been the short "historical study" designed to give an object-lesson to contemporaries. An outstanding example of this is a comparison between the Slaves' Rebellion under Spartacus, and the revolt of the Zanj under Muḥammad Ubn ʿAbd Illāh. The sharp contrast that is made between the rebel leaders, relying only on the justice of their cause, and their opponents and eventual victors, disposing of unlimited wealth and power, makes spirited reading. But the author's approach is not that of the disinterested historian. He claims that the Zanj revolt is but one example of a demand for social justice springing from within Islām, and points out that in such examples is a source of literary inspiration for contemporaries, but he also extends the reach of such possible inspiration by remarking that although individual slavery may have disappeared, the enslavement of one people by another or of one social class by another has not.

Something of the same temper can be detected in ʿUthmān. This is the first of two volumes purporting to be a study of the first great schism in Islām. Dictated within the space of two months, it suffers both from the author's precipitation and from his determination to find in it a political moral.

(1) Rūḥ ut-Tarbiyah, pp. 112, 132-133.
The book starts with an analysis of the form of government instituted by Muḥammad and perpetuated by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. This is said to have been unlike any other known to History, and to have rested on a dual foundation: religion and aristocracy. By religion is meant no more than the prevalence of justice in the inter-relationships of the nation, the means whereby it was to be attained being left to human devising. And by aristocracy was originally meant the aristocracy of service to the cause of Islām, so that when Muḥammad died and it was decided that a successor should be chosen from the Quraysh, what was intended was to favour the muhājirūn, the earliest converts to Islām; but this was later misinterpreted, and led to the creation of an aristocracy of birth.

The weakness of this form of government was that there was no guarantee that religious zeal and wisdom would be perpetuated in the community or even in the aristocracy or the ruler himself. Indeed the growth of the Empire was making it possible for the aristocracy to amass immense wealth, and only the wisdom and sternness of ʿUmar restrained them. A constitution should have been framed, but the Arabs were too busy and too inexperienced in administration to do so then.¹

ʿUthmān's career is then reviewed, both before and after he became Caliph. He is shown to have been mostly well-intentioned but weak, to have favoured the Quraysh and particularly his kinsmen in the distribution of high positions and of public moneys, to have ill-used some respected men in the community, and above all to have

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(1) pp. 10-49.
followed an unfortunate agrarian policy: in order to attract colonists back to the Hijāz, he allowed those who had acquired land as booty in the provinces to sell it and buy estate in Arabia instead. This enabled the aristocracy to exploit and expand its wealth, and soon three classes appeared: the rich, themselves divided by conflicting interests; the mass of the Arabs, among whom the rich recruited followers; and the slaves brought in from conquered territories, who as yet had no say in political matters, but were soon to play an important role. It was in fact among the rich, and specifically among the munājirūn, that opposition first appeared.

Those who took an open and active part in opposition are then introduced, each in turn, and something is said of the attitude taken by some of the most important companions of the Prophet, but nothing is said of ‘Ā’ishah, ‘Amr Ubn ul-‘Ās, or ‘Abd Ullāh Ibn Saba’, for they were most active after ‘Uthmān’s death, and are therefore to be dealt with in the second volume.

An account is then given of ‘Uthmān’s death, and an attempt is made to apportion responsibility. The area of disagreement is narrowed down to internal administration, and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn accepts the view that ‘Uthmān did not fulfil the contract he had made with his people to follow the example of his predecessors. But he can scarcely be held accountable. Generous, trusting, and already in

(1) pp. 45-125.
(2) p. 168.
(3) pp. 126-168.
his declining years when he took up the charge, he had arrogant and ambitious kinsmen who abused his kindness. Some of the other companions of the Prophet were also moved to oppose him out of greed and envy. But above all, the rapid expansion of the Empire had created strains which no one could be expected to relieve. True, 'Umar had been able to deal with such strains, but 'Umar was unique.

Of course, the malcontents had no right to kill him. They should first have ascertained whether they had the support of the people, and if they had they should have chosen representatives from the several provinces. These representatives would have discussed grievances with 'Uthmān, and then decided whether to support him or appoint another Caliph who would then have brought him to judgment.¹

One looks in vain in this book for a quality worthy of a former Professor of History.

As a History, not only has it little originality except in bringing to light 'Uthmān's agrarian policy, but it uncritically reports dreams and miracles, and accepts as authentic some of the anecdotes related of 'Umar on no other ground than that "they agree with 'Umar's life and character and inclinations".² Besides, until the second volume has appeared and the role of 'Alī, 'Ā'ishah, and others has been clarified, the picture presented of 'Uthmān's rule remains hopelessly distorted.

If it were a semi-historic narrative, the inclusion of anecdotes and miraculous accounts might be justified, but it would lack

(1) pp. 169-222.
vivacity and continuity, for opposition to 'Uthmān, which is said to have been popular, is related in terms of a few individuals, each in his turn.

As an essay on political methods, it is disingenuous in asserting that Islam remained aloof of the direction of human affairs, and grotesquely anachronistic in suggesting a procedure of impeachment where no tradition or machinery of representative government existed.

From the scholarly point of view, the contrast between this late work and the thesis on Ibn Ḥalladūn is complete.
PART FOUR

THE CRAFTSMAN
Chapter Sixteen

Form and Style.

Literature flourishes best when it is half a trade and half an art

RALPH INGE.

Ṭāḥā Husayn's method of composition is the "involuntary" one which he sets up as the prototype of all literary creation: his secretary reads a great deal to him - Arabic, French, and even a few English works. Ideas then stir in him, take shape, become an urge to dictate, and he does so. He never goes back on what he has said, and does not allow a single page to be read back to him.

Works which demand research, however are prepared in the standard fashion, with the use of bibliography and note-cards, every detail being attended to by Ṭāḥā Husayn himself.

Accordingly, most of Ṭāḥā Husayn's longer original works show an underlying tendency to be discursive and personal, curbed in the most purposeful, and particularly the early, ones. His self-assertiveness also makes them invariably unequivocal, and often incautious.

His two theses, written under a measure of outside discipline, show stricter reasoning, better integration, and more economic expression than all his other full-length books. Of his critical works other than Ṭajdīḍ Dhikra Abī 'l-ʿAlāʾ, Fī ʿash- Shiʿr il-Jāhilī and its expanded reprint are logically developed, but the polemic

(1) Interview.
temper in them encroaches on the scholarly. As for Ma' al-Mutanabbi, it admittedly departed from its original plan, and Ma` Abî 'l-`Aî fî Sijinîh is planless.

Mustaqbal uth-Thaqîfah fî Mi`r succeeds in maintaining order among a multitude of ideas and opinions. The bulk of it, of course, is a straightforward statement of the author’s views, and that part of it which is argumentative is not without specious features.

Tâhâ Husayn’s one philosophic work, Qâdat ul-Fikr, has the smoothness and continuity that come of over-simplifying the issue between East and West, but like all over-simplified works it is distorted and has lacunae; it sums up, for example, the philosophies of Socrates and Plato, but not that of Aristotle on the pretext that it cannot be summarised.

And the latest of Tâhâ Husayn’s serious works, ‘Uthmân, is farthest from unity, completeness, or consistency.

Even the narratives, as has already been demonstrated, show something of this fundamental indiscipline.

Not unnaturally, Tâhâ Husayn has devoted the greater part of his energies as a writer to the composition of short pieces. Some of these are journalistic comments on matters of topical interest, but the majority are of more lasting quality.

The most numerous are the critical essays, of which there are several collections: Hadîth ul-Arbî‘a (in three volumes), Fusûl fî ‘l-Adab wa ‘n-Naqd, and Hâfiz wa Shawqi; closely allied to them are Min Hadîth ish-Shi‘r wa ‘n-Mathr, consisting of reports of some of Tâhâ Husayn’s lectures, and his many paraphrases.

His epigrams deserve separate mention, but are not unrelated to the variety of short pieces intended to rouse the moral and social
conscience of Egypt. Of these there are several loose collections. Al-Mu'adhdhibUna fI 'l-Ard consists mainly of narratives, Jannat ul-Hayawân mainly of sketches, and Mir7ât uq-Damûr il-Hadîth mainly of essays slightly dramatised as letters of reproach or exhortation to imaginary correspondents, some in imitation of al-Jâhiq. But there are also narratives in Jannat ul-Hayawân, sketches in Mir7ât uq-Damûr il-Hadîth, and direct comments on the plight of underpaid State officials in all.

Finally, there are what may be called holiday diaries, such as Min Ba'Id, Fî 's-Sayf, and Rihlat ur-Rabî', consisting of a hotchpotch of personal experiences and reminiscences, reactions to news, essays on religion and on the clergy, observations on the countries visited often leading to comparisons with Egypt, and even sermonettes in letter-form.

The outcome of a press-ridden literature, these short pieces are as divergent in quality as they vary in form. When reprinted in book form, they are carelessly brought together, articles being omitted out of a series, others being included in more than one collection, and comments on the uncharitableness of a religious institution being included among critical essays. Besides, even within their narrow compass these pieces may lack balance, for Tâhâ Husayn is fond of introducing a specific subject with generalisations, and these introductions tend to be lengthy. Even unity may be lacking: musings on moral courage in the course of a trip from Marseille to Paris1 are preceded by a description, extending over

(1) Rihlat ur-Rabî', pp. 46-60.
more than two pages, of the difficulties encountered in securing seats on the train; and a titleless entry in the same collection is equally divided between praise of the intellectual vitality of Parisians and a tribute to Tāhā Ḥusayn's secretary. Inevitably also, when one undertakes to contribute a regular column or a series of articles to the Press, there are times when one has nothing better to say than that books are more reliable friends than humans or that nature manifests its indifference to man in the vagaries of the weather.

But it is only research students that have to read every word published by a particular writer. In Tāhā Ḥusayn's abundant production, the general public finds much that is varied, provoking, stimulating to the emotions and stylistically satisfying.

Tāhā Ḥusayn's style deserves particular attention both because wording has long been an important consideration in Arabic literature - it was in fact one of the liveliest issues between Modernists and Conservatives - and because it is one the most distinctive features of Ḥusayn's work.

Because of his blindness, his descriptive powers inevitably attract attention. He is in fact very skilful at building up a picture by the accumulation of sensory details. Of course, these details are often tactile, auditory, or olfactory; of the way between the Azhar and his lodgings he says:

(1) pp. 68-75.
When he came back from the Azhar he turned to the right through a gateway which was open during the daytime and shut at night. Once through it, he became aware of a gentle heat playing on his right cheek, and a fine smoke teasing his nostrils; while on the left he heard an odd gurgling sound which at once puzzled and delighted him. Then one day he gathered from a chance remark that it came from the bubbling of a narghile smoked by tradesmen of the district. He walked straight on for a few steps before crossing a damp, roofed-in space in which it was impossible to stand firmly because of the slopes thrown there by the cafe proprietor. Then he came into an open passage-way; but this was narrow and filthy and full of strange, elusive smells. He hurried along nervously at his companion's side, breathing the nauseous smells, and half-deafened by the medley of sounds that came from all sides at once... to meet in mid-air, where they seemed to unite above the boy's head, layer upon layer, into a single fine mist... At a certain point on the road he caught the confused sound of conversation through a half-open door on the left; then he knew that a pace or two further on he must turn to the left up a staircase which would bring him to his lodging.

He does not, however, shy away from visual descriptions, and the picture Taha Husayn draws of his village schoolmaster, fat and almost blind, walking along with a pupil on either side, his arms over their shoulders, singing with abandon, his head waggling from side to side and his fingers keeping time on his companions' chests, is as vivid as it can be made; clearly, the merciless tongues of his school-mates supplied him with abundant material for it. Elsewhere, he is less specific, as when he speaks of the gathering of rain clouds which "have veiled the sun with veils that cannot be penetrated by eyesight, then thrown between us and the hills and valleys and

(1) Al-Ayyam I, pp. 29-30.
plains and trees and flowers curtains which make it impossible to
tell what lies behind them." His character sketches, of course,
abound with composite pictures, and the boldness of the attempt must
be admired; but here the association of feature with trait tends to
be conventional and gross, and the impression aimed at is stated
rather than conveyed:

Look into his huge, morose face and you will see on
his thick lips a smile which indicates silliness and
stupidity rather than penetration and intelligence... you will see a narrow bulging forehead... and you will
see closed eyes as though he was in a deep sleep; then
if he should wish to look at something or at somebody
before him, he lifts wrinkled eye-lids, and lifts them
with effort, to reveal beneath them small, lifeless eyes,
which bespeak not wakefulness and energy and intelligence,
but sleep and apathy and great stupidity.

With equal confidence Tāhā Ḥusayn makes figurative use of con-
crete images, and his comparisons, especially when short, are usually
apposite. Occasionally, one may be found that is in doubtful taste,
as when - the plague having broken out in a city - its inhabitants
are said to be "racing one another to the grave." More often than
not the simile is adequate or even striking: ambitious Arab youths
who were debarred from holding office under 'Uthmān were "like tethered
horses biting on the bit, their fieriness and energy almost driving
them out of their skins," and the lingering impression made by the
Athenian ruins on the souls of Tāhā Ḥusayn's travel companions is
"like pieces of silk that have caught in thorns, and that need to be
manipulated deftly and delicately if they are to be disengaged without
damage."

(1) "At-Tabī‘at us-Sākhirah," Al-Ahrām, 17 September 1948.
(2) Jannat ul-Hayawān, pp.75-76.
(3) Ūdīb, Thīsyūs, intro., p.8.
(4) Al-Wa'ad ul-Haqq, p.74.
He may even cleverly elaborate a comparison. Of Bashshār, whose improvisations are said to have been facile but poor, he says:

It is as though his mind was like soft earth filled with water like a sponge: it is enough to touch it for water to ooze out of it; but this water was not always clear, it was not without sourness and brackishness, sometimes even not without stench.

But already in the comparison of Bashshār's mind with the earth and of the earth with a sponge we perceive one of Tāhā Ḥusayn's most frequent failings: the mixed image. Thus he writes of `Abd ul-Muṭṭalib, who has been frightened by a recurrent dream urging him to dig the well of Zamzam:

He hesitates: should he throw himself into the waves of sleep which appear before his eyes? Or should he remain awake on the shore, teased by sleep but refusing to sleep? Let him hesitate as he will, let him resist sleep as he may: the clamorous waves before him can invade the shore and submerge him, and submerge everything else with him... Come to sleep and have no fear! These waves bring repose, not drowning. Come to these two arms extending towards you, and you shall forget everything between them... The young man closed his eyes and moved forward, and the waves of sleep engulfed him as they engulfed other people and other things.

And when, as has already been pointed out, the comparison is extended into symbolism, it almost always consists of a somewhat gross personification.

His modernism expresses itself most clearly in his unstudied,

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easy, confident use of words, not entirely unadorned, but decidedly free from self-conscious, clever tours de force.

Sometimes, but very seldom, this results in inadequate wording: Muṭṭī Ḥbn Iyās is said to be "more truthful of expression"¹ than others because he was not carried away by partisan feelings but could praise the Umayyads one day and the Abbasids the next out of indifference to both. There are also a few slips due to carelessness² and even some grammatical errors, but these last are so elementary that they are clearly to be laid at the proof-reader's door.

A more constant feature of Tāhā Ḥusayn's unstudied style is prolixity. There are passages of great concentration in his theses, and his comparison of al Maʿarrah and al-Mutanabbi in two pages is an admirable effort.⁴ Elsewhere, however, he tends to be diffuse; his elaborations are not always ineffective, but there can be no justification of the redundancy in this passage, which speaks of the habit of Egyptian students in Paris of foregathering in certain cafés just as they would have foregathered at the maṣṭābah of their native village:⁵

They had another maṣṭābah, a luxurious one, to which they used to go at the beginning of the month when they had received their allowances and had some money in hand. This maṣṭābah was the Café de la Paix, to which students used to go in the first days of every month, when they felt able to spend without compunction or constraint.

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(1) Ḥadīth ul-Arbiʿāʾ, II, p. 190.
(2) Riḥlat ur-Rabīʿ, p. 92. Ḥadīth ul-Arbiʿāʾ, II, p. 26:
(3) Al-Muʿadhḏhabūn fi 'l-ʿArq, p. 14:
Al-Ḥubb ud-Dāʿiʾ, p. 167:
(4) Tajdīd Dhikrā Abī 'l-ʿAlāʾ, pp. 223-225.
(5) "Al-Maṣṭātib," Al-Aḥrām, 19 October 1948.
The most marked of Tāhā Ḥusayn's stylistic characteristics, and the one most often commented on by admirers and detractors, is his repetition of words. Of the persistence of traditional features in Arabic Literature he says: 1

Say it is the nature of the Arabic language that has caused the firmness of these roots, or say it is the noble Qur'ān that has caused the firmness of these roots, or say it is the conservatism which distinguishes the Arab nation from all other nations that has caused the firmness of these roots, or say it is all these factors together with other factors that have caused the firmness of these roots. It is all possible, but what is certain is that Arabic Literature retains a number of traditional roots which it cannot renounce and from which it cannot free itself.

It will be remembered that he has praised precisely similar "musical" effects in the poetry of Ibn ur-Rūmī and al-Buḥṭurī, 2 and it is in emphatic or consciously artistic writing that Tāhā Ḥusayn most commonly displays this mannerism. It is therefore not a matter of convenience, but of taste - a taste nurtured by the Arab tradition for verbal effects and fostered by Tāhā Ḥusayn's own dependence on his ear; possibly also, it was at first developed in defiance of scholasticism, which would have demanded that similar "echoes" be formed not of repetitions, but of puns or rhymes.

A variation of this taste for repetitions is the use of modifiers of the same derivation as the word they modify: the blind gods of chance "maintain some people in blissful bliss, and maintain some others in miserable misery," 3 and the personality of Ahmad Amīn

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(2) v. Supra. p. 227.

(3) Rihlat ur-Rabī`, p. 16.
combines such opposited as "calm calmness and rebellious rebellion."\(^1\) Of the same order is his predilection for the unqualified cognate accusative.\(^2\)

Another mannerism of his is to emphasise a statement by the negation of its opposite: in their programme of expansion, "Umar and his lieutenants were "bold, not shrinking, decided, not hesitant,"\(^3\) and Aminah's employers were refined people who "did not eat off the floor, but ate from a table; they did not eat maize, but ate wheaten bread; they did not eat from copper plates, but ate from porcelain plates.\(^4\) The same taste for contrast and juxtaposition can be detected in the succession of fastidious alternatives, often coupled with paradox, which one often encounters in his writings: On a Friday, the wealthier among the Azharist students used to have a special meal, including meat, to which they would sit in a spirit of "physical seriousness, or serious playfulness," while less fortunate neighbours found in the smell of such food "a painful pleasure, or a pleasurable pain."\(^5\) The trick has an appearance of subtlety when used to describe an emotion, but it becomes ludicrous when attached to a plain statement of fact, as when village women are said to be fond of coloured glass made into "bracelets or hollowed circles into which they introduce their arms or which they introduce into their arms."\(^6\)

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(1) *Fuṣūl fī 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd*, p.15.
(2) *Du‘ā' ul-Karawān*, p.27:

فصُّرَتْ جَسَمًا هَنَا، ثُمَّ انْهَمَتْ دِمُوعًا اِنْحِصارًا

(3) *'Uthmān*, p.56.
(5) *Al-Ayyām*, II, pp.50-51.
(6) *Al-Mu'ādhdhhabūna fī 'l-Ard*, p. 93.
As was to be expected, there are marked French influences in Tāhā Ḥusayn's style. He uses such words as Piano,¹ radio,² and even douche³ in spite of the efforts exerted by the Fu'ād Academy to give currency to others coined from Arabic roots. He adopts a large number of expressions familiar to the French, and speaks of "being more of a royalist than the king,"⁴ of "burning one's boats,"⁵ and of stories "which have neither head nor tail."⁶ He even gives Arabic words the secondary meanings that their equivalents have in French; to him actors "play" a drama,⁷ the rich have no need to earn their "life,"⁸ and when in doubt he should "love" his judgment to remain "suspended."⁹

When all these peculiarities have been listed, it remains to be recorded that the dominant impression which Tāhā Ḥusayn's writing leaves on the reader is one of freedom, ease, smoothness, and communicative emotion. These qualities in turn depend on a confident command of the language and a wide acquaintance with literature, so that Tāhā Ḥusayn is never at a loss for a word, or for an apt poetic or Qur'ānic quotation. It also depends on consumate artistry and not a little craftsmanship, for Tāhā Ḥusayn's sentence is always

(1) Al-Hubb ud-Da i, p. 55.
(2) Rihlat ur-Rabi, p. 20.
(3) Min Hadith ish-Shīr wa 'n-Nathr, p. 147.
(4) Mustaqbal uth-Thaqafah fi Misr, p. 349.
(5) Ala Hamish is-Sirah, II, pp. 40-41.
(6) Hadith ul-Arbi a, I, p. 257; Al-Hubb ud-Da i, p. 50.
(7) Fusul fi 'l-Adab wa 'n-Naqd, p. 113.
(8) Sawt Baris, I, p. 50.
(9) "Shahrazad," Al-Ahram, 3 September 1948:

أحب أن يظل حكمي عليها معلقاً
rhythmical, and although he disapproves of excessive verbal ornamentation, he can himself highlight his writing with sentences in which parallelism, assonance, and even rhyme are exquisitely combined. Indeed, although he has not published any serious verse, some of his prose passages could easily be divided into poetic stanzas. Above all, there is in his prose an emotional quality such as we find in Tennyson or in Alfred de Musset, a quality which defies analysis and can only be described as the echo of a vibrant soul.

So it is that Tāhā Ḥusayn has been able to bring to life a wide variety of emotional situations, in a language that had long been stiffened by conventions. The emotions he has portrayed range from the pathos of his daughter's reaction to his blindness to the winning naïveté of his devotion to learning when he first went to the Azhar, and from the violence of his condemnation of a hypocrite to the weary, submissive despair of a man whose night-long prayer that his wife might be cured of her madness has proved unavailing. In some isolated contexts, he has even broken free of the objectively descriptive method to reproduce, as from within, Aminah's turbulent emotions the night before she is to enter into the engineer's service,

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(2) Jannat ul-Ḥayāwān, p.97.
(3) Al-Ayyām, I, epilogue.
(4) Al-Ayyām, II, p.16-17.
(5) Rihlat ur-Rabī', p.98.
(6) Shajarat ul-Bu's, p.41.
(7) Du‘ā’ul-Karawān, p.149.
or to represent dramatically, by bold changes from the third to the
first person, the end of the proud Abū Jahl in the battle of Badr;

he (his followers having been put to flight) has the choice of two
alternatives: if he wishes he may turn his horse's rein and it will fly with
him where there is safety, where he has eminence, and where there is shame; and if he wishes he may press forward, feel pain for a while, and then go the way people have gone since time began. No, by God! Quraysh shall not deride me... Quraysh shall not say that I have never looked on Muḥammad but have been filled with terror and have taken to flight. Then he forces his horse between the ranks, and lo! he is struck down, one of his legs cut off, the blood gushing out; yet he is more acutely conscious than ever before; he sees everything, he sees Muḥammad's companions reaching the backs of the Quraysh with their spears, he sees a man approach him until he is treading on his chest. Who is this man? I know him! I once subjected him, in Makkah, to a violent test! He is the Hudhali Ibn Mas'ūd, the shepherd!

Some attention should also be paid to Ṭāhā Husayn's humour, not because he is outstandingly successful in it but because humour has long had a poor deal in Arabic literature. Gifted with a robust and distinctive sense of humour, the Egyptian is ill at ease when he turns from the colloquial to the written language, and finds it difficult to forget its pedantic associations. Ṭāhā Husayn himself has observed that it is not easy to convey the humour of a French play to the Arabic reader, for Egyptians - though much given to levity - have a guilty feeling about it.

Ṭāhā Husayn's own tendencies towards the prolix and the explicit

(1) "Alā Hāmish is-Sīrah, III, p.104.
(2) Sāwṭ Bāris, I, p.48.
do not make him very successful at epigrams. Witticisms are not beyond him, for he once said of the practice of expurgating old texts in popular editions that the National Library publishes of each text two versions: a purified one to suit modern taste, and a foul one to suit the taste of scholars; but he usually dilutes such effects by elaboration. He is more successful when he simply describes amusing characters, such as his schoolmaster in al-Ayyām, and recounts their actions.

But as a polemist it is to irony and sarcasm that he has most commonly resorted. His use of them is usually obvious and sometimes heavy-handed, but not ineffective. Thus when ar-Rāfi‘ī wrote:

You know that to have a taste for something is but to understand it, that judging something is but the result of taste, and that criticism is but understanding and taste together...

Tāhā Ḥusayn commented:

We admit that we do not understand this sentence, and have no taste for it, and therefore are unable to believe it or judge it, for taste is understanding, and understanding is judgment, and criticism is both taste and understanding... and you can circle around as long as God wills it... It seems to us that taste is one thing, and understanding is another; and the proof of this is that we can understand much of what ar-Rāfi‘ī writes, yet have no taste or admiration for it!

It was also in the course of the polemic on Fi 'sh-Shi‘r il-Jahiliyyīn

(1) Ḥadīth ul-Arbī‘ā’, III, p.70.
(2) Ḥadīth ul-Arbī‘ā’, II, p. 326.
that, two shaykhs who admittedly did not know French having accused him of misunderstanding Descartes, he retorted with a "study" which related with rollicking and sustained fantasy that Descartes had been misunderstood by the West, and had really been the shaykh of the Šūfīs of his time; he was carried by a hoopoo to the island of Nūn where all people were one span in height and one metre in diameter, and died because he was too old for his constitution to undergo the change! Such, he concluded, is the profound kind of philosophy which his Azharist critics would like to set up above Western rationalism.

Something of this facetiousness is found also in al-Qaṣr al-Mashur, which has the distinction of containing a humorous poem parodying the heavenly delights described in Risalat al-Ghufran.

Taha Husayn's style is often lengthy, sometimes even irritating by its mannerisms. But it has vigour and delicacy, stateliness and sparkle. It does not only express, it also impresses. It cannot always be compared to a finely wrought, smoothly finished figurine; but it has the movement, the adaptability, and the power of sympathetic evocation of a living being.

(1) Min Baʿid, pp.283-309.
PART VI

CONCLUSIONS
Chapter Seventeen.

An Estimate.

... for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's many activities reveal him as a gifted writer, a zealous reformer, and a man of decision and energy. There can be no doubt that he is also a man of unusual intellectual powers. It must be specified, however, that his are primarily powers of observation and, to some extent, analysis: he observes and records social and educational conditions just as he observes and records the qualities of a poet or the characteristics of a bygone age. But his speculative and creative powers are of a lower order: both his philosophy and his critical theories are wordy abstractions at variance with his practice, and even as a narrator he has not proved outstandingly inventive.

In fact, his formula for Modernism is to no small extent a recognition of trends that were already taking shape, that had been given initial expression by Ahmad Luṭfī 's-Sayyid, and that were shared by not a few men of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's generation. Of the outstanding literary figures of the last thirty years, 'Abbās Maḥmūd ul-'Aqqād (1889- ), and Ibrāhīm ʿAbd ul-Qādir il-Māzīnī (1890-1949) differ from him mainly in that the foreign culture they have drawn on has been primarily the English one; and there are not a few - like Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888- ), Mansūr Fāhī (1886- ), or Zakī Mubārak (1895- ) - who share both Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's enthusiasm for French culture and his respect for the Egyptian Arab heritage. Among these, his supremacy is by no means unchallenged.
To some extent, he owes his notoriety among Modernists to the abundance of his production, to the influence he has wielded in the University where so many young writers were trained, and to the boldness and pugnacity with which he has argued the case for Modernism. It is significant in this respect that one of the earliest consecrations of his leadership came from his opponent ar-RāfīʿI, who compared him to an ant leading a number of other ants to a "new world" which proves to be merely a playing ball temporarily abandoned by a schoolboy.

To-day, it is easy to overlook the fact that the Western component of Egypt's new culture once needed to be defended with courage and steadfastness. But it is the very success of Westernisation that seems to belittle the efforts of its champions.

Of course, it is contributions of substance rather than polemics that have ensured this success. It scarcely needs to be stressed that Tāḥā Ḥusayn's work has been substantial, and if we now survey the progress of the Renaissance, it is with the knowledge that his influence has been more widespread and more subtle than can be specifically traced.

After a bitter struggle throughout the twenties, nationalism - itself one aspect of Westernisation - made some spectacular advances. Egypt acquired a substantial measure of independence, it even took a leading position among the Arab states, and it now has a part to play in international organisations. Its administration is modelled on that of Western Parliamentary democracies, and its Constitution has not been seriously challenged since 1935. Some national industries

(1) Taḥt Rāyat il-Qurаn, pp.99-100.
and banking institutions have come into existence. And it is but one sign of the changes that have occurred in the educated minority that women have gained access to the University and to some professions, that Huda Shaʿrāwī (1879-1949) founded a feminist union in 1923, and that Durriyyah Shafīq now speaks of creating a feminist political party.

Against the persisting evils of poverty and disease there has been a rising if somewhat confused clamour, to which Tāhā Ḥusayn has added his voice; but it was left to the present Minister of Social Affairs, Ahmad Ḥusayn Bey, to introduce a comprehensive scheme of social security.

Education has been somewhat more fortunate. Even before Tāhā Ḥusayn became Minister of Education, there had been vast increases in budgetary appropriations for Education and in the number of schools operating in the land. By 1950 the school population was as follows:

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<th>Girls</th>
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<tr>
<td>- run by Ministry</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>95,094</td>
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<td>351,242</td>
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<td>13,171</td>
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In addition, the Universities of Fuʿād and Fārūq had 17,384 students, of whom 1,052 were women, there were some 175 specialised schools and higher institutes, and more than 500 students were studying abroad

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(1) *Ar-Risālah,* XVIII, 874 (3 April 1950), p. 394.
at the State's expense. In 1948, a "popular university" offering evening courses to adults was founded, and by 1949 it was said to have an enrolment of 15,000. The Azhar itself was reorganised under Shaykh ul-Marághí; it was subdivided into schools and specialised Colleges, and the teaching of foreign languages and sciences was introduced. It is often charged that the educational authorities do not make the most economic use of the resources available and that the schooling provided is rigid, over-centralised, and top-heavy; but at least the percentage of literacy throughout the country has risen from 7 in 1920 to an estimated 28 at present. To this expanding tendency, Táhá Húsayn has added his enthusiasm and energy, but the principles that guide him are not particularly distinctive, indeed are admittedly at one with those of his Wafdist predecessor in office, Najíb ul-Hiláli.

Naturally, literary production has also been rising. In 1949, 515 original works and 44 translations were published, and no fewer than 18 daily papers and 280 Arabic magazines were appearing regularly.

There are still some Azharist conservatives, such as Shaykh Abû 'l 'Uyûn, among Egyptian writers; but the field is dominated by men who have had some measure of Western training. Even on matters concerning religion and Islamic philosophy, the most impressive work has been done

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(2) Ar-Risâlah, XVIII, 901 (9 Oct. 1950), p.1152.
by Muṣṭafā Ḥabūd ur-Rāziq (1885-1948) who studied first under Muḥammad Ḥabūd and later in France. In Khālid Muḥammad Khālid we even have an Azharist ṣāḥib with a Socialist programme. Lay modernists have also been edging on to the religious field, first in the course of controversies, as did Tāhā Ḥusayn, and then in independent historical or biographical studies as did Ḥabīd Aḥmad Amīn, Ḥusayn Haykal, and al-ʿAqqād. Modern scientific thought is represented in the work of Ḥabīd Muṣṭafā Musharrafah Pasha (d. 1950), who ranged over physics, philosophy, and economics. Psychology is served by Amīr Buqṭur and Ḥabīd ul-ʿAzīz ʿl-Qūlī, and Ḥabīd Ullāh Ḥabū Ṣanā has produced some serious sociological studies and has translated Tāhā Ḥusayn’s thesis on Ibn Khaldūn into Arabic. Biographies of great men, memoirs of political figures like Ḥāfiẓ ʿAffī, and comments on current events are popular; there are also not a few histories, but most of them – especially when dealing with the nationalistic movement or with the ruling dynasty – are patently biased. And almost alone in his field, Salīm Bey Ḥasan has published several works on the history and literature of Pharaonic Egypt.

Almost 25% of all books published and the bulk of periodical literature fall within the field of belles lettres.

Journalism has its own celebrities, such as Anṭūn ul-Jumayyil (1887-1948), at-Ṭābiʿī, Muṣṭafā Amīn, Maḥmūd Abū Ṭāḥ, or Fuʿād Ṣarrūf. But so vast is its scope that there is scarcely a writer of note who has not at one time or another contributed to the periodical or even to the daily press. And whereas the term "journalist" would have uncomplimentary associations if applied to a Western writer, Tāhā Ḥusayn was greatly offended when, opposing his
although his delight in intellectual subleties sometimes borders on the abstruse. Soon, many established as well as younger writers were producing novels. In this respect, Tāhā Ḥusayn is therefore one of many latecomers but he has the distinction that whereas most others— including al-Māzīnī and Bint ugh-Shāṭī’—tend to place Westernised heroes or heroines into an Egyptian setting, or else like al-Ḫakīm subject the action to their own intellectualism, he achieves his purpose best when, like the old watchman Cēthru in Galsworthy’s allegory on the function of a novelist, he merely raises his lantern to illumine a genuine scene.

Drama has had greater difficulties to contend with. The theatre itself has been dominated by actors rather than playwrights. Comedy was fortunate in being served long and continuously by Ṣābīr ur-Riḥanī, who used to write or adapt his own plays in collaboration with Bāḍī’ Khayrī. Two "serious" theatrical companies, producing mainly melodramas and headed respectively by Yūsuf Wahbi and Fāṭimah Rusḥī, were run commercially until 1930. Then a subsidised National Company was formed in the hope that it might present better, even if uncommercial, plays. Its subsidy had to be raised again and again, until it reached L.E. 20,000 in 1949, and as it did not offer enough scope for experimentation, a second company, also subsidised, was then created. Meanwhile, a cinema industry had arisen, the achievements of which are often of fairly high technical qualities, but too often slavishly modelled on the most popular Hollywood productions.

So narrow is the scope both on stage and screen, and so dependent the standards on popular taste, that most plays with literary pretensions are destined to be more often read than seen. Nevertheless, some significant developments have occurred. In the
last years of his life, Ahmad Shawqi wrote a number of lyrical dramas with an Egyptian or Arab historical setting, and he is being imitated by 'Aziz Abzagha Pasha. In prose, Tawfiq ul-Hakim has written a number of well-constructed plays, often with extremely ambitious themes in which the conflict is usually philosophical rather than emotional; and another fertile and successful playwright is Mahmud Taymur. In this field, Tahay Husayn's influence can be traced only in the work of Tawfiq ul-Hakim who, apart from his personal association with Tahay Husayn, published in 1949 a play on the Oedipus theme. What effect the screen adaptation of Tahay Husayn's al-Wa'd ul-Haqq is likely to have it is as yet impossible to say.

As for poetry, it was dominated during the twenties by the figures of Shawqi and Hafiz. The continuity of their high standards of classical expression has been ensured by Khalil Matrân, Aliyul-Jârim (d.1949), and also by al-‘Aqqâd who deserves special mention because he has often succeeded in expressing virile and measured emotions by concrete and homely images. But the new generation of poets that has arisen appears to have brought to poetry the taste for romantic self-expression which appeared earlier in prose. Immature as yet, this poetry consists largely of inflated emotionalism and indiscriminate imitations of Western themes; it is also marked by linguistic weaknesses. Tahay Husayn's strictures on Hafiz and Shawqi doubtlessly contributed to the appearance of this trend, but whatever influence he has exerted on it since has been that of the chastening critic.

It is in Criticism of course that Tahay Husayn's pioneering quality and his influence are most clearly unchallengeable. His view of the close connection between "descriptive" literature and "creative" literature has proved particularly agreeable, and is
reproduced in many a school-text and in the works of some younger writers, as in Ahmad ush-Shayib's Usul un-Naqd il-Adabi. In practice, almost every writer doubles as a critic, and there have been since Tajdid Dhikra Abi 'l-`Ala' innumerable studies attempting the all-round appreciation of a poet or of an epoch. The younger generation, however, is not altogether satisfied with his subjective criterion; Ash-Shayib, for example, tries to apply Winchester's principles of literary criticism to Arabic-literature, and Mustafa 'Abd ul-Latif is-Sa'artil attempts to formulate a theory of aesthetics which seems to rest largely on the social significance of a writer's or poet's message. But one of the most promising of the younger critics, Muhammad Mandur, who has started some meticulous original investigations into such questions as what makes the rhythm of Arabic poetry, is a protege and disciple of Tahar Husayn's.

The example of the West therefore seems triumphant in every way. What of the second main component of Tahar Husayn's modernism, the Arab-Islamic heritage?

There is no sign that interest in past Arabic literature is waning. Men like 'Abd ul-`Amid il-`Abbadil are searching for Arab manuscripts even abroad, and extensive work is now being done to bring to light neglected texts, notably those belonging to the Fatimid dynasty.

As for linguistic and stylistic considerations, there are no longer writers of any importance who favour elaborately ornate writing,

(1) Muhammad Mandur, Fi 'l-Mizan il-Jadid, dedication.
and the only issue still open concerns the adoption of the colloquial as the language of literature. Some journalists, notably at-Tābī‘ī have developed a style that comes near to the colloquial; and among litterateurs Bayram ut-Tūnisī writes zajal in the colloquial, and Salāmah Mūsā has adopted a "telegraphic style" of his own, and openly favours a breach with the past. But the more representative of Egyptian writers of to-day believes in elastic classicism: he remains strictly within the bounds of Arabic grammar, but allows himself the use of new words, and where he has the choice he adopts the term or the word order that comes nearest to the colloquial. In fact, it was in consecration both of Egypt's attachment to the classical language and of its right to coin new words that the Fu‘ād Academy was founded in December 1932. It is only in drama that the classical presents a difficulty, for it destroys the realism of plays with a contemporary setting and it restricts the appeal to the educated Egyptian public. But even those who use the colloquial in plays do not advocate its extension. In a discussion between Haykal, al-‘Aqqād, al-Ḥakīm, and Maḥmūd Taymūr, it was agreed that the use of the colloquial was inevitable in plays of a local character, but that the classical should prevail in works of universal appeal.

There is also a group, headed by Amīn ul-Khawlī, which stresses the effects of the environment on literature, and speaks of Egyptian in preference to Arabic literature. Its members do not themselves use the colloquial but their interests naturally include folk-literature, and it was one of them, Ṣādūq al-Ḥamīd Yūnūs, whose

doctorate thesis on the Hilāliyyah was accepted by Fu'ād University in 1950. The group has a useful mission to fulfil, but it need not be at variance with others. As education is extended, and as cultural exchanges increase between the Arabic-speaking countries, Egyptian literature is likely to develop its distinctive features within the bounds of "elastic classicism".

It would appear from this survey that the modernistic formula to which Tāhā Husayn subscribes has been an unqualified success. Unfortunately, it is not without its imperfections, and even its disturbing features.

Although interested in its Islamic past, Egypt has renounced its guidance. It continues to profess Islām and glorify it. But by ascribing to it, as Tāhā Husayn has done, whatever principle happens to appear desirable, Egypt has not only neutralised Islām but also circumvented issues which it would have been better to face.

Instead, it looked to the West for salvation. But whereas the West had developed its civilisation by a long process which had impressed upon it the values of meticulous investigation and independent thinking, what Egypt saw in it was a set of techniques, political, industrial, educational, or literary, the application of which would result in practical benefits. A Parliamentary system was therefore bestowed upon an illiterate electorate, and looked upon at first as though it were a social panacea. In literature, Western genres are regarded as lessons to be learned, so that when Anwar ul-Ma'addāwī was accused of having stolen the plot of Min Warā'il-Abad from the work of a popular story-teller, he retorted with a sneer: "I do not for a moment doubt that he studied the art of narration in his village school," and he added that if he were to
plagiarise, it would be to the "giants of the West" that he would turn. The resultant production is therefore only superficially related to experience: novelists may place a hero in an Egyptian setting, but they make him feel and react as one steeped in the Western tradition; and magazines publish special spring numbers in which poets extol the reappearance of life in a country where cultivation is perennial and the spring months are scarcely the most inspiring. The Western echo itself may be no more than a pretentious artifice - a reference to Bacchus and Venus as a poet's deities, or a discussion of al-Mutanabbī's rightful place on Parnassus; and lesser writers may even describe a night of love as "a splendid dream, in which the angels danced to the music of a jazz-band."²

Besides, the emphasis placed on practical benefits does not make for high standards of intellectual honesty, at least among the rank and file of the movement. Affirming the unity of Christian and Muslim Arabs in the face of Zionist aggression in Palestine, for example, Muqīlā 'l-Ḥaddād makes out that both Christianity and Islām stand for the universality of God's kingdom as against the Jews' narrow interpretation of what is intended by "the Chosen People;" he then relates the parable of the good Samaritan and concludes:³

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(3) *Ar-Risālah*, XVII, 810 (10 Jan. 1949) p. 70.
Then the Messiah asked the Jews: "which of these is the man whom God would choose - is it not the one who showed mercy?" And when the Jews perceived that He placed the despised Samarians on an equal footing with them, they crucified Him, for the theory that "God is Lord of the worlds" is contrary to their belief.

And even a University Professor like ʿAbd ul-Wahhāb Ḥammūdah is not above plagiarising so widely-read a contemporary as Tāhā Ḥusayn.1

Egypt is not unaware that some of its achievements are hollow. Too often, this awareness manifests itself in extravagant vainglory and in the belief that Egypt's best interests are served when criticism by an outsider has been silenced. Forbid tourism until we have put our house in order, writes the editor of al-Hilāl, surround Egypt with an Iron Curtain!2 But at least behind this iron curtain there are growing signs of national self-criticism.

Self-criticism is indeed one of the most hopeful signs of Egypt's coming of age. Whereas some thirty years ago its path seemed deceptively clear, it has now reached the stage when it must take cognisance of its problems. How deep its malaise is, one can see in its recent poetry; much of its romantic pessimism is a pose, and yet one can easily detect in it a strangely deliberate kind of escapism: the poet is convinced that the beautiful ideal which he pursues is illusory, that it is a statue which is not likely to come to life.3 The Egyptian Renaissance seems to have identified

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(2) Al-Hilāl, LVI, 12 (December 1948), p.5.

(3) ʿAlī Mahmūd Tāhā, in ar-Risalah, XVII, 860 (26 Dec.1949)p.1755:

أنا يا أم صانع الأمثلة الفضلى
فإنك في صورة الخيرات المرموقة
وأمسو لكل عربي رقائق
ودبت الحياه في مخلوقات!
the West with materialism, and materialism with reality. It is not a reality which it can love.

Egypt needs a new faith, a faith in something at once real and worthy. To find it, it must probe deep into itself, deep into the fundamentals of human nature, deep into Truth. Merely to couple dissatisfaction with its present impatience for palpable results is likely to lead only to the substitution of one technique for another, of one shallow ideology for another.

Tāhā Husayn himself has shown an increasing impatience for measures that would bring immediate relief to Egypt's ills. Of course, he could scarcely have been expected to remain indifferent to his countrymen's plight, or unaffected by prevailing tastes. But it can only be regretted that conditions did not direct his immense energy more exclusively to the service of the scholarliness he displayed in his thesis on Ibn Khaldūn, and of his early determination to instruct the public in the fundamentals of culture.

Always at the forefront of the most characteristic trends in the Renaissance, sharing its aspirations, its preferences, and even some of its impatience and confusion, he is outstandingly representative of its present stage. But he has not been so inspired as to provide it with its faith for the future.

Nevertheless, he has cleared away many prejudices and misconceptions which would otherwise have prevented it from developing to its present stage. He has helped to maintain some balance between its components. He has made contributions of intrinsic worth to it. He has given an example of the courage with which the nation must learn to criticise itself. And above all he has taken a prominent part in the creation of that current of new and significant ideas out of which the new faith is likely to arise.
It was not given to him to be the Prophet of the Renaissance. But he has been a perceptive, devoted, zealous, and stimulating tutor to it in its adolescence. His guidance is likely to be outgrown, but it has made its mark, and he will be remembered with respect and gratitude.
APPENDIX I.
AL -KĀTĪB UL-_MIṣRĪ’S PUBLICATIONS

A. Modern Original Works.

Muḥammad Abū Ḥalīm Abū Ullāh. Lāqītah.
Muḥammad Sa‘īd Abū Urryān. ʻAla Bāb Zuwaylah.
--- Min Ḥawlinā.
Muḥammad Uṣ-Sādīq Ḥusayn. Al-Bayt us-Sabkā.
Salāmūn Mūsā. ʻAqlī wa ʻAqlūk.
--- Tarbiyat Salāmūn Mūsā.
Yaḥyā ’l-Khāshshāb. Hikāyāt Fārisiyah.
Yūsuf Kāram. Tārīkh ul-Falsafat il-ʻUrūbbiyyah fi ʻl-‘Aṣr il-Wāsit.

B. Editions of old Arabic Works.

Abū ʻl-Ḥasan Abū ʻAbd Allāh Ibn Abū ʻl-Ḥasan il-Maṣīqī. Tārīkh Qaṭā il-Andalus.
Jāhīz (al-). Kitāb ul-Bukhārā’. ed. by Ṭāhā ’l-Ḥājirī.

C. Translations.

Barrès, Maurice. Un Jardin sur l’Oronte (Jannah ʻalā Nahr il ʻAṣī). tr. by Muḥammad Abū ʻAbd Allāh il-Maṣīqī Abīdīn.
Benōt, Pierre. L’Atlantide (Ghāniyat Atlantā). tr. by Rushdī Kāmil.
Daudet, Léon. La Vie Orageuse de Clémenceau. (Klimanṣū wa Ḥoyatuhu ʻl-ʻAṣīfah). tr. by Ḥasan Maḥmūd.

Gide, André. La Porte Étroite (Al-‘Abāb uq-‘Dayyiq). tr. by Nazīh ul-‘Haḳim.

--- L’École des Femmes (Madrāsat uz-Zawjāt); Robert (Rūbīr); Geneviève (Jinivyīv). tr. by Šabdīrul-Fāḥīm.

--- Oedipe (‘ūdīb); Thésée (Thīsyyūs). tr. by Tāhā Husayn.


Justinian. Institutes (Mudawwanat Justiniana fi ‘l-Fiqhi ṭ-Rūmāni) tr. by ‘Abd ul-‘Azīz Fāḥīm Pasha.


Merimée, Prosper. Célèbre (Kūlūmbā). tr. by Muḥammad Ghallāb.

Stendhal. La Chartreuse de Parme (Dayr Bārma) tr. by ‘Abd ul-Ḥāmid ʿAbdul-Dawākhīlī.

Tchekov, Anton. Histoire d’un Inconnu (Qissat Rajul Majhūl). tr. by Māḥmūd uṣbā-Shumayṭī.


Voltaire. Zadig ou la Destinée (Zadīj aw il-Qadā’). tr. by Tāhā Ḥusayn.


APPENDIX II

SUMMARIES
of TÁHÁ HÚSAYN'S NOVELS

I. Adîb

At the University, Táhá Husayn is befriended by Adîb, an ugly, voluble, loud-voiced young man who shows no respect to anything except literature.

When the University announces that it is to send a number of students to France at its expense, he spares no effort to ensure that he is included in the first mission, and he succeeds.

Unfortunately, one of the University's rules is that only single men should be sent abroad. Adîb could keep his marriage secret, but he prefers to repudiate his wife, partly because he does not wish to be untruthful to the University authorities, but mainly because he coolly anticipates that he will succumb to temptations while in France, and would rather his wife was not involved in his sins. Although he feels kindly towards her, he must send her away without a word of explanation, for she is a simple, illiterate, provincial woman who could not understand his complex motives.

He has qualms about his treatment of her while he is on his way to France, but he no sooner lands at Marseilles than he finds the temptation he expected in Fernande, a chamber-maid in his hotel. He takes her to Cannes on a round of pleasure, but the affair ends unhappily. Disillusioned and ill, Adîb goes to Paris.

His correspondence even with his family becomes irregular, but reports are that he is working uncommonly hard and doing uncommonly well at his studies. When war breaks out and Paris is threatened, alone of all the Egyptians there he chooses to remain in the city and share its dangers even as he has shared its delights. Besides, he does not want to be separated from Hélène.

Alternating between extremes of cheerfulness and depression, at times giving complete satisfaction to his professors and at others abandoning all study for Hélène's sake, he becomes increasingly unbalanced. Identifying himself with Germany, he finds himself mercilessly persecuted by the French press. In his last letter to Táhá Husayn, he says it is Hélène who has turned the Allies against him because she had discovered that he had become engaged to the daughter of one of his professors.

A year later, having despaired of Adîb's recovery, Hélène sends Táhá Husayn voluminous papers which her lover had left in her keeping. Now that he has been banished from the University, Táhá Husayn has
found time to go through these papers, and he has discovered in them literary pieces unequalled by any contemporary writer. Will the circumstances of Egypt's literary life permit that they be published some day?

2. Shajarat ul-Bu's

The story starts towards the end of the nineteenth century.

'Abd ur-Rahmān and 'Ahl, two traders, are close friends, and both are devout followers of the Sufi shaykh in 'Ali's town. The shaykh commands that 'Ali's son Khālid be married to 'Abd ur-Rahmān's daughter Nafīsah. The girl is exceedingly ugly, but the shaykh's wisdom is unquestioned except by Khālid's mother, who predicts that the marriage will "plant a tree of misery" in the family. Shortly after the wedding, Umm Khālid dies.

It is only after Nafīsah has borne Khālid a beautiful daughter, Samīhah, that he realises how ugly his wife is, and he makes cruel comparisons between mother and daughter. When next she bears him another daughter, Julnār, as ugly as herself, his silent disappointment is even more hurtful to Nafīsah, and she becomes insane. The shaykh arranges that her father should look after her and her daughters as long as he lives, and then leave his fortune to Khālid that he might provide for them.

Both Khālid and his cousin and close friend Salīm then become clerks in the government service, at a salary of four pounds a month each. Salīm is married to a sensible and witty woman called Zubaydah, who has always been kind to Nafīsah and has promised her that her son Salīm will one day marry Julnār.

When 'Abd ur-Rahmān dies, it is found that he has left little money, for of late the market has been invaded by foreign traders who make their shops attractive and use methods that the old-fashioned traders do not comprehend. 'Ali's business has also suffered, and as in his old age he has taken to marrying and repudiating as many women as he can, he is finding it difficult to provide for his many children. The shaykh therefore commands that Khālid should provide for Nafīsah, but should repudiate her and marry Munā, daughter of the wealthiest trader in the region.

That same year, the Sufi shaykh dies, and is succeeded by his son Ibrāhīm. Eager to extend his influence, the young shaykh secures for Khālid a better position in a different region.

For a while, Nafīsah and her daughters remained with Salīm, but when her madness became suicidal and uncontrollable, she was returned to Khālid's household.

Years pass. Khālid has taken to "European" ways, strains his
resources to send his sons by Munā to new-fangled schools, and has the satisfaction of seeing most of them rise above his own beginnings. But of course he neither educates his daughters nor makes provision for any that might remain unmarried.

Nafīsah leads a negative and marginal life in his household. Sāmīthah is happy enough until she is married, at fifteen, to an aged widower, and she proves unfortunate in her children, for most of them die young and the others are unkind to her. As for Julnār, she is hard-working and uncomplaining, but her stepmother, who now has six sons and four daughters of her own, drives her increasingly hard, especially after the birth of her first daughter. Julnār has only one thing to look forward to: her marriage to Sālim, whom she loves.

But there have been changes in Sālim's household. Zubaydah has died, and Sālim has taken the view that schooling is not meant for children of peasant stock, so he has apprenticed his son Sālim to a cobbler. Sālim envies the education given to Khālid's sons and rebels against the way his father has ordered his life. He decides to marry not Julnār but Munā's eldest daughter Tafīdah.

Julnār receives little sympathy from Munā in her sorrow, but the tree of misery soon extends over Munā and her own daughters as well. The day comes when Munā finds herself surrounded with sobbing women, all unmarried or divorced, and she hints that their misfortunes are due to Julnār's envy. Julnār thereupon retires to her room for a number of days, and comes out of it only on her way to rejoin her father "where there is no envy or hatred or enmity".

3. Duʿāʾ ul-Karawān

Now a happy wife living in comfort, Suʿād recalls the days when she was known as Āminah.

She was of stern Beduin stock, but her father led a scandalous life, and when he was killed in circumstances that dishonoured him, his widow and two daughters were driven out of the community.

They settled in a provincial town, and all three women went into domestic service. Āminah was especially fortunate, for she was employed by the Maʿmūr and became companion and friend to his daughter Khādījah. She even attended Khādījah's lessons, and so learnt to read and write.

But one night her mother decided that they must flee the village without delay: Āminah's sister Hanādī had been seduced by her employer, an engineer; the disgrace must be hidden at all costs. She took her daughters to another village and sent word to her brother Nāṣir to come and take them back to their native village on the edge of the desert.
Nāṣir was a fierce, proud man. He wasted no time in getting the women started on their journey, and at nightfall refused to halt. But having reached a deserted spot he stopped, stabbed Hanādī, buried her, then silently resumed his journey with the other two women: his family honour was now safe.

But Āminah had been profoundly impressed by the murder. For days she was ill, and in her delirium was haunted by a fountain of blood. As soon as she recovered she fled the village and returned to the Ma’mūr's household, where she was kindly received.

She had decided to avenge her sister's death, and now constantly spied on the engineer.

She discovered that he was planning to marry Khadījah. She foiled this plan by revealing Hanādī's secret to Khadījah's mother. But this success made her position in the household very awkward, so she took up employment with another family. She continued to spy upon the engineer.

By patient intrigue, she succeeded in entering his service. From the first night that she spent under his roof, she inflamed his passions, but refused to satisfy them. Day after day they contended with each other, and a subtle change came over both. He altered his ways, no longer made advances to her, but took to spending all his leisure at home. For her part, when she heard that he was transferred to Cairo, she burst into tears, realising suddenly that she too had fallen in love with him.

He took her to Cairo with him, and after a while proposed marriage. In tears, she explained that they could never marry, and revealed her sister's secret and her own. He, genuinely penitent, replied that their union was now more imperative than ever, for in the light that now flooded and dazzled them both, neither could find his way without help from the other.

4. Al-Hubb ud-Dā'ī

This is the diary of a gentle, sensitive, introspective French girl called Line.

To it she confesses that she is aware her parents are planning a marriage for her, and although somewhat annoyed at the secrecy, she is so devoted to them that she finds herself in love with the man they have chosen and of whom she does not even know the name.

She goes to the city to spend some time with relatives, and at a party meets Maxime and immediately falls in love with him. Fortunately, he is the very man that her parents have chosen for her.

For three happy years, she neglects her diary. When she
returns to it, it is to confide a secret sorrow. Maxime and she have a very dear friend, Florence, whose husband died of war wounds. It must have been at the time Pierre was born to Line and monopolised her attention that Maxime fell in love with Florence. The first that Line knew of it was when Pierre brought her a letter he had picked up: it was from Florence to Maxime, and revealed that he had been making advances to her but that Florence had nobly resisted them, and that it was in order to escape temptation that Florence was now travelling abroad. Line replaced the letter in Maxime's bureau and said nothing.

For a while, it seems as though Line's happiness has been saved, but one day she is startled to hear Maxime speaking in defence of polygamy, and a little later she learns that Florence has returned from abroad, has settled in near-by Grenoble, and has at last consented to having a liaison with Maxime.

Line spends a night reading Florence's letters to Maxime, then writes to her to say that she knows of her love, bears her no ill-will, and wishes her happiness. Then she turns to her diary to confess that the letter was insincere. In her bitterness, she can only seek another world, forgetting Maxime, forgetting even Pierre.

People were startled to hear that both women had committed suicide on the same day.

5. Al-Qaṣr ul-Maṣḥūr

(In collaboration with Tawfīq ul-Ḥakīm)

While on vacation in the Alps, Ṭāḥā Husayn receives an invitation from Shahrazād, and is magically transported to her enchanted castle. She complains of sleeplessness, and he suggests that she should have a companion such as she was to Shahryār. Tawfīq ul-Ḥakīm could be kidnapped while on his way to fish, and he would be very pleasant company.

Tawfīq is seized and brought to her. He pleads that Ṭāḥā could fill the bill much better. Slyly, he tries to excite her jealousy by mentioning that Ṭāḥā thinks little of her and spends all his time with al-Mutanabbī.

Shahrazād, however, is not so easily duped. She charges three beautiful maidens with washing, shaving, and robing Tawfīq; then she writes to Ṭāḥā that Tawfīq is in danger because several characters from the Arabian Nights which he has misrepresented in a play of his are demanding his head.

Meanwhile, the three maidens have quarrelled over which is to fetch towel and soap and which is to remain with Tawfīq. Tawfīq
takes advantage of this and dashes along some dark passages.  
Taḥā, on his way to answer Shahrazād's call, also finds himself in dark passages. Mistaking him for Tawfīq, the maidens seize him and give him the treatment intended for his friend.

The misunderstanding is cleared when Taḥā is brought to Shahrazād, and he suggests that to appease the ghosts offended by Tawfīq, he should be brought to trial before Time. Tawfīq is lured back into captivity by a mysterious voice singing of a good bed, good food, and good fishing. He is then punished by being placed in the hands of ugly women, and by being forced to catch smelly fish from a pond of strong, semi-liquid cheese.

Then Time seizes him and brings him to trial, although Shahrazād would rather have retained him. He pleads that the writer aims at perfection, which in Art as in Nature consists of bringing something to life; but then the attainment of perfection is as rare in Art as it is in Nature.

Time declares him innocent, but since he is still in need of development, he is banished to Salzburg for the duration of the Festival of Music. Shahrazād herself is condemned to sleeplessness for the rest of the summer for having overstepped the limits of freedom. They all part on good terms, Shahrazād urging that the story be published.

6. Ahlām Shahrazād

It is the 1009th night. Restless, Shahryār wakens and is urged by a spirit to go to Shahrazād's bedside. He hears her say, in her sleep:

Taḥmān ibn Zahnān, king of the Jīn in Ḥadramūt, had a daughter as wise as she was beautiful, called Fāṭinah. She was courted by all the kings of the Jīn, but scorned them all. Feeling that he is changing back into fire, Taḥmān confesses to Fāṭinah that he is worried about her future.

All day Shahryār presents a happy appearance, but he is troubled by the mixture of deference and irony with which Shahrazād treats him. On the 1010th night he returns to her and hears her say:

But Fāṭinah knew what troubled him: it was that her disappointed suitors had sworn to unite in war against her after her father's death. She says she has a counter-plan, and asks the Vizier to announce that she will marry whichever King takes the city by force.

Shahryār presses Shahrazād to tell him who or what she really is. She answers: I am your mother when you need a mother's kindness, your sister when you need a sister's affection, your
daughter when you need filial piety; your wife when you need a wife's tenderness, and your mistress when you need a mistress's joy." She thinks he is ill, and urges him to place himself entirely in her hands for a cure. On the 1011th night he hears:

The King remonstrated that it was unfair to expose the subjects to war for a purely personal quarrel. The people may be quiescent, but a ruler must look after the interests of his people even when they do not know where their interest lies. Fātinah assures him no harm will befall the people.

Shahrazād leads Shahryār to parts of his estate that he never knew. They end by the shore of a lake, and she invites him to return to the days of youth and innocence. The King finds himself on a boat and is lulled to sleep. It is the 1012th night, and he hears:

The King was not reassured, and despondently called a Council of War. The enemy approached. The earth shook, the heavens roared, and the waves of the sea seemed to reach up to the sky. But the citizens were unharmed. This was magic such as had never been heard of before.

The King awakes and they land on the Island of Happiness, peopled by the souls of the maidsens whose lives were spared during the nights that Shahrazād held him under her spell. Then they are on a lake again, but a sad one, for its shores are peopled by the souls of all the women he has killed. Again Shahrazād lulls him to sleep; it is the 1013th night, and he hears:

Fātinah has immobilised the forces of the enemy, so that they can neither advance nor retreat. Her father then abdicates in her favour. The enemy sends an embassy, but she insists that the Kings are personally responsible for the war, and must come themselves.

After experiencing the extreme violence and the extreme gentleness of love, the King appears to recover his serenity. On the 1014th night he hears:

Fātinah said that tyrannical kings do not deserve to be treated with deference. Her enemies were given the choice between death and recognition of their faults, followed by trial by their own people. For ever after, the Jinn lived happily under wise constitutions, and some of their knowledge occasionally reaches down to humans, though only in imperfect form.

Shahrazād said that it was time to turn to affairs of State, for have not rulers certain duties towards their subjects? "Strange!" Shahryār exclaims, "I seem to be hearing the words of Fātinah." "Fātinah?" says Shahrazād, "the name is not strange to me."
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