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The Arabic Language

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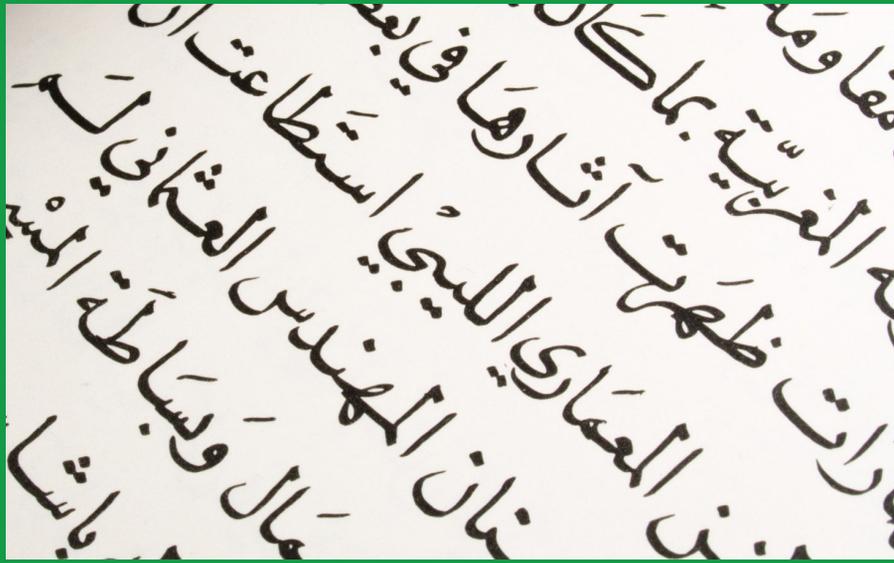
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THE ARABIC LANGUAGE



By Thomas Chenery

Philology



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THE ARABIC LANGUAGE.

It would ill become me, in addressing Members of the University of Oxford, to begin by urging the importance of a study of the Arabic language. Such a preface might be in place before a popular assembly with narrow notions not only of language but even of what constitutes utility. A learned body which cultivates with activity and success every branch of knowledge does not need to be persuaded that one of the most perfect and beautiful forms of human speech, one of the most widely extended, most enduring, and most influential languages of the world is worthy of the attention of its students. And if there were any tendency to overlook its importance (for there is a fashion in studies as in other things, and the curiosity which attracts to new subjects sometimes causes whole departments of learning to be neglected for a time), I should be forbidden to recognise it by the very conditions under which I address you. The merit of the Arabic language, literature, and history, as a study for Europeans, is the very reason of my own professorial existence. I am bound to assume that when the successive Sovereigns of this kingdom have for more than a century and a half maintained a Professorship of Arabic in either University, there is a sufficient reason for their bounty; and since the Lord Almoner has done me the honour to appoint me to the office, and the University to admit me to it, I will not enter on an argument which would seem to assume that the acts of such high authorities need a justification. I am also bound to recollect that the University maintains the Laudian Professorship, which has been distinguished by the names of several eminent scholars, the first of whom,

the illustrious Pocock, will always be had in remembrance wherever Eastern learning is cultivated. Indeed, the study of Arabic in this University may be traced back to a still more distant age. At the Council of Vienne in the early part of the fourteenth century Pope Clement V addressed a command to the Universities of Rome, Paris, Oxford, Bologna, and Salerno, that they should appoint teachers of the Hebrew, Chaldee, and Arabic tongues, for the purpose of raising up scholars who should be competent to defend the Christian theology against its most learned adversaries, the doctors of Judaism and Islam. Authority so high, in times remote and recent, enables me to yield to my own inclination, and to omit an apology for Arabic, which will not be demanded by men of literary tastes, and which, even if far more cogent than I could make it, would probably have little effect on those who are without them. It will be best to devote the brief space of this Lecture to a definition of the Arabic language absolutely and in its relations with its cognate tongues, or with the chief of those which it has influenced by means of religion or conquest ; and then to such a slight sketch of its literary features as will indicate how, in my judgment, it may best be studied.

You are aware that the Arabic is a member of the remarkable and well-defined family of languages to which the convenient, though not strictly accurate, name of Semitic has been given. This family comprises the well-known tongues which have long been the subjects of investigation to European scholars—the Hebrew, the Eastern and Western Aramaic, commonly distinguished as Chaldee and Syriac, the Arabic and the Ethiopian; it comprises also, it would seem, one or more of the idioms spoken in the valleys of the

Euphrates and Tigris, preserved in the cuneiform inscriptions, and now gradually emerging into light through the marvellous researches of our own time. Confining ourselves to the former group, where we are on sure ground, we find a literary character and a philological system which may well excite our curiosity. The most prominent quality of these languages is a similarity which can hardly be distinguished from identity. When it is said of European languages that they resemble each other, the phrase is used with great latitude. It merely means that there is such a likeness between the words and the grammatical forms of each, as may be perceived by an educated man, whose intelligence will enable him to trace the divergencies wrought by time and separation between dialects which have had a common origin, or were at least in some former age much more closely related. The tendency of our languages to phonetic variation or decay, and the impulse of our more mobile races to new turns of thought and expression, have produced a changeableness in speech which is only checked, not wholly removed, by literary culture. But unchangeableness is the law or the fate of the Semitic tongues. According to the mould in which they were first cast, they exist from age to age, unvaried in their substantial structure; their development being superficial, or at least unessential, and resembling rather the slight efflorescence of the mineral than the exuberant vegetative growth of Aryan speech. It is not too bold a generalization to say that the Hebrew, the Aramaic, and the Arabic are to the philologist but a single language. The student who passes from the Hebrew text of the Bible to the Targum which accompanies it, who then turns to the Syriac version, is soon conscious that he sees little more than dialectical

varieties. Should he extend his researches to the Koran, he does indeed find himself in a new world. He escapes from the minutiae of the Massora, since the Arabic being a living language the Moslems have not thought it necessary to mark each subtlety of pronunciation, and each delicacy of tone; but he comes upon an elaborate system of inflection and syntax for which his previous studies have given him no preparation. This, the *i'rab*, or Arabization, is the distinguishing feature and the highest beauty of that classic tongue which is known among Arabs as the language of Modar. To guide the learner through the intricacies of its system, to demonstrate or imagine the laws which govern it, to reconcile anomalies in what has been written, and to lay down rules for future composition, have occupied the labours of a multitude of grammarians for nearly twelve hundred years. European teachers have shown equal devotion to the form of the classic speech. Their pupils have been taught to make the study of its delicate mechanism precede even an acquaintance with the vocabulary, and many have been thus discouraged by the semblance of insurmountable difficulty. Yet a little inquiry on the subject reveals this singular phenomenon, that these desinences of the verb and noun, which are the principal study of the grammarians, are unused in ordinary speech throughout nearly all the Arabic-speaking world. This would not surprise us if the language had suffered any corresponding change in its internal structure if there were, in fact, a modern and an ancient Arabic, and the desinences had been abandoned with other properties of the old tongue. But this view would be fallacious. There is really no such thing as a modern Arabic language. Certain words may have dropped out of use, or have slightly changed their

signification, and the excessive redundancy of the vocabulary may have been limited by modern custom: but between the earliest Arabic verses which have come down to us and the cultivated language of the present day, there is absolutely no grammatical difference. Everything that is written or that is uttered with any rhetorical intention by an educated man in Damascus or Cairo in our time is identical to the most minute point with the language of the Koran, and the learned man is able to speak on occasion with every delicacy of the classic tongue. Yet not only now, but from the age immediately succeeding the first conquests of the Saracens, the desinences have been omitted by the multitude even of those of pure Arab extraction. In Syria, in Irak, in El jezireh or Mesopotamia, and still more in Africa and Spain, the people, as soon as they were removed from the classic influence of the desert, dropped the elaborate inflections of the language of Modar. The corruption extended even beyond this, and it is said that as early as the close of the first century of the Hijra, the powerful Khalif El Welid ibn Abd el Melik spoke so incorrectly that he could not make himself understood by the Arabs of the desert. But in the general disuse of the desinences, even by those who otherwise spoke grammatically, I cannot but see a sign that they represent something adventitious and almost artificial in the language, while in its substance it is identical with the great body of Semitic speech.

In their close relation with each other these languages are kept by the strength of their most remarkable characteristic, the triliteral root. Respecting the mental or phonetic impulse which caused a race to embody its conceptions in words made up of three consonantal sounds to which other

sounds prefixed, affixed, or inserted within gave the necessary modifications, it is useless to speculate: this much, however, is clear, that it was a general and irresistible tendency, and that words which in the most archaic form of the language were monosyllabic, and consisted of two consonants, were gradually trilaterized either by the affixion of a third consonant, which is often variable, or by the doubling of the second consonant, or by the insertion of a vowel sound between them, making the so-called concave or hollow verb. Sooner or later the whole body of the roots was affected with this trilaterity, and even foreign words were broken and recast in this normal form, or in quadrilaterals of analogous structure. When the trilateral system was complete, the unity of the Semitic languages was for ever decided. The limits within which they could vary were fixed, and these were necessarily narrow. Where the three main consonants of each word must be retained under all circumstances of modification, and constitute its indestructible substance, there is no longer the possibility of essential variation. It is, moreover, remarkable that the Arabic, which has been destined to survive all the other Semitic languages, and in a manner to include them all, is the most exact in its maintenance of the sanctity of the root. There are in Hebrew many signs of phonetic negligence, and the root appears worn and triturated in the mouths of the people, even in the earliest records that have come down to us. But in Arabic, probably from the more energetic pronunciation of the race, it remains clear and sharp as if moulded in adamant. For these reasons we hear from the mouths of millions at the present day a language which does not fundamentally differ from the oldest Semitic speech of which we have knowledge. The common

household words of the modern Arab are not only similar to but are identical with those of the ancient Hebrew; and it is not too much to say, that an Israelite of old and an Arab Sheykh of our own time would be mutually intelligible in the expression of simple wants. I have been led to dwell, I hope not with exaggeration, on this fundamental unity of the Semitic languages in order to suggest that Arabic is not to be looked upon as a mere outlandish tongue, to be studied only by professed Orientalists, or by persons who have a Levantine or Indian career before them, but as the most perfect and elaborate form of a speech which in its other varieties has always been considered necessary to the complete education of scholars and churchmen, and which is important, I may say necessary, for the full comprehension even of the Hebrew Scriptures.

It would, however, be unwise to conceal from the student, that in approaching the Arabic language he must prepare to surmount many difficulties. The greatest and most abiding of these, for it is never wholly overcome, arises from the immense number of words which claim a place in it. Years of labour may not secure him from meeting with one or sometimes two or three words in a single line of poetry which he cannot recollect to have seen before, or for which he must seek a different meaning from that which they ordinarily bear. This excessive redundancy arises in part from a minuteness of discrimination which was instinctive among the ancient Arabs and which led them to describe a single object by distinctive names or epithets, according to the most trifling variations of its qualities. Thus a camel had appellations according to every accident of age, stature, colour, breed or use; and these, though originally of the nature of epithets,

are used alone, and their peculiar signification being often lost they become simply synonyms of the name camel. A horse was similarly distinguished; a lion, a sword, a beautiful woman had innumerable synonyms. This, however, is intelligible, and there is something like it in every language. Less so is the variety of expressions allotted to one kind of action. I will only cite a single instance.. The notion of the miraculous transformation of a human being into another creature is expressed by four nearly related roots. A transformation into another man is *neskh*; into a beast, *meskh*; into a plant, *feskh*; into an inanimate, unincreasing object, as a stone or a log of wood, *reskh*. But a more prolific source of this multiplicity is perhaps to be found in the variety of the tribes which contributed to the formation of the literary language. It is well known that each of these had peculiar words and phrases which were unknown to its neighbours, so that even a poet who declaimed before a company of strangers might be interrupted with a demand that he would explain or defend some word that he had used. After the victories of Islam there was a fusion of the vocabularies of the tribes, as well as of the tribes themselves, in the conquered countries, and the words which were thrown into this common stock served as the material for future compositions. The literary pedantry that soon sprang up among the Moslems, and for generations infected the polite societies of Damascus and Bagdad, Basra and Cufa, tended to increase the evil of an excessive idiom. Language was studied \ for its own sake rather than for the thoughts of which it was / the vehicle. The men of letters delighted in the wilderness \ of speech amid which they lived, and were careful to encourage I its rankest vegetation. They did indeed confer an inestimable ‘

benefit on literature by preserving the noble poems of the pre- Islamic period, and by commenting them according to the explanations which they received from Arabs of chaste speech. But in their own compositions they sought to show their knowledge by the use of rare and obsolescent words they had discovered. . A name or phrase, which was perhaps to be found only in a single poem, the unique utterance of some son of the desert, was adopted and multiplied by the artificial imitators of the ancient style. Yet the learner ought not to be unduly discouraged, even though he seems to be launched forth on a vast and chartless sea of diction. The Arata their Lexicon the Kámús, or Ocean, and he will in time discover that to have thoroughly explored it is the fortune of a very few, even of the most learned Sheykhs. There are writers, even in the present decline of Eastern letters, who still pride themselves on their knowledge of the Arabic vocabulary: who, with laborious ingenuity, compose with the sole intention of grouping the rarest words they can find in the voluminous dictionaries of the East, or in pagan verses more or less authentic. Such a man is Fáris esh Shidiák, who some years since published a book of which the French title is, ' La Vie et les A ventures de Fariac containing much curious learning, but bristling With words which would be unintelligible but for the context. He has his reward in the admiration of those who are faithful to the ancient studies, and I have heard it said by a learned Syrian that Nasíf el Yázaji of Beyrout is a greater grammarian than Fáris esh Shidiák, but that Fáris knows more words than Nasíf.

The second great difficulty of the Arabic language is the i'ráb, or Arabization, of which mention has been already made, and which is superadded in the classic tongue to the

sufficiently complicated internal changes which affect the structure of the words. The delicacy and precision of this desinential syntax is one of the chief beauties of the language, and gives it a marked pre-eminence over its sisters. It would be useless here to enter into any disquisition concerning the origin of the desinences, or the comparative antiquity of the various forms of Semitic speech. I may, however, state my belief that the Aramæic, which retains much of the monosyllabic character, represents a more primitive type, from which the plentifully vowelled and euphonious Arabic is a graceful development. And this may be the case even though it be proved that in many of its grammatical forms the Arabic preserves for us an older tradition. We find it a settled law in Arabic that a syllable cannot begin with two consonants: in other words, there can be no $\Psi\Gamma\aleph$, a short vowel being always interposed between the two consonants. This abhorrence of rugged sounds has, I think, much to do with the birth of the desinences, which not only introduce precision into the syntax, but lighten the pronunciation and make the language more fitting for the purposes of rhetoric and poetry. Indeed, it is impossible to hear a piece of Arabic read with and without the desinences and not feel the transcendent superiority of the former, and understand the pride with which the master of such a language would regard his precious inheritance. In sound there is as much difference as exists between the mellifluous Tuscan and the most rugged Romanic dialect of the Alps, while the syntax gives accuracy to the phrase without recourse to those particles and expletives which make their appearance in the vulgar Arabic dialects.

All that we can say with certainty of the I'ráb is that we find it complete, with all its delicate and learned flexions,

as the possession of the tribes of the Hejáz and of Nejd, at the time of the great awakening to intellectual life which preceded by about a century the predication of Mohammed. This, indeed, is not to say much; but what more can we reasonably assert of a race to which the age of Augustus is prehistoric, and that of Constantine still mingles itself with legend? The notion of an ancient Arabic literature, of which some fragments are said to have come down to us, is, or ought to be, quite exploded. The Arabs, for instance, have preserved what they say is the lament of Amr, son of El Hâarith, son of Modád the Jorhomi, who was expelled from Mecca and from the care of the Ka'beh, and forced to take refuge in Yemen at some remote time. Albert Schultens believed this Amr to have been contemporary with Solomon, and published the verses among his *Monumenta Vetusiora Arabiae*, as '*Carmen Salamonis setatem attingens.*' But he probably did not know that the Moslem men of letters were among the most unscrupulous and shameless of forgers, and were in the constant habit of placing snatches of poetry in the mouths of the heroes whose deeds they chronicled. The piece in question is in regular metre, determined by the quantity of syllables after the manner of Latin or Greek, and there is reason to believe that this more elaborate form of poetry was introduced at no early period. The conclusion to which we are forced to come is, that these verses were probably composed by some versifier under the Khalifs, when the old legends of the people were digested into a regular historical chronicle. But of the prevalence of the i'rab among the tribes of pure speech for several generations before Islam there can be no doubt. Very little examination is requisite to show that the germ of it exists in the other

Semitic languages: thus, though in the Hebrew verb לָעַד the last radical is without a vowel, a vowel appears for the easing of the pronunciation when the verb is combined with one of that is, with the accusative suffixes it becomes *k^etālā-nī* *k^etālā-hu*. with the suffixes to the as *yikt^elē-nī*. With respect to the noun, traces of the three cases are also to be discerned. But, leaving these nice inquiries, it is enough to say that among the unlettered Arabs of the fifth and sixth centuries of our era a language was spoken identical with that which is preserved in the Koran, in the Mo'allakat or prize poems said to have been suspended in the Ka'beh for their especial excellence, and in all the other authentic compositions which have come down to us. This classic speech in all its purity is universally admitted to have been the possession of the sons of Modar. Modar was the son of Nizâr, the son of Ma'add, the son of 'Adnân, and he begat Elyâs, who begat Tábikhah and Mudrikeh, and so the traditional genealogy is continued through Fihri, who is also called Koraysh, from whom sprung the most exalted of all the tribes in the opinion of Moslems, since it had the honour of producing the Prophet. Now this group of tribes, (for each man in the descent becomes the founder of a new family,) was with other kindred tribes, among which they held a kind of primacy, established in the Hejáz and Tihámeh, the region of Mecca and Medina, and also in Nejd or the high land of central Arabia, at the time when the earliest extant Arabic literature was produced. There can be no doubt that these spoke with all the grammatical inflections. The poetry of the period is a sufficient proof. This is composed in regular metres, which require for their scansion a rigid observance of the desinences. If read without them, it loses entirely the character of verse. Now,

the poets were for the most part wholly ignorant of the art of writing. They declaimed their compositions before the multitude, and the most admired of these were committed to memory by their contemporaries, and especially by a class of reciters who went from place to place and gained their living by repeating them. Therefore, even if we admit that there is something not strictly essential to the language in the desinences, we must guard ourselves from the opinion that they were a mere literary ornament, much less, a some unsound European scholars have suggested, a device of the early Moslem grammarians to give precision to the Koran. Koráash was the tribe and Mecca was the city which presented the model of this classic speech. Himyar, that is, the tribes of south-western Arabia, had a more simple inflection, the noun being diptotic, as in some forms of the classic Arabic, such as certain of the plurals, and the proper names of foreign origin. But Koráash spoke beyond all doubt with the perfect i'rab as we now possess it. The surrounding tribes were also of pure speech. Ibn Khaldun tells us that many of the descendants of Modar lost the faculty of speaking the classic language by dwelling among people of other races. The descendants of Ma'add by Rabfah and Modar had in great part recognised the authority of the king of Hira, who was himself a vassal of the Persian monarch, and many of them had settled in the northern parts of the peninsula. Here they borrowed of their neighbours forms and words. For this reason, he says, the speech of Koraysh was the most eloquent and pure, since they were the most remote from the abodes of foreigners. Next in excellence was the speech of Thákif and Hodhayl, and Khozá'ah and the Benú Kináneh and the Benú Asad and the Benu Temfm. But as for the

tribes more remote from Koraysh—as Rabíah and Lakham and Iyyád and Kodáah and Jodhám and Ghassán and the Arabs of Yemen—their speech was imperfect through their . intermixture with Persians or Abyssinians. It is therefore a settled opinion, that the greater or less distance of a tribe from Koraysh was the measure of its deflection from the pure language of Modar.

To this cultivated language Islam gave complete supremacy. Mohammed's revelations were couched in it, and though the Prophet never versified, the rhythm of the Koran is indebted to the inflections for much of its beauty. The Meccan emigrants who gathered round the founder of Islam became the chiefs of a monarchy, which in a century after the Hijra extended from the Indus to the Pyrenees. But it soon appeared that the classic dialect of Koraysh was beyond the faculties of the rude tribes which had been brought under the dominion of the Khalifs. From the very morrow of the death of the Prophet difficulties arose respecting the true readings of the Koran and when a number of those who knew it by heart were slain in the campaign against an adverse prophet, known as Museylimeh the Liar. Omar counselled Abu Bekr to have a standard copy written. The recension which is now in use was made by order of the Khalif Othman, who then ordered all discrepant manuscripts to be destroyed; but the new copies gave but the simple words, without any signs of orthography or syntax. The misreadings of this imperfect text were shocking to the ears of the orthodox and zealous companions of the Prophet. It is a tradition that the Khalif Ali, the most accomplished of the Arabs and the author of poems still extant, heard a man quote from the Koran with a perversion of the desinence which changed the meaning

of the sacred text from ‘ God is clear from the sin of the idolaters, and his prophet (is clear from it),’ to ‘ God is clear from the sin of the idolaters and of his prophet/ Ali then suggested that rules should be made for the expression of the inflections in writing, and for the determination of the exact reading of the Koran and Arabic speech in general. He was seconded by able men who knew well the tongue of Koraysh, and thus arose the first school of grammarians, who not only fixed the classic language as we now have it, but founded an elaborate science which has exercised the ingenuity and subtlety of generations more than any study in the encyclopaedia of Islam.

It is this classic language, on the principles of this original grammar, which it is the office of a Professor of Arabic to expound. On this subject I must be allowed to give a decided opinion. I believe that for one who desires a real knowledge of the Arabic language and literature it is not sufficient to study the grammar as transformed, or rather travestied, by those European writers who have striven to wrest it to the forms and relations of the Latin. Their purpose has been to make it more familiar and comprehensible, and they have taken for granted that the principles to which they were accustomed must be universal, and applicable to all languages. But the Arabic syntax presents divergences from the Latin or Greek, which necessitate a system and nomenclature of its own, and the grammarians I speak of can never inform the mind of the learner with clear ideas as long as they insist absolutely on the agreement of verbs with nouns, of adjectives with substantives, and divide the verb into moods after the fashion of the classic languages. Even the grammar of the modern European languages has

been somewhat perverted and falsified by such theories; how much more that of a tongue so peculiar and so independent of foreign influence as the Arabic! Grammar must be the exposition of a speech as it actually exists, and this depends on the mode in which a race conceives and expresses its ideas. The Arabic grammatical system, founded on a minute investigation of the idiosyncracies of the language, is exquisitely adapted to the thought of the people; and the study of it is the only means of perceiving the true relations of words in composition. Thus the inflections are particularly fitted to determine the meaning of phrases in such a speech as the Semitic, which has no long periods, nor even the apparatus for forming them, but consists of short propositions connected together by some vague copulative particle, as و or ف which serves to express meanings that are distributed in European language among a whole series of conjunctions. Thus, also, the theory of the inchoative and predicate, پس and پس the لوقيد and لوقيد of the Jewish grammarians, a theory which is one of the bases of Arabic grammar, suffices to give a common principle to a number of various forms of speech. If it were only, then, as an aid to a thorough knowledge of the language, I would counsel the • student, when his first difficulties are past, to go boldly to some standard Arabic grammar, such as the *Alfiyeh* of Ibn Malik with the commentary of Ibn 'Akfl, using Silvestre De Sacy's celebrated work as a key to the Eastern author. But there is a still further necessity for this study. Grammar among the Arabs is more than the handmaid of composition. It has been studied for its own sake, and indeed seems to have been almost the only original production of the Arab intellect. It is so unique in its conceptions that we cannot conceive it to have

borrowed from anything that preceded it, and indeed the system is known historically to have been complete in all its essential parts before the Moslems began to receive Greek culture. The first division of the parts of speech into the noun *ism*, the verb *fa I*, and the particle *harf*, is attributed to the Khalif Ali, and the fancy of the learned soon seized upon grammatical ideas with extraordinary avidity. Grammatical disquisitions formed one of the chief amusements of the people. In the courts of the Khalifs, at Damascus and then at Bagdad, the most subtle questions were discussed by the literary in the presence of the Commander of the Faithful, and even the slave girls who sang before the guests were able to parse the lines they recited, using all the technical terms of the science, and declaring on what authority they used such or such an inflection, or preferred one form of the plural to another. I may here relate the story of Sibawayh, one of the most famous of the grammarians, a Persian who visited the court of Bagdad in the reign of Harun Alraschid. A contest had raged between the schools of Basra and Cufa concerning the use of the *raf* and *nasb*, or, as we should call them, the nominative and accusative case of the noun, in certain positions. Sibawayh took one side; El Kisaí, a grammarian of Cufa, the other. One day, in the presence of the Khalif, Sibawayh put a question on the subject to his opponent, and after a dispute the Khalif ordered that a reference should be made to an Arab of the desert. It was the custom to send for men of the tribes of pure speech, often soldiers or grooms, and to lead them in conversation to utter the doubtful word or phrase, not asking them a direct question, which might have confused them, they being ignorant men. Whatever might be determined by their unsophisticated,

unpremeditated utterance was looked upon as authoritative. In this case El Kisa'i, by the help of the Khalif's son El Amin, who was his pupil, contrived that some men of a tribe of impure speech should be sent for, and their utterance was in favour of El Kisa'i's assertion. Sibawayh angrily departed from Bagdad, and, according to one account, he would not return to Basra discredited, but repaired to Ahwaz, where he made inquiry if there were any prince with a fondness for grammar. He was recommended to Talhat ibn Tahir, of Khorasan, and set out for his court, but died on the way, some say of grief. It is related that a pupil of Sibawayh, indignant at the conduct of El Kisa'i, sought him out, and put to him a hundred grammatical questions, convicting him of a mistake in every answer. The point which this enthusiasm for the subtleties of grammar had reached in a later age, is indicated in the Assemblies of Hariri, still the most popular book among the learned of the East; but, in truth, it is impossible to read even the Thousand-and-One Nights without falling upon instances of the prevalence of this pursuit. The terms of grammar are introduced into love poems, and they are even played upon in indelicate jests and witticisms. A study of the niceties of speech was the most esteemed pursuit of the Arabic-speaking Moslem, and brought with it higher consideration even than proficiency in divinity or law. The word which expresses this technical literary culture came to be synonymous with the education of a gentleman.

Assuming then that the student desires to obtain a real knowledge of the classical Arabic, and with that purpose has the courage to investigate the principles of its structure in the works of the native grammarians, it remains to direct his attention to the literature which will be opened to him as the

reward of his perseverance. Here, indeed, his researches must be determined by the bent of his own mind, or the purposes to which he may intend to apply his knowledge. He may desire to study the Moslem law for its practical usefulness in the East; he may be curious concerning the influence of the Arabian philosophy and science on Christendom during the Middle Ages; he may be an investigator of history, and wish to draw the materials for a knowledge of the relations of Western Asia with Europe from sources not generally sought. To give a sketch of the voluminous literature of the Arabian writers in a single lecture would be impossible, even if I had the learning for the task. Philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine were taken by our forefathers from the Arabian schools; the Aristotle which was taught in the Universities four centuries since, was not the Greek text of that philosopher, but a compilation founded on the commentary of Averroes; the names of the stars, of chemical instruments or substances, even the word algebra, and the use of the decimal notation bear witness to the activity of the Arabian teachers and their influence on the Christian nations. The names of Avicenna, Aben Pace, Rhazes, and many others are widely known as those of the most successful seekers after knowledge at a time when darkness overspread the Latin and Teutonic nations; and it is recorded that even a Pope, the learned Gerbert, afterwards Sylvester II, studied in the Moorish schools of Spain. But this learning has been long superseded by the larger teachings of modern science. Those works of the intellect which need chiefly the more sober faculties of man, judgment, penetration, industry, perseverance, are destined to neglect. The reward of their authors is to bear an honoured name among those who have

advanced the knowledge and happiness of mankind; but the productions themselves live only as undistinguishable elements in the compositions of those who come after, and who enlarge and transform

the sphere of science. A similar fate awaits the labours of those who are learned in an unprofitable learning, the scholastics and metaphysicians, who, neglecting the phenomena of nature and the events of life, construct systems on the processes of their own minds, or of some text whose absolute authority they take for granted. The literature of the kalam, or scholastic theology of the Moslems, fills innumerable volumes, and some acquaintance with it is necessary for a due comprehension of their history. The more practical commentaries on the Koran, and the treatises on law, which with them is founded on the sacred text, may be read with profit by the advanced student, but in all these he must expect to find much that is at once wearisome and frivolous, and that gives no due reward to his labours. The works of real genius, however, are ever fresh and young, and their light structure floats on the stream of time, when the ponderous barks, freighted with the accumulations of the learned, are one by one engulfed. After the Arabian mind has been exercised by centuries of authorship, a professor of the language is compelled to declare that the works in which an European student will find most pleasure are the poems of the unlettered Arabs of the Ignorance, that is, of the period which preceded the advent of Mohammed. These, which, though individually short, make up in their entirety a considerable mass, should be read with care by whoever desires to understand the primitive spirit of the people. Here there is nothing artificial, nothing of that tasteless and puerile

extravagance which we associate with Oriental composition. The primitive Arab, like the Hebrew, had a chaste and classic genius; there is nothing monstrous and elephantine in his conceptions; nor, on the other hand, is he infected with the odious taste for artifices and conceits which distinguishes the authors of a later age.

The most simple and primitive form of poetical diction is what is called *seja* or cadence, that is, a rhymed prose, consisting of short unmetrical sentences having the same desinence. The versicles which have been handed down as the utterances of soothsayers and wizards are generally in this style. In the legend of the breaking of the dyke of Mareb in Yemen, the event which led to the great dispersion of the southern tribes, the sorceress Zarifeh is made to speak in rhymed prose. When the two deformed soothsayers Shikk and Satih interpret the dream of Rabf at ibn Nasr. and predict the birth of the Prophet, they use the same primeval speech; and it is often placed by the chroniclers in the mouths of the women of the tribes, while the men are made to declaim in metrical verse. But, as has been said, the regular *Jcaqideh* of the Arabs with its perfect prosody is found already in existence more than a century before the preaching of Mohammed. The first who composed a regular poem is said to have been Adi, called Mohalhil, who thus lamented the murder of his brother Kolayb, the chief of the tribe of Rabf ah, and the most powerful prince in Arabia. This event took place, probably, in the last ten years of the fifth century after Christ. Before that time poetry had only been declaimed by each man according to his needs; in other words, it consisted of a few lines improvised on occasion, and addressed to the tribe in counsel, to the enemy on the

battle-field, to the shade of a slain friend, to the judge who had to decide some question of honour or precedence, to the mistress who had been carried away by her family or had preferred a rival. The passion for poetry seized the most cultivated tribes, and there was scarcely a chief or a hero who did not declaim upon occasion. The most celebrated name among the poets of the Ignorance is that of Imr el Kays the Kindi, who is believed to have visited Constantinople in the early years of Justinian. It was probably he who gave the Jcameh the form which it retained for centuries. In the verses of this type the poet is supposed to arrive with two friends on the site of a deserted encampment, and to lament the disappearance of his mistress, who has been carried off by her tribe. He then passes to his feats in love or war, describes the noble form and high spirit of his horse, the fleet pace of his camel, his sharp and glittering sword, his perils and his sufferings. Nothing can exceed the vigour of each description : the fiery soul of the poet glows through his declamations, and the free life of the desert is depicted for us with a few marvelous touches. Such were the poems recited at the yearly fair of 'Okaz, near Mecca, on the territory and under the presidency of the Koraysh, who, although they were not distinguished in poetry themselves, held as the guardians of the Ka'beh the highest position among the Arah tribes. Several of these poems bear the title of Mo'a11ak£t, or the Suspended, and common tradition derives the name from their having been suspended in the Holy House by reason of their surpassing excellence. The seven which are commonly received as Mo'allakat have been edited in Germany by F. R. Arnold, and are easily accessible. The first Mo'allakah is that of Imr el Kays, of whom mention has been made; the second

is that of Tarafeh, a youthful and profligate poet, who was murdered when only twenty years old. The subject is the loss of a herd of camels belonging to himself and his brother, which was carried off while Tarafeh was passing his time in pleasure. Another was declaimed by El Harifeh, son of Hil-lizeh, before 'Amr, son of Hind, the king of Hira. Some men of the tribe of Taghlib having been wilfully led astray by the men of Bekr, so that they perished of thirst in the desert, the men of Taghlib claimed the price of blood. The matter was referred to king 'Amr, and each side sent an orator. The orator of Bekr provoked the king, so that the king would not hear him; and the matter was about to be decided against the tribe, when Hárith stepped forward and began to declaim. He was so leprous that his people covered him with a veil, that he might not offend the sight of the king. Leaning on a bow, which pierced through his hand without his perceiving it in his poetic fury, he improvised the defence of Bekr. As he proceeded, the king was so charmed that he bade him lift the veil, and when he had ended 'Amr placed him by his side on the royal seat. Some say that the Mo'allakah of 'Amr, son of Kulthum, was declaimed on the opposite part at this contest: it is a fiery and exulting panegyric on his own tribe of Taghlib, and worthy of the warrior who afterwards struck the king dead for a trifling insult, and gave rise to the proverb, As swift to slay as 'Amr ibn Kulthum I will mention only one more Mo'allakah, that of 'Antarah, or Antar, son of Shedd&d, the chief hero of Arabian romance. He was not of pure Arab blood, his mother having been an Abyssinian slave, so that he was one of the Aghjnbeh, or Crows, of the Arabs, that is, a warrior of dark skin, of whom several were famous. Nor was he handsome, for his mouth was deformed.

and he was known by the name of 'Antarah of the Split Lip. But he performed prodigies of valour, and his adventures have been made the subject of the most voluminous of Eastern romances, portions of which are still recited by persons who are called *natireh*, or Recounters of the Adventures of 'Antar. This Mo'allakah was inspired by his love for his cousin 'Ableh, whose family were unwilling that she should marry the son of a slave, and who, in consequence, imposed on 'Antarah the most perilous adventures.

From these slight indications, the nature of the early Arabic poetry will be sufficiently understood. Not only did chiefs and warriors compose, but there was a class of vagabonds, outcasts, and robbers gifted with poetic genius, whose verses have come down to us. Foremost among these 'Desert-devils/ as they were called, was Shanfara, the author of the *Lamiyet el Arab*, that is, a poem of which the rhyme is the letter I. He was a vagabond of the tribe of Azd, and lived in the utmost misery and squalor. He celebrates his filth, his tattered garb, his matted and vermin-infested hair, with the same exulting energy with which he tells of his speed of foot and the perils of his wild life. He vowed to kill one hundred of the Benu Salâman. Whenever he met one of them he exclaimed, 'To thine eye P and he shot his arrow with such skill that he always pierced the eye of his foeman. Thus he slew ninety-nine; but at last Asid ibn Jâbir, one of the hostile tribe, and himself a famous runner, together with his brother's son, Khazim the Nokmi, lay in wait for him. His enemies tortured and killed him; but some time after, one of them, seeing the mouldering body, gave the head a kick, and a piece of the skull breaking off fixed in his foot, of which wound he died. Thus after death did Shanfara kill

his hundredth enemy. Ta'abhata Sherran was another of this race, and some verses which are attributed to him tell of his wanderings in the desert, and of his meetings with the dreaded Ghul, the demon of the wilderness.

After Islam the fine poetic spirit of the Arabs passes away. The Prophet himself had no love for the poets, many of whom reviled him, and his highest praise of the gifted Imr el Kays was, that he would lead the band of the poets to hell. Yet he knew well the power of poetry among the tribes, and rewarded the poets of his party, whose victories over the unbelieving declaimers were often the cause of numerous conversions. The chief of these laureates of Islam was Hassân ibn Thâbit,, who was looked upon as the greatest city-born poet of his age. The Arabs believed the natives of towns to have less of the poetic spirit than the desert-born, and there is certainly less of life and vigour in their conceptions. Yet Hassan vanquished the sons of Temim in a mufdkharah, or 'strife of honour having praised the Prophet and his followers with more splendid eloquence than was displayed by Oterid, son of Hajib, and Zibrik&n, son of Bedr, the poets of Teimm. Another of the Moslem poets was Kab ibn Zohayr, whose poem, called the Burdeh, or Mantle, is still extant. He recited his kasideh in the mosque before the Prophet, and when he came to the words, 'Truly the Prophet is as a sword drawn by God Mohammed, delighted, cast his mantle upon him. This mantle was afterwards bought by the Khalif Mu'âwiyeh for twenty thousand dirhems, and was worn by his successors on the two great feast days of the year. It is said to be the same which is yearly exhibited to the faithful at Constantinople. After the generation which listened to these poets had passed away, a great change came over the mind of the

Arabs. The Koran itself seems to foreshadow it. The earlier Suras, composed at Mecca when Mohammed's zeal was new and made more fierce by persecution, are sublime and vivid, and show a high order of ; lyric genius. They are not in verse, but in rhymed periods of the nature of the *seja* of which I have spoken. But when the enthusiast of Mecca is changed into the Prince of Medina, the spirit of the composition is sensibly lowered. The style is more flat and prolix, the celestial voice is employed on wearisome invective, the revelation concerns itself with petty details, the motives suggested are less lofty, and the argument is trivial and barren. The influence of an infallible book, and of a religion of rigid and never-ceasing observance; still more, the direction of the energy of the race to foreign conquest, were unfavourable to the free poetical spirit of the Arabs. Within the space of a lifetime the character of the composition was completely changed, and before the first century of the Hijra had closed, the poet Farazdak had introduced antitheses and conceits into poetry, and the first germs of corruption were implanted in the tastes of the people. The language, too, is recognised as less pure, and this theory of the degeneracy of their speech is carried" so far by the learned Arabs that they will not admit any one to be an absolute authority on the use of words or on grammatical mechanism except a *Jdhili* or poet of the Ignorance, that is, one who died before the preaching of Islam, or else a *Mukhadram*, that is, one who was contemporary with it. An *Islami*, that is, a poet of the first three or four generations of Islam, is of less consideration; and after this age the poets are called *modem*, and have no linguistic authority.

Yet poets of great genius arose in successive ages. The highest place in Arabic literature is given by some *Abú't Tàib*

Ahmed, known as El Mutenebbi, that is, 'The pretender to prophecy/ who flourished in the tenth century of our era. His natural genius was of the highest order, and if he had lived in an earlier age his poetry would have rivalled the Mo'allakat in noble simplicity. But his lot fell upon a time when the worst vices that can affect composition had invaded the Arabic style. The bent of his mind may be judged from the incident to which he owes his surname. In early manhood he went forth into the Syrian desert about Palmyra, and erected the standard of a Prophet, declaiming to the wild tribes, among whom he made many converts. He was defeated and taken prisoner but in the year 949 he repaired to the Court of Seyf ed Dowleh at Aleppo, and sang the praises of that prince. It is singular to find a poet full of the genius of battle, wild and gloomy by natural temperament, studding his grandly-conceived compositions with miserable conceits, and deliberately descending to the level of the worst versifiers of a Court. Another name which I must mention is that of Ibn el Farid, the mystic poet of Cairo, and the most celebrated Arabic writer of the school of the Sufis. This order or sect of Moslems, so called from the robe of wool {suf}_y worn by the first ascetics who belonged to it, has exercised the most powerful and enduring influence on the Arabic and Persian literatures. Ibn Farid devoted himself to religion, and seldom quitted the mosque El Azhar at Cairo, though tempted by an offer of the post of Chief Cadi of Egypt. He fell into trances which lasted days together, and while in this state he neither heard nor saw what passed around him. Yet, if we are to credit his biographers it was when entranced that he composed his loftiest poetry. The verses thus inspired are of that strange order which clothes heavenly conceptions with

the grossest material forms, which allegorizes the inflow of the divine Spirit under the name of wine, and makes sensual love typify the mystical union of the soul with God. Ibn el Fârid was born in the year 1181 of our era, and died in 1234; he is held in high estimation in the East, where he is placed in the same class as his contemporary, the Persian poet Jelâl ed dm Rúmí, the author of the *Mesnewi*, the greatest and most original work of the Sufi school.

It remains that I should treat of a subject not less important than any that has been mentioned—namely, the influence of Arabic on the other languages of the Moslem world. It is from this influence, or rather supremacy, that an advocate of the study of Arabic derives some of his strongest arguments. The power of the Mohammedan religion is so direct and absolute over its votaries, and so affects every act and relation of life that the idiom of the Koran must always be a second language for the followers of the Prophet. To this political and social pre-eminence were added for several generations after the preaching of Islam, and the tongues of the various nations subjected to the Khalifs were exposed to the irresistible and ceaseless action of a language which represented at once celestial and earthly dominion. The results have been almost without a parallel in history. Some languages have entirely disappeared, or remained only as the inheritance of remote and secluded tribes, and the Arabic has taken their place. In Africa it has vanquished every rival speech, from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. In Asia the Syrians were, a cultivated and quick-witted people. When the Arab conqueror imposed his yoke, they bowed in submission but not in despair. They soon began to exercise the influence which their higher civilization gave them over

their simple masters. They were the scribes and accountants of the early governors, and it is well known that the first knowledge the Moslems obtained of Greek letters was from translations made into Arabic by Syrian writers, often from existing Syriac translations. Add to this that Damascus was the first seat of the Khalifate, that Syria at the time of the Arab conquest was densely populated, full of magnificent and wealthy cities, and it would seem that the Syrians were in the best position for maintaining and even propagating their own variety of the Semitic speech. Yet the Arabic gradually prevailed. The literary industry of the Syrians did not prevent them from falling under the intellectual influence of the Moslems, and though we find them at first the masters, they appear in a later age as the pupils of the Arab men of letters. Even a work so peculiar as the Assemblies of Hariri was imitated in Syriac, as it was also in Hebrew for Jewish readers, who were affected by a similar influence. At last the voluminous Syriac literature comes to an end with the Chronicle of Barhebrseus, the Arabic language everywhere prevails, and at the present day all Aramaic speech has passed away except among some obscure Christian communities.

It was possible that the Persian nationality and speech might have been thus destroyed. But Iran had a genius of its own, a strong individuality, and the traditions of two periods of glory under the Achsemenian and Sassanian kings. The Persian has ever maintained some mental independence, the effects of which are to be seen in his divergence from the orthodox standard of Islam, and in a literature which in some respects shows more genius and fancy than that of the Arabs. The Persian language, though philologically degenerate, and with a simplicity of structure which verges on feebleness,

resisted long the invasion of the Arabic. The learned men of Persia were among the most devoted students of Arabic, and in the long list of writers in this language they appear more frequently than any other foreigners. But the people, and those who composed on popular themes, for a long time kept their language unadulterated. The Persian genius, overwhelmed by the first conquests of the Arabs, revived with the decline of the Khalifate and the virtual independence of the country under native princes of the houses of Saff&r, Saman, Bowaih, until a real Persian literature arose in the eastern provinces under the celebrated Mahmud of Ghazna. This literature displays a strong national spirit. Thus when we open the great epic of Pirdousi we find the pure speech of the Persians, with but the very smallest admixture of Arabic words. Even of * those which appear, it is probable that many had been naturalized in the Persian language at an early time, and not imposed by the conquests of Islam. It may be that the theme and the prepossessions of Firdousi made him studious of purity, and that he felt the old speech of his race to be the fittest to chronicle the wars of Iran and Turan, the grandeur of Feridun and Kai Khosru, and the heroic valour of Rustam. But in the early writers generally there is a comparative rarity of Arabic words and phrases. In course of time, however, the influence became too powerful to be resisted. The Persian language remained and flourished, but it was completely transformed. Every writer thought himself at liberty not only to introduce Arabic words on occasion, but to mingle in his composition entire phrases from the venerated language. In fact you may have a Persian sentence in which every important word is Arabic, nothing remaining of the original language but the gram-

matical structure—the setting, as it were, of the vocables. The most esteemed poets introduce Arabic verses into their pieces, looking on them as the highest ornament of style. The works of Sa*di cannot possibly be understood by one who is ignorant of Arabic. The great Sufi poets Fend ed din Attar and Jelal ed dm Rumi make free use of Arabic, which in fact furnishes nearly all the technical terms of Sufism. The odes of Hafiz are full of Arabic. Historical writing has not been less affected, and the ordinary language of life has fallen under the same influence. Hence it comes to pass that the knowledge of the modern literary Persian presupposes a knowledge of Arabic. The Persian authors wrote or recited for those who were perfectly acquainted with the tongue of the Koran, and the European who would understand them must perfect himself in the same study. He who attempts to learn the Persian as an independent language will never have more than a misty conception of it, however patiently he may labour. Not only words and sentences, but forms of composition, rhetoric, prosody, terms of theology, philosophy, science and art, and even the customary pious phrases of ordinary life, are taken from the Arabic. To the proficient in Arabic the modern Persian is the simplest and easiest of subjects, and the application of a very few months gives him a sufficient mastery over it. But an original study of the language is vain, except for the merest vernacular use.

Not less has been the influence of the Arabic on the language of the Turks. The cultivated dialect which is spoken and written at Constantinople, and which is known as the Osmanli, is a composite of three distinct languages, representing, singularly enough, three of the great races into which modern ethnologists have divided mankind. The

original stock is the Turkish, a Turanian speech of great vigour and power, as well as of remarkable euphony, and constructed on a system which excites the admiration of all philologers. But in cultivated conversation and writing this is overlaid by masses of Persian and Arabic, the latter being almost exclusively employed when any grave or lofty subject demands a learned vocabulary. The Turks had not the genius to develop their own remarkable language: they first incorporated the cultivated Persian with its large admixture of Arabic into their speech, and then they Arabicized still further for themselves. The Hindustani, which seems to be called to high destinies in Asia, is a language of the same class, an Indian grammar being associated with a vocabulary which borrows largely from the Arabic and Persian. In all these cases it is remarkable that the grammatical structure of the original speech maintains itself, as if this formed the true and essential individuality of the language.

The adoption of the Arabic alphabet by the nations which have come under the influence of Islam is a subject also worthy of notice. To the languages themselves it has been certainly a misfortune. The Arabic alphabet is exquisitely suited to its own language, the properties of which it defines with the utmost accuracy. Thus the sounds which the other Semites confused, or at least expressed by a single character, are in Arabic clearly discriminated; as ح and ع, خ and غ, ص and ض. The Orthographical system also, though undoubtedly defective, is not unsuited to the genius of the language, with its clearly defined root, and its forms of strict regularity. Thus in Hebrew or Arabic when we see a word we commonly know what vowels to supply, because the consonants themselves indicate its form. We can perceive how

the Arab too the Jewish grammarians failed even to form a conception of a vowel in our sense of the word, and treated a vocal sound as a consonant affected merely with a certain intonation or motion, But when an exclusively consonantal writing is applied to languages which have no such regularity, and in which a word cannot be expressed as it were by a formula, endless ambiguity and progressive corruption of the true original sounds of the language are the result. What would have been the fate of the Greek language if the Greeks, on adopting the Phoenician alphabet, had written with consonants only ? Happily they did otherwise, and we find that though the Greek alphabet is identical with

