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No. 40

THE
A R A B S

BY
H. A. R. GIBB

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THE Arab world described in this pamphlet, and surveyed region by region, stretches from the south-eastern corner of Arabia, where the coastline of Oman faces Karachi, less than 500 miles across the Arabian Sea, to the Atlantic seaboard of Morocco on the north-western flank of Africa; a distance, from east to west, of nearly 5,000 miles. In Asia it includes Arabia proper, Iraq, Syria, Palestine¹, and Transjordan; in Africa it includes Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. The total area is some 3,300,000 square miles, considerably greater than that of the U.S.A. The total population is over 50 millions.

The author describes the effect of the impact of the West upon this huge cluster of Arab lands and the re-awakening of Arab self-consciousness and Arab Nationalism. 'Gone is the lethargy, the political apathy, the calm acceptance of good and evil as the Will of God. From end to end the Arab world is in travail.'

H. A. R. Gibb is Professor of Arabic in the University of Oxford and the author of several standard works on Arabic history, culture, and literature. He edited the symposium 'Whither Islam ?' (Gollancz, 1932).

¹ See Oxford Pamphlet No. 31, *Palestine*, by James Parkes.

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I. The Psychological Background

THE Arabs are a people clustered round an historical memory. Over thirteen hundred years ago the Prophet Mohammed preached a religion of monotheism to the townsmen and tribes of Western Arabia. In 622 he founded a tiny state at Medina. Within eighty years the armies of that state had spilled over the whole of Western Asia up to the mountains of Afghanistan and across North Africa to the Atlantic. Wherever they went, they founded colonies which imposed their language, their racial consciousness, and to a large extent their religion, on the conquered peoples; and from their fusion (though some resisted fusion) a new and greater Arab nation was born. To the question 'Who are the Arabs?' there is—whatever ethnographers may say—only one answer which approaches historic truth: all those are Arabs for whom the central fact of history is the mission of **Mohammed and the memory of the Arab Empire** and who in addition cherish the Arabic tongue and its cultural heritage as their common possession.

Until little more than a hundred years ago the Arab peoples subsisted on this heritage of medieval Moslem culture. By its balance, balance social and economic interests and the religious sanction which they had acquired, the old "Moslem system fostered a sense of well-being and a rather apathetic attitude towards politics and questions of government. Although the vitality of the system was gradually diminishing, **there was 30 incentive to changes**

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which might disturb the social harmony. Living in the traditional way^jn^their self-contained world, the Arabs knew nothing of the political and economic evolution of Europe, and still thought of the Franks* as a barbarian nation beyond the pale, infidels to whom the Sultan had condescended to grant trading privileges in their cities.

It was consequently with a sense of shock and outrage that they witnessed and suffered the intrusion of Europe. From the west and from the east the 'Franks' encircled the Arab countries. They imposed their will upon Sultans and upon lesser princes and chiefs. 'Frankish' armies intervened in their wars, 'Frankish' consuls, merchants, and colonists in their local affairs and economic life. From the Arab point of view, the nineteenth century is a tale of increasing European penetration, of increasing dislocation of the old order of things and, amongst the politically minded and the more educated, of bewildered effort to grasp the secret of Europe's success and turn it to account. But what hurt most of all was that the Moslem Arabs, who had always looked upon Islam as the ultimate revelation of truth and upon themselves as the pattern for other nations, were now for the first time thrown into contact with peoples who despised them and all that they stood for. In this, much more than in the political and economic revolution, lay the seeds of future conflict.

At first, the Western tide seemed to cany everything before it. While the great majority of the people were only dimly conscious of the changes

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taking place around them, new generations passed through schools organized and directed by Western agencies or on Western models, and entered into a public life whose institutions and ideals were almost wholly borrowed from the West. Above all, a new Arabic press spread the new ideas far and wide, and combined with the rapid increase of personal contacts with the West to form a new mentality, set against the background of the old social and religious tradition. However imperfectly the new institutions might work, especially in the territories still governed from Istanbul, there could be no going back to the old order in politics, at least.

But in the deeper things of the spirit the Western invasion, here as everywhere, brought about a conflict which has grown sharper with every decade. To the young, the active, the ambitious, the self-assertive, the seeker after novelty, and the reformer, the West opened up new vistas. Their impatience, their lack of experience, the contempt or hostility of some of them towards the old institutions, all these stirred up resentment; and a real and well-justified fear of the social and intellectual effects of westernization has succeeded so far in curbing the threatened revolution. A long and tenacious battle was engaged between the two philosophies, which, now in one shape, now in another, continues to play a vital part in the inner life of the Arab **peoples** and shows no signs of abating. But one thing **was** and is shared by the partisans of both **causes**. **The coming of the West had shaken the Arabs out**

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of their long medieval lethargy. Slowly at first, but with increasing force and in ever-widening range, the national consciousness revived to serve as rallying-point and inspiration in the effort to avoid complete surrender to the spiritual and material forces of the West.

II. The Human Elements

The area of Greater Arabia has suffered little change since the conquests of the seventh century. From the Persian Gulf and the foot-hills of the Iranian mountains it extends westwards through Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria to Morocco and the Atlantic Ocean. At the height of their power the Arabs were masters also of Iran, Sicily, and most of Spain and Portugal. To-day only the Arabic-speaking (but not Arab) population of Malta remains to witness to their former sea power in the Mediterranean. In the Indian Ocean they founded colonies, which still exist, on the east coast of Africa and in the Dutch East Indies. But the only effective extension of Arab territory in the last thousand years has been into the northern Sudan.

A peculiar feature common to all the Arab lands is that they are bounded by deserts, which often separate them from one another. It is perhaps largely for this reason that the Arabs as a whole are pictured in the popular imagination as Bedouins, that is to say, as camel-rearing nomads. But in truth the Arabs are divided—and so far as we know have always been divided—into two main social

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groups: the settled townsmen and the nomad herdsmen, with a fluctuating intermediate body of cultivators, half settled and half nomadic. It is not the nomad, but the townsman, who has in all ages guided the political destinies of the Arabs and been the standard-bearer of Arab culture. On rare occasions the energy of the Bedouins has been harnessed by the sagacity of political leaders, and they have played a valuable role as a reservoir of fresh forces counteracting the physical degeneration to which the settled Arab has often been exposed. But left to themselves they constitute an elemental force of destruction, always menacing the security and culture of the settled lands. The settled communities formed, as it were, oases of civilization, engaged in a perpetual struggle to maintain themselves against the ceaseless pressure and infiltration of the nomads and exposed to repeated fluctuations of fortune. And, broadly speaking, for several centuries prior to 1800 the nomads had steadily encroached on the settled lands, in some regions, such as Iraq and Algeria, destroying the works of civilization outside a few walled cities, in all sapping their economic strength and impoverishing their cultural life. The Ottoman Turkish Sultans, the suzerains of all the Arab lands (except Morocco) since the sixteenth century, could do little or nothing to arrest this process; the most that lay within their power—and this they did—was to prevent the total relapse of Arab Asia and Egypt into barbarism.

It was only in the nineteenth century that the

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tide turned. The strong centralized government set up in Egypt by Mohammed Ali (1805-49) not only broke up the Bedouin confederations in the basin of the Nile but also the powerful nomadic empire of the Wahhabis in Arabia, which had threatened to overrun Iraq and Syria. A little later the Ottoman Government, with its new military forces organized on European models, took up the task of restoring the foundations of law and order in its Arab territories. The difficulties with which it was confronted were far greater than those in Egypt, and the means at its disposal were sadly insufficient, but it succeeded, even if only to a limited extent, in curbing the nomad and giving some security to the townsman and the cultivator. The measure of its achievement can be more fully appreciated when it is remembered how many years of labour, and what sacrifices in lives and treasure, it cost the far more powerful French Government to pacify and settle Algeria after its occupation in 1830. To the very end of Ottoman rule, however, the recovery of Arab Asia remained precarious, and it was not until the period after the war of 1914-18 that the menace of the nomad began definitely to recede.

When we take up our survey of the Arab countries region by region, therefore, we must bear in mind the paradox which every one of them presents in greater or less degree. All are heirs of a highly developed civilization, with a rich tradition of spiritual and intellectual culture, but all are emerging from a condition of political, economic, and even moral

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weakness. The problem which faces them all is to recreate a stable society. And in facing this problem the more far-sighted Arab statesmen have not forgotten that the restoration of ordered government—whether carried out by local authorities using European military and administrative methods, or by European powers directly—was in reality the first-fruits of the Western penetration.

Another feature of the Arab countries which has had important social and political consequences goes back to the methods and policy adopted by the conquering Arabs to the conquered peoples. The conquests were a national movement inspired by a religious faith. Those of the conquered who accepted Islam were for the most part gradually merged into the new and greater Arab nation. But some of the peoples in the remoter hill countries, though they were converted to Islam, retained their old speech and something of their old traditions and exclusiveness. The Kurds in the mountains to the north of the Mesopotamian plain, and the Berbers in the mountainous tracts of North-West Africa, have always remained distinct from the Arabs, although it would be an exaggeration to speak of a strong national consciousness amongst them. Secondly, those peoples who retained their old faiths, Christian or Jewish, continued to exist as 'protected' communities, enjoying on the whole a wide toleration. So, in every Arab country except Arabia, there survive to the present day racial or religious minorities, who are precluded from fully sharing those loyalties and convictions which, by

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the terms of our definition, constitute the foundation of Arab national consciousness.

But even amongst the Arabs themselves there exist other lines of division, whose origins and causes are intimately connected with the historical foundations of the Arab movement, and which are therefore the more resistant to well-meant efforts to heal the breach or seek a compromise. Outwardly, the division between Sunni and Shi'ite goes back to a dynastic quarrel over the political succession to the Prophet Mohammed. The Sunnis maintained the rightness of the historical order of succession—Abu Bekr, Omar, Othman, and then Ali; the Shi'ites maintained that Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, was the only legitimate successor and that the others were usurpers. But the quarrel perpetuated itself by developing into a religious schism, to produce at length different mentalities. Broadly speaking, Sunnism stood for the tolerant, compromising, Erastian outlook of established orthodoxy, while Shi'ism took on the character of a secretive and often intolerant sectarianism. The schism is still a live issue in Iraq, where the Shi'ite tribesmen and population of the towns of Najaf, Kerbela, and Kadhimayn actually outnumber the Sunnis, and in Arabia, where Shi'ism is the dominant power in the Yemen. In Syria the position is complicated by the survival of three separate communities, each professing a distinct form of heterodox Shi'ism—Druse, Nusairi, and Isma'ili—with peculiar local traditions and characteristics.

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Elsewhere in the Arab world Shi'ism is non-existent, but North-west Africa and Oman in Arabia still harbour remnants of another schism which broke out in the century after the death of Mohammed. The Kharijites ('Seceders') were an extreme militant and puritanical sect, who waged war on their more complaisant fellow-Moslems, and their present-day successors in the Algerian M'zab and in Oman are still distinguished by their puritanical habits and outlook. The Wahhabis of Central Arabia constitute in one sense an intermediate group between the orthodox Sunnis and the Kharijites, with whom, indeed, they were identified by the orthodox on their first appearance. But they claim to belong to a puritan movement of later origin which was reckoned one of the four 'schools' of orthodox Sunnism, and this claim has been allowed by other Moslems generally.

It is a delicate matter to assess the influence of such sectarian divisions upon the political and social problems of the Arab countries to-day. The extremer Nationalists either ignore or minimize them, and can point to many instances where followers of the different sects have united in demonstrations or political activities. But although unity of feeling on external questions is real and undeniable, it has only a secondary and indirect effect on the vital problem of internal stability. And in this connexion the doctrinal differences are infinitely less important than the inherited traditions, customs, and outlook which distinguish the various groups.

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| Country | Status | Area (sq. miles) | Population | Exports | | Imports | | Remarks |
|---------------|---|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---------|
| | | | | Annual Revenue (see note at foot) | 1937 (millions of gold dollars) | 1937 (millions of gold dollars) | 1937 (millions of gold dollars) | |
| EGYPT | Independent State in alliance with Great Britain | 383.000' | 1937 15,004,525 | 1930-40 L.E.40,594,800 | 115 6 | 111-a | ¹ of which only 13,600 are cultivated | |
| IRAQ | Independent State in alliance with Great Britain | 116,600 | 1935 3,560,456 | 1938-0 Dinars 5,795,530* | 163 | 27 9 | * exclusive of oil royalties (dinars 1,977,458) | |
| SYHIA-LHSANON | French mandated territories | 57,000 | 1938 3,342,000 | 1933 Fes. 551,147,180 | 250 | | | |
| PALESTINE | British mandated territory | 10,429 | 1933 1,435,285* | 1938-9 L.Pal. 5,937,280 | 170 | 46 4 | ² including about 400,000 Jews | |
| THANSJORDAN | Mandated territory in treaty relations with Great Britain | 34,740 | About 300,000 | 1938 L.Pal. 529,615* | | | ⁴ including a grant-in-aid from the Imperial Treasury | |
| SA'UDI ARABIA | Independent State | About 800,000 | About 4,500,000 | | | | | |
| YESMEN | Independent State | 75,000 | About 3,500,000 | | | | | |
| OMAN | Independent State in treaty relations with Great Britain | 82,000 | About 500,000 | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|--|
| LIBYA | Italian Colony | 677,000 | 1938 888,401* | 1939-40 Lire 600,115,000* | | | * including 89,098 Italian colonists • mainly grant-in-aid from the Italian Treasury |
| TUNISIA | French Protectorate | 48,300 | 1936 2,608,313 | 1940 Fes, 811,198,000 | 262 | 31*0 | |
| ALGERIA | French Territory | 847.500 | 1936 7.234.684' | 1940 Fca. 2.526,128,968 | 1023 | 06-8 | ⁹ including 987,252 European colonists |
| MOROCCO | French Protectorate | 153.870 | 1936 6,298,528 | 1939 Fca. 1,1^5,054,070 | 270 | 41*3 | |
| | Spanish Protectorate | 13.175 | 795.202 | Pes. 111,785,245 | 11 | 38 | |
| | International Zone | 225 | 60,000 | Fes. <u>29.795.000</u> | | | |

NOTE. The Palestinian pound and Iraqi dinar are at par with the pound sterling, and the Egyptian pound is worth sixpence more. At the end of 1939 the official rate for French francs was 1766 to the pound, for Italian lire about 78, and for Spanish peacças about 40.

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III. Egypt

Geography and history have combined to make the fortunes of the different Arab countries very unequal, and their inequality was enhanced, rather than lessened, during the nineteenth century, chiefly as a result of the varying intensity of the Western impact and of the local reactions to it. In two regions, Egypt and Lebanon, which were largely autonomous and in which Western influences were continuous and far-reaching, there was a rapid expansion of material and intellectual culture, and in both the seeds of nationalism had begun to bear fruit well before the end of the century. In the directly administered Arab provinces, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine, progress was limited by the slow and often reactionary methods of the Ottoman Empire, and Western influences were mainly filtered through the muddy vessel of Turkish administration. Arabia, little affected by the outside world, pursued its immemorial ways until the war of 1914-18. Finally, North-west Africa, after several centuries of decay and disorder under Turkish corsairs and Moroccan Sultans, has only in the last two generations seen a new regime built up under direct French control.

Thus in the Arab family Egypt occupies the place of elder brother. Its population is not far short of all the others put together, and in its economic, social, and cultural progress it has far outdistanced them. Yet at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was a poor and largely derelict

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country with a population of some three millions. The factors which have brought about this spectacular advance are worth examining, since it is in the light of what Egypt has accomplished that the potentialities of the other Arab countries can be most fairly estimated.

The freedom from Turkish control which Egypt has enjoyed in its internal affairs since Mohammed Ali founded the reigning dynasty in 1805 was of importance in enabling it to develop on its own lines. But this in itself would have meant little had not the Khedives taken advantage of Western skill and technique to develop its resources, a process continued and extended after the British occupation in 1882. The wealth of Egypt has hitherto lain in its agriculture, and its increasing prosperity has been due primarily to the great extension and improvement of its irrigation system by digging new canals, building barrages and dams to form reservoirs, and by scientific methods of draining off the surplus water. One consequence of special importance was the expansion of economic crops, particularly cotton and sugar, on which the economic well-being of Egypt now depends. It is only quite recently that steps have been taken to round off the economic progress of Egypt by fostering industries to utilize the raw materials—agricultural and mineral—available in the country. Since physical conditions set a limit to the extension of cultivable land, it is mainly on this industrial movement that the solution of its population problems and its increase in wealth must depend.

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This, however, involves a difficult question of ways and means. The economic advance of Egypt during the last hundred years would have been seriously crippled without the freedom of entry enjoyed by foreign capital. Even at the present day, by far the largest volume of liquid capital in the country is in foreign hands. But foreign capital has acquired in the minds of Egyptians and other Eastern peoples a sinister political significance, and the general tendency is to look to the State to mobilize capital for industrial purposes. Although the State may be able to do so to a certain extent, and although Egyptian enterprise has in the last twenty years played an important part in industrial development, yet the rate of progress in the future will necessarily be affected by the presence or absence of Western co-operation in meeting the larger economic issues.

The advance in material culture was paralleled by the progress in intellectual culture during this period. And just as Egypt's economic development caused no breach with the past, but was rather a rebuilding and modernization of its old economy with the aid of Western technique and capital, so intellectually it has developed in the main by modernizing the medieval Arabic culture with the aid of some European concepts and methods. An extremely valuable contribution in this sense was made in the decades before and after 1900 by immigrants from Lebanon, which, under the stimulus of educational missions from the West, had experienced a sudden uprush of vital energy. The out-

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come was to confer on Egypt an undisputed primacy in the Arabic world, both in the fields of traditional Moslem culture and in the newer scientific literary fields, a primacy which has been maintained and increased in the years since 1918. In particular, the wide circulation of the Egyptian press in other Arab and Moslem countries constitutes one of its main international assets.

The growing confidence and self-reliance called out by all these signs of progress inevitably strengthened Egyptian self-consciousness. Although conservative Moslem feeling and the new forces produced by the ferment of Western ideas have often come into conflict on internal questions, they readily join in alliance against external pressure. The first Nationalist movement, which broke out in 1878, was suppressed in a military sense by the British occupation. But Nationalism had taken firm root and grew until it triumphed over a somewhat half-hearted British opposition in 1922, and at length in 1936 a full settlement and alliance was negotiated with Great Britain.

To sum up, then, the progress of Egypt has been due to a long and uninterrupted process of modernizing its economic assets with assistance from foreign capital, to a wide tolerance in matters of education and intellectual culture, which has permitted the rise of an enlightened and instructed middle class, and to the growth of a spirit of patriotism in all sections of the population. But it must be remembered that Egypt started with the rare advantage of being a homogeneous unit,

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physically, economically, culturally, and politically. The only apparent exception to this uniformity is the existence of a small minority of Coptic Christians. But the Copts have so far identified themselves with the interests of their Moslem fellow citizens that friction has been reduced to a minimum and the unity of the nation is in fact unbroken.

The advantages enjoyed by Egypt in its unity and relative self-sufficiency, and the comparatively long and slow process of its moral and material regeneration have, however, produced an outlook which is sharply distinguished from that of the other Arab countries. The eyes of Egyptians are focused on Egypt, and while they do not deny Egypt's kinship with the Arab world and interest in its fortunes, they regard Egypt as a separate and independent unit. If we hold to our definition of Arabs, we must exclude from them large sections of Egyptians, for whom the re-emergence of Egypt is a more important fact than the memory of the Arab Empire, and who tend to set the glories of Rameses II alongside the mission of Mohammed as equal elements in their tradition. This attitude may perhaps be modified substantially in the course of the present conflict, but whatever the outcome the relations of Egyptian Nationalism with Arab Nationalism will be one of the decisive factors in the future of the Near and Middle East.

IV. Arab Asia

For the spirit which animates **Arab** Asia is uncompromisingly Arab, glorying in the Arab tradi-

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tion and the Arab Empire and dreaming of their revival. In the long lethargy of the Ottoman period it seemed that this spirit was dead, and only the persistent survival of the Arabic language and the Arabic literary heritage distinguished the Arab from the Turk. But the ferment of ideas which stirred Lebanon roused it to new life, first of all amongst both Christians and Moslems there, and then, as the yoke of Turkish centralization grew heavier, among the Moslems of Inner Syria and Iraq. Many leading Arabs, as officers in the Turkish army and administration, or as professional men in Istanbul, were exposed to the same currents of thought as were moulding Turkish nationalism. Their opportunity came in the war of 1914-18 when, with British and French support mediated through the Sharif of Mecca, the leaders of Arab Nationalism joined in the movement to shake off Turkish rule, and visualized the creation of a united Arab State.

That their vision was not immediately realized was due partly to the political rivalries of the victors, partly to deeper causes. The British and French Governments had in fact come to an agreement in 1916 on the division of the northern Arab lands between them, partly as directly administered areas, partly as zones of influence. This division was substantially maintained in the form of **Mandates'**—Iraq and Palestine, with Transjordan, being allotted to Great Britain, Lebanon and Inner Syria, **with the Jazirah (Upper Mesopotamia), to France.** There were Nationalist risings in **Iraq in 1920 and in Syria in 1925-6, but both were suppressed.**

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Looking beneath the surface, however, it is very doubtful whether in the conditions of 1918 and the following years a united State of Iraq, Syria, and Palestine would have been practicable, except under the control of a single European Power. All were regions of sparse population, and not only backward and unorganized in their economy but still half nomadic in their social structure. The vitality of Lebanon had been drained, mainly by mass emigrations to the Americas. There were no industries to speak of, few exportable crops, and no mineral resources except the recently discovered oil-fields of Iraq. The crying need of capital for even the primary necessities of reconstruction could not have been met unless a regime which promised some measure of stability had been set up.

But poverty was not the only hindrance. Real as were the enthusiasm and devotion of the Nationalist leaders, the great mass of the people had no political experience and could not yet shake off the long tradition of local rivalries. Kurds and Arabs, Sunnis and Shi'ites in Iraq, in Syria Moslems, Catholic Maronites, Orthodox, and Druzes—not to speak of narrower but still more intense lines of division—had still to learn the art of mutual tolerance and co-operation. Everywhere, except in Lebanon, the education which would broaden their outlook and fit them to be citizens was in a rudimentary stage, and even in Lebanon education, though more highly developed, was dominated by the spirit of sectarianism.

But twenty years have brought about far-reaching

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changes, especially in Iraq, since 1932 an independent State in alliance with Great Britain. Many years must pass before all economic weaknesses can be eliminated, but sound foundations have been laid, with the help of royalties on Iraqi oil. Education and political responsibility have advanced at a rapid rate. Local and sectarian rivalries, if not yet a thing of the past, have lost much of their sharpness. Part of the credit for these advances must fairly be given to the Mandatory Power, and much to King Faysal and his advisers. But amongst the people the incentive has come from their faith in the national destiny, and they have striven with a fierce intensity (which has sometimes led them into excesses) to overcome all the obstacles in its way.

In Syria-Palestine this faith is not less strong, but progress has been slower. An arbitrary division into four States—Palestine, Transjordan, Lebanon, and (Inner) Syria—and several autonomous regions has blocked political co-operation, intensified local rivalries and sectarian feeling, and hindered any rational economic reconstruction. In Lebanon an extremist section of the Maronites has been encouraged to maintain an irreconcilable attitude, and in the Jazirah a wedge has been driven between Syria and Iraq by the settlement of non-Arab refugees. Serious as the minorities problems are in Middle and Northern Syria, however, their gravity and the violence of Arab reaction are much less than those raised by the mass immigration of Jews into Palestine to form the Jewish National Home **foreshadowed in the Balfour Declaration of 1917.**

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To this policy Arab opposition has been unrelenting, not only in Palestine, but throughout the Arab world and not least in Iraq, Not that the Arabs of Asia are 'anti-Semite' (as is sometimes grotesquely said), though there is a real danger that the local antagonism engendered in Palestine between Jew and Arab may spread to the other Arab countries. They would probably still agree to the establishment of a Jewish National Home—as Faysal agreed to it provisionally in 1919—if they could be certain that it would not impede the political and economic development of the Arab world. But there is widespread fear of Jewish economic penetration and the power of Jewish finance, and this fear reinforces their determination to frustrate any design to set up a Zionist State in Palestine. For the Arabs are firmly convinced that the Arab countries are destined to unite together sooner or later, and that a united Arab State was in fact promised by the British and French Governments in 1916; and, believing this, they cannot afford to see a foreign State set up in the strategic link between Arab Asia and Egypt, especially when they fear that, under pressure from European refugees, the policy of that State would be an expansionist one. And if it may be truly said that they underrate the vital and spiritual driving force of Zionism, the chances of reaching a peaceful solution of the problem have been sadly diminished by delay, timidity, and prejudice in the handling of it. For nearly twenty years bitter feelings, made more bitter by the repression of repeated risings and

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disturbances, were allowed to grow almost unchecked. Only with the issue of the 'White Paper'¹ of April 1939 have the foundations been laid of a stable policy which may serve to reconcile the local interests of both Jew and Arab, pending a settlement which will embrace the whole or the greater part of Arab Asia.

The fourth Syrian State, Transjordan, is an improvised creation of the British Colonial Office, dating from 1922. Transjordan is the meeting-place of Syria and the Arabian desert, and oscillates from the one to the other according to the general state of affairs in the Near East. Almost wholly nomadic a few years ago, it has made, under the Amir Abdullah, considerable progress in settlement, security, and education, but it obviously cannot remain an independent unit in perpetuity.

It was only in the nineteen-twenties that the chronic internal rivalries and tribal feuds of Arabia proper were supplanted by a single State, embracing the whole peninsula excepting its southern and south-eastern fringes. This was the work of one man, Abdul-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud, the restorer of the Wahhabi power (see p. 8). Unification was attained by military conquest, which involved the expulsion in 1924-5 of the rival power of the Sharifs of Mecca, known as the Hashimids. An unfortunate consequence of this episode was to strain still further relations between the Sa'udi kingdom and Iraq and Transjordan, in both of which the ruling family is Hashimid. Open hostilities between them were averted only by **the good**

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offices of their common ally, Great Britain, and at length, in 1934, Iraq and Sa'udi Arabia entered into a pact of Arab Brotherhood, to which the Yemen was subsequently admitted.

Meanwhile King Ibn Sa'ud has supplemented military unification by extensive schemes for settling the Bedouin tribes and raising the economic level of the country. This arduous and ungrateful task has recently been rewarded by the exploitation of oil in the north-western and Red Sea regions, which provides the Sa'udi State with much-needed resources.

The success which Ibn Sa'ud has achieved by his own efforts and with the minimum of external support, along with his vigorous championship of Islam and the Arab cause, have gained for him the universal esteem and affection of Arabs and Moslems. No more outstanding figure has appeared in the Arab world for many centuries. Mirror and exemplar of all the Arab virtues, it is not surprising that the Arabs should see reincarnated in him the spirit of those knightly and humane Arab leaders who founded the Arab Empire, and should be inspired by him to enthusiastic hopes for the future.

In the south-west corner of Arabia, in the monsoon-watered highlands of the Yemen and its adjacent Red Sea coasts, survives in medieval obscurity and isolation the State ruled by the Imams of the Zaydi sect of the Shi'a. On the other side of the peninsula, Oman and part of the southern coast acknowledge the authority of the Sultan of Mascat,

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of the once heretical but now almost orthodox Kharijite sect (see p. n). Between the Yemen and Oman, in the Aden and Hadhramaut Protectorates, as well as along the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf up to the islands of Bahrain, and at Kuwait on the borders of Iraq, a multitude of ancient ruling houses, whose heads bear the title of Sultan or Shaykh, recalls the former mosaic of Arabian political life, except that all now live in mutual peace under British protection.

V. The Maghreb

Passing over the thinly populated and mainly desert provinces of Cyrenaica and Tripoli, whose Arab population has declined still more since Italian colonization succeeded to Turkish neglect, we reach the three French-controlled regions of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, collectively called the *Maghreb*. For all their apparent unity on the map, they present a number of complex problems. The small province of Tunisia, with a mainly Arab population, never wholly lost the traditions of Arab culture, and has rapidly and deeply absorbed the spirit of the Arab renaissance. Algeria, with an Arabicized Berber and formerly nomadic population, owes its political unity and its economic and cultural regeneration entirely to the French. Morocco has a long history of independence, with a Sultanate ruling over a relatively small proportion of sedentary Arab and Arabicized tribes, and endeavouring, without much success, to maintain its authority over the refractory Arab and **Berber**;

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tribes in the Northern 'Rif' and the Berbers of the Atlas ranges in the centre and south.

French policy has followed divergent lines in the three countries. In Algeria, governed as an integral part of France, extensive colonization, accompanied by attempts to assimilate the Moslems, has led to frequent clashes not only between the colonists and the Moslems but also between the colonists and the Home Government. In Tunisia the protectorate originally established in 1882 has become more and more a threadbare cloak for direct administration, at the expense of the former native officials. In Morocco a supple policy has dictated the maintenance of the Sultan's administration, while at the same time endeavouring to conciliate and assimilate the Berbers.

One effect of this divergence has been to force local objectives upon the local Nationalist movements. In Tunisia and Morocco their first aim is to set up modern constitutional States under the present ruling houses. In Algeria, one group is concerned chiefly with internal religious reform and unification, and another demands Algerian independence. But in spite of private rivalries the leading Nationalist parties have parallel programmes, culminating in a restored and unified Arabic culture in a united Maghreb, linked to its Arab brethren in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The realization of this ideal is, however, faced with immense obstacles, apart altogether from the firm refusal of the French Government to abandon its control, and the complication introduced by the

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Spanish Protectorate in Northern Morocco. While the Arabicized Berbers accept the Arab programme, the lack of political experience amongst the Nationalists would certainly provoke a conflict with the warlike and restless Berber tribes of the Atlas and other mountain zones. The general level of culture is still very low, and the small middle classes and cultured *Mites* of the scattered cities are not large enough to carry the weight of a modern political organization. The economic resources of this region are almost wholly in foreign hands, and there is neither economic skill nor capital available to take them over and exploit them, except under foreign control. Above all, the old-established, well-organized, and highly race-conscious body of French colonists could not be expected to surrender their present privileges without a struggle; and even if the interests of Frenchmen and *indigenes* should be reconciled, many difficult problems of mutual adjustment would still have to be faced in the ensuing period of transition.

VI. Arab Nationalism

From this survey, brief and generalized as it must be, we return to the point at which section I broke off. Gone is the lethargy, the political apathy, the calm acceptance of good and evil as the Will of God. From end to end the Arab world is in travail. Western agencies, collaborating with new forces within, have **transformed or are transforming the Arab lands into modern States; their peoples, driven**

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from their old moorings, anxiously ask whither they are steering. Their Arab self-consciousness is aroused and expectant, and their intellectual leaders are struggling to define the political and cultural ideals of the Arabs in the modern world.

Like all other forms of Nationalism, Arab Nationalism is based upon a community of sentiment. The general content of that sentiment has been indicated in the first section: pride in the historic mission of Islam, in the achievement of the Arab Empire, and in the cultural tradition enshrined in Arabic literature, together with envy of the material supremacy of the West and resentment at its assumption of moral superiority. These feelings are almost universal amongst Arabs in all countries, and it is both false and dangerous to assume that they are not shared by the 'illiterate peasantry*.

Bearing in mind that at the outset nationalism in the Moslem world was religious rather than racial, these ideas and reactions dictated of themselves its first objectives: the driving out of the 'Franks', the reconstitution of the Islamic Empire of the early Caliphs, and the reassertion before the world of the spiritual and moral values of Islam. The first modification came when Turkish and Iranian nationalism disrupted the pan-Islamic ideal, and drove the Arab Nationalists to adopt a pan-Arab ideal instead. But this involved only a slight readjustment of the second objective, which now became the restoration of such an Arab Empire as the Caliphs of Damascus had ruled over in **the** seventh and eighth centuries (excluding Iran, of

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course; but some romantic spirits even dreamed of regaining Cordova and Granada). And down to the present day this mirage still floats before the vision of the more simple-minded Nationalists.

In recent years, however, a more realistic perception of political and economic facts, a clearer understanding of the processes of history, and a more profound evaluation of Western cultural ideals has begun to show itself amongst Arab statesmen and intellectuals. To take the last point first, the naive and uncritical 'Trankicism' of some earlier reformers has practically disappeared, and among the younger generation there is considerable respect for the Islamic tradition, both in itself and as a vital element in the national consciousness. On the other hand, the uncritical rejection of all that the West stands for is also disappearing, except amongst some conservative professional theologians and the ignorant masses. All enlightened Moslems are trying to steer a middle course, described as 'selecting the best elements from both the East and the West*'. By this they mean the effort to cut away the dead wood of medieval tradition, and at the same time to protect the Moslem world from the destructive forces in Western civilization. From them there will come in due time the formulation of the new ideals of Arabic culture, but that time is not yet.

There is, however, a growing conviction that the historic basis of Arab Nationalism is no longer sufficient. Common memories and common pride in the past will always have their place. The Arabs

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can never make a clean breach with the past as the Turks have done, unless under pressure of some terrible national calamity. And Islam is so much a part of that past that the Arab ideal can never be fully dissociated from it. But the past by itself is bound up with the historic causes of separatism, and to overstress the religious ties alienates Shi'ites and Christians, amongst whom are many of the most fervent Nationalists. Besides, as the new societies develop in the Arab lands, with their many interests in the world around them, the past loses some of the intensity of its emotional appeal. If Arab Nationalism is to overcome its present elements of weakness, to discipline the native individualism of the Arab and to transform the 'cluster' into an organic unity, it must look to the future no less than to the past and plan accordingly.

The experience of the last quarter of a century has shown very clearly that the division of the Arab world into a number of small and individually weak States is a standing offence to Arab feeling. But it is equally clear that wider unity, whether by merger or federation, must be achieved on a regional basis. Though each Arab country, as we have seen, has its own inner problems of unity, stability, and economic reconstruction, many of these can be met only by planning on a wide scale, and by an outlook which transcends the petty issues of local politics. The mutual interest of neighbouring countries in removing possible causes of conflict has brought some progress in co-operation

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(see p. 24), and it is probable that further efforts will be made on these lines. But, if Arab history is any guide, the final achievement of unity will not be a gradual, but a cataclysmic process.

It must always be remembered that the Arabs of to-day are very different from the Arabs of 1915. What they have achieved in the intervening years would be incredible to those who have not been warned by their past history how swift is their response to changing circumstances and how sudden their political development. Nevertheless, in the conditions of the modern world, and especially in view of the long period which will be required for the rebuilding of their economic structure, even the strongest union of Arab countries which can be envisaged would scarcely be strong enough to stand entirely on its own feet. Some form of association with the Western world would seem to be indispensable for their continued political and economic progress. The more far-sighted and responsible of Arab statesmen have always accepted this as a political necessity. But they are determined that it shall not be an association between master and subject on the political plane, nor of exploitation and gearing-in to a more powerful economic machine on the economic side.

The task which this imposes upon both Arab and Western leaders is one to test their powers of statesmanship. As the Arab world continues to evolve towards a regrouping of its political forces and the rebuilding of its inner life, constant re-adjustment will be called for in its relations with

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the Western world. The old feud still rankles, but a stable friendship and co-operation between them can be achieved at long last if each steadfastly respects the interests and the moral status of the other.

