

SOME NEW BOOKS.

Arabic Literature.

The latest addition to the "Literatures of the World" series of volumes of some 450 pages, entitled "A History of Arabic Literature" (Appletons). We scarcely need point out that this was a difficult book to write, and that the number of scholars qualified for the purpose might be reckoned on the fingers. The editor of the series, Mr. Edmund Gosse, has done wisely, therefore, to secure the services of M. CLEMENT HUART, secretary-interpreter for Oriental languages to the French government, and a lecturer at the Ecole des Langues Orientales in Paris. Owing to the immense volume of Arabic literature, the subject was a difficult one to treat within the scope of the book before us, even for one whose knowledge is known to be as wide as it is accurate. Prof. Huart's dozen years ago was sent to Asia Minor to make a report on the Arabic epigraphy of that province and the Arabic inscriptions in Syria. We should note that his manuscript has been skillfully translated into English by Lady Mary Lloyd, and that the spelling of proper names has been transposed from the French to the English system by Mr. R. A. Nicholson, lecturer in Persian to the University of Cambridge.

There is no doubt that parts of Arabia were civilized many hundreds, if not some thousands of years, before Mohammed. Especially is this true of the southwestern corner of the peninsula, a region of vantage with reference to the immemorial trade route between India and Egypt. It is true also of the primitive inhabitants of the northwestern corner, who must have been powerfully influenced by the Accadian and Accado-Semitic civilizations which arose successively in Mesopotamia. Then, again, the dwellers in the northwestern districts must have been affected by the Phoenician times, and the Egyptian Delta in Phoenician times, and the Semites whom they had in the Seleucid and Roman periods. Inscriptions in Hittitic characters have been found on ruined monuments in Yemen and Hadramaut, and it is probable that inscriptions belonging to an epoch long preceding the Christian era will one day be discovered by archaeologists in the other sections of the peninsula which we have referred to. The pre-Islamic nature of Arabia, however, if any existed, has perished. The most ancient remains of the primitive Arab poetry go back only to the sixth century of our era. These fragments of poems are satires, songs or chanted by one tribe in derision of another. None of the prose writing of pre-Islamic Arabia has come down to us. If prose was written at all, it was not deemed of sufficient importance to merit the honor of transmission.

In spite of all the means by which the remarkable medium of expression employed by Mohammed was perfected, it must still be said that Arabic literature begins with the Koran, the text of which, as is well known, was not brought together until after the death of the Prophet. The style of the Koran is not purely Semitic, and is closely allied to the long series of documents emanating from Hebrew sources, which begins with the ancient records of the Torah, which through all the outbursts of prophetic inspiration that were recorded in the Northern Kingdom of Israel or in the Kingdom of Judah, and which, eventually, descend to the Gospels. The sentences are cut up into verses, very short verses at first, then very long. The short verses are the oldest, though they are placed at the end of the Koran. The rhymed prose employed by the Prophet is marked by alliteration and alliteration. The chapters fall into two great classes, according as they were produced at Mecca in the preaching period before the emigration, or at Medina after the Hegira. In the former class of chapters, the expression is curt, because the inspiration is powerful and the adoration is pathetic. Here Mohammed appears as the Prophet. In the latter class, composed at Medina, enthusiasm is chastened, for the preacher has given place to the lawyer and statesman. The principles of the religious, civil and penal code of the newly organized Islamic society are nearly all contained in the three longest chapters, which form almost a tenth part of the sacred volume.

The history of Arabic literature, from the death of Mohammed to the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate near the close of the thirteenth century, occupies some three hundred pages. The immense amount of poems composed by the Moslems under the Medina and Damascus Caliphates, conquests which caused the Arabs to assimilate the Greco-Syrian and Persian civilizations, gave a huge ascendancy to the Arab tongue, and literary efforts by men whose native language was not Arabic were soon ventured. History first makes an appearance under the sway of the Omayyads, whose seat was Damascus. It was, however, in Persia, and in the immediate vicinity of the Abbasid Caliphate at Baghdad that the agency of the Aryan mind to creative work in philosophy and art mightily affected Arab literature, stimulating its development in every quarter of the Caliph's realm, and culminating in the production of an enormous aggregate of metrical and prose compositions, many of which, no doubt, were lost in the destruction attending the Mongol Conquest. The chief specimens have been preserved. The efforts of the Arabs on the European continent, as related by M. Huart to have been far greater than many scholars have supposed. It is certain that the Persian influence on Arabic literature was immense. It pervades everything—poetry, theology, jurisprudence. Under the Abbasid Caliph the Arabs, for the most part, ceased to write, all posts, administrative, court and judicial, were held by men who were not Arabs. It is true, of course, that Arabic became the sole language of the far-reaching empire of the Caliph, but it was Arabic spoken and written by men who were Arabs by education, not by blood. All races, Persians, Syrians, Berbers from Maghreb in the extreme west of North Africa, were melted and amalgamated in this crucible. The most intellectual parts in the amalgam were finally to recover their identity. In the West, however, Arabic was only to be driven out of Spain by the Moors in a way that must be described as modern, and Morocco was to keep the language of its conquerors, now become its native idiom.

Among the many poets whose work is described in more or less detail by M. Huart may be mentioned Omar ibn al-Farabi, Jamel, Jaros, Farazdak and Nossayeb; the first four Arabs and the last named a negro by birth. The first and second were masters of Arabic, the third and fourth of Saurian, and the fifth of descriptive poetry. Abu-Tuman, who flourished at Baghdad in the ninth century under the Caliph Almu-tasim, was celebrated, not only for his own poetry, but as the compiler of an anthology, the "Golden Treasury" of the Arabs. He was thought to have excelled his contemporaries in purity of style and in the industry of his work. Futuh, who was born in the beginning of the eighth century in Syria, but spent most of his adult life in Persia, is generally accounted

the greatest Arabic poet. According to M. Huart, the qualities most valued by Oriental criticism in Mutanabbi's verse, positions are his refinement of diction, his use of the antique simplicity in favor of affected mannerisms and his accumulation of fantastic imagery. His popularity is attested by the fact that more than forty commentaries have been written to explain his poems, but there seems to be no doubt that he gave an unfortunate impulse to Oriental poetry, which subsequently dropped deeper and deeper into bombast. Tughral, who lived in the latter part of the twelfth century, was at once a poet, a man of learning and a statesman. In his Lamiyat al-Ajan, an elegy on the misfortunes of the times, he entered the lists against Shafara, the most brilliant of the pre-Islamic poets. This piece is said to have furnished Tennyson with the model of "Locksley Hall." The greatest model of the poet of the Arabs, Omar ibn al-Farid, the author of a mystical volume that has never in its kind been surpassed, or even equaled, in the literature of any other country, was born in Cairo in 1181, and died in that city in 1225. M. Huart describes his poems as perfect models of the style used by the Sufis, or pantheistic philosophers, to describe their ecstasies.

Romance was always a favorite branch of Arabic literature. Most of the tales known to Europeans as the "Thousand and One Nights" are, as we shall see presently, not Arabic, but Persian or Syrian. The sources whence he procured his verbal information makes his narrative a valuable historical document. It is, unfortunately, only a summary of a much larger work, which he never completed. The great historian of the Abbasid epoch, however, was named Tabari. He also was of Persian blood and was born at Amul, in Turkestan, to the south of the Caspian Sea. After travelling in Egypt, Syria and Iraq he established himself as a teacher of the traditions and of jurisprudence at Baghdad. To his researches in these subjects are due two of his extant "Commentaries." His most interesting work, however, is his universal history, the first complete history in the Arabic tongue. Masudi, the son of an Arab family tracing its descent from Masud, one of the comrades of the Prophet, was born at Baghdad near the close of the ninth century. He opened a new branch of Arab literature, that of the historical anecdote. After visiting Persia he went to India. He traversed Multan and Mansura, and then proceeded by the Deccan Peninsula to China and the Red Sea, touched at Madagascar and returned to Arabia by Oman. The Caspian Sea, Syria and Palestine in turn attracted his attention. During the latter years of his life he was in Egypt, and probably died at Fustat (Old Cairo). A man of inquisitive mind, he neglected no accessible source of information. He extended his researches beyond purely Moslem studies, exploring the history of the Persians, Hindus and the various philosophies and religions, Christians and pagans. The numerous anecdotes collected in his "Golden Meadows" furnish the fullest and most entertaining fund of knowledge relating to Oriental civilization during that part of the Abbasid period which was contemporaneous with his life. His great historical work, of which the "Golden Meadows" is but an extract, was in thirty volumes. Almost all of these have perished, but a philosophic epitome of the larger work has been translated into French.

Of a melancholy interest is the bibliographical treatise known as the Fihrist (Index), compiled by an author surnamed al-Warraq (the Bookseller) of Baghdad. It is a catalogue of books, most of which have now disappeared, either because they did not survive the great catastrophes which overtook the Baghdad libraries (destroyed by the Mongols in the thirteenth century) or because, as regards the Arab Middle Ages, may be compared with the various annihilations of the Alexandrian Library in ancient times; or because, owing to their being epitomized in more recent and fashionable works, they were no longer copied, and so died out by a process of decay. If there is one Arab historian whose name is known to the West, it is that of George al-Makin (A. D. 1205-1273), son of an unfringed monk, a Christian employed at the Ministry of War, who was born at Cairo. Like his father, he entered the Government service, and, eventually, held an important post in Egypt. But, having been dismissed and imprisoned, he retired to Damascus and died there. His universal history bears the title of "The Blessed Collection," the second part of which covers the period between Mohammed's time and the year 1290, has been translated into Latin, English and French. Yuhanna Abul-Faraj, also known under his Latinized Syrian name of Bar-Hebraeus, was the son of a baptized Jewish physician. He was born in 1226, accompanied his father to Antioch in a flight before the Mongol invasion, there became a monk and lived the life of an anchorite. Later he went to Tripoli in Syria to study medicine, and was appointed Bishop of Gubos and became successively Bishop of Aleppo and Archbishop of the Eastern Jacobites. He displayed considerable activity in Syria as well as Arabic literature. Of his Arabic works the most important is the "Epitome of Dynasties," which is, in fact, a condensed chronicle, to which his author has added information regarding the medical and mathematical literature of the Arabs.

Passing over the works which treat of theology and jurisprudence, we come to those branches of Arabic literature which deal with geography, with philosophy and with science. The geography of the Arabs is evidently of Greek origin. Al-Kindi had Ptolemy's work translated for him. Arabic scholars and travelers, responding to the political and economic needs of the huge empire of the Caliph, soon produced descriptive geographical works of immense interest for their bearing on our knowledge of the East in the Middle Ages. Some of the most eminent Orientalists in our own day have endeavored to limit their attention to the study and publication of these works. The postmasters of the horse-posts, the functionaries who both in the capital and the provincial centres were responsible for the transmission of the Caliph's correspondence, and, at the same time, were expected to keep the central authority informed concerning everything that occurred all over the vast empire, wrote descriptions of the countries ruled by the Koran to facilitate the performance of their official duties.

In A. D. 921 the philosopher Abu Zaid ibn Sahl al-Balkhi wrote a book entitled "Figures of the Climates," the contents of which consist for the most part of geographical maps. A copy of this work is now at Berlin. Abu Abdallah al-Maqdisi, habitually called Al-Muqaddasi, was born at Jerusalem in the early part of the tenth century. He spent a great part of his life in travelling all over the Moslem Empire, with the exception, perhaps, of his eastern

and western extremities. His book, entitled "The Best of Divisions for Knowledge of the Climates," is a very complete work, in which, besides the results of the author's personal observation, is given a summary of all preexisting information. It was written in A. D. 985. This account of Moslem countries has been frequently utilized by subsequent geographers. Al-Biruni, who was born in 1000, studied at Cordova, travelled far and wide, and reached the court of the Norman King of Sicily, Roger II, for whom he wrote in 1154 his great geographical work, which has been translated into French. Yaqui, whose memorable geographical dictionary has been published by Wustenfeld, was born of Greek parents on territory belonging to the Roman Empire of the East toward the year 1170. He was carried off in a foray taken to Baghdad and there sold as a slave. His owner, a merchant, had him carefully educated, and sent him, when still quite young, on journeys connected with his trade. Returning in 1194 from his third voyage on the Persian Gulf, he quarrelled with his master, and, being turned out of the house, began to copy for his livelihood, and studied under the grammarian Al-Ukbari. In 1212 he started on a journey to the East, first to Tabriz, then left Mosul for Syria and Egypt, and proceeded to Khoreasan two years later. To console himself for the loss of a Turkish slave woman, from whom he had been constrained to part on account of his poverty, he read the books in the libraries of Merv, and conceived the plan of an extensive geographical lexicon. Having spent some two years at Merv, he proceeded to Khiva, where he was taken to the town of Rihazes, who died in the early part of the tenth century, were translated into Hebrew and Latin at an early date. A contemporary of his wrote at Baghdad a memoir on the astrology of which Bernard Dorn has made use for one of his studies.

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After the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in the thirteenth century Arabic literature rapidly declined, and we pass over the pages allotted to this branch of the author's theme. It is interesting, however, to note that in the nineteenth century there has been a kind of revival of literature in Egypt, Syria, Tunis, Algeria and even Morocco, all of which are Arabic-speaking countries. The revival is evinced, not only by the publication of a number of newspapers, but also by the production of various works in book form. Beirut, Damascus and Cairo have been centres of the literary movement. Not only the official printing presses at Bulaq, but private printers in the Egyptian capital have been engaged for some time in placing the Moslem classics within the reach of all men. Even the cities of Tunis and Algiers can boast of a few Arabic publications. A biographical dictionary of the eleventh and twelfth centuries of the Hegira has been written and printed in quite recent years at Fez. At Mecca itself was printed in 1885 a political history of Islam. Regarding the future of Arabic literature, M. Huart expresses the opinion that the Arabic tongue, with its skillfully composed grammar, is sufficiently malleable to enable it to express modern thought, and at the same time to supply the whole of the Moslem East with the new technical terms in chemistry, medicine and modern sciences. As yet, however, there is an obstacle between a publisher and his readers, to wit, the uncertainty attending the reading of a language in which the vowels are very solid and unchangeable. In our author's opinion, an immense service would be rendered to the Eastern reading public if publishers would consent to mark the vowels invariably in the case of words which may bear a double meaning, and in the case of substantives the sense of which changes according to the spelling. If clearness could be thus secured, he thinks that a brilliant career might be predicted for Arabic literature. M. W. H.

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