

CURRENT TOPICS

Arabic Poetry Broadcast

We are pleased to learn from the *London Times* that for the second year in succession the B.B.C. has organized and given a wide public hearing throughout the Near East to an Arabic poetry competition. Many entries have been received from all those regions where Arabic is spoken—from Iraq, from Syria, from Palestine, from Egypt, from the Sudan, and southwards to Aden and the Persian Gulf. This poetry competition received the hostile attention of the Axis broadcasters. The aim of these broadcasts has been to think not so much in terms of propaganda as of good broadcasting. Cultural values are linked with hopes that people will respond to approaches to their best motives. The broadcasts have included readings from the Koran, in the voices of Cairene sheikhs famous throughout the Moslem world, and also more popular debates and discussion in various provincial dialects.

The poems entered for the competition were to be written in classical Arabic, although both modern and classical metres were admitted. Cairo, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Khartoum and Aden each announced and held their own individual competitions and broadcast what were, in the opinion of local authorities, the most successful entries. Judges in London representing the whole Arab world awarded first, second and third prizes for the entire competition. The winning poems were then broadcast by the B.B.C. from London. The prize-winners were:—First, Muhammad al-Asmar (Egypt) for his poem on "Al-Dimuqratiya" (Democracy); second, 'Abdallah 'Ibn 'Ali al-Zayid (Bahrein) for his poem on "Al-Harb al-Bahriya" (War at Sea); third, Muhammad 'Abdu Ghanim (Aden) for his poem on "Al-Wahdatu'l-'Arabiya" (Arab Unity).

Progress in Iran

The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (U. S. A.) tells of new freedom in Iran:

"War has finally embraced Iran in its ever-widening scope. What of the future of our work there? The simple answer has been furnished by letters which continue to arrive from the field in the unsteady trickle of the mail. Without exception all tell of the increasing freedom to do evangelistic work, of the lack of interference with all forms of work, of the increased desire of the Iranians and the Iranian Government that the Mission extend its service to the country. The situation has never been more favorable than it is at present.

"The entire evangelistic program of the Mission and the staff in all of the stations has been reorganized and placed under the direction of the Iranian Church. Significant changes have taken place within the Church—women elders have been elected for the first time in Meshed, young men have been made elders in Tabriz; efforts have been made to get the family as a group into church activities; home prayer meetings have been developed; courses in education for home

and family life have been made a part of the program for all churches; some churches have been able to maintain their financial independence, and others have increased their pledges through the Every Member Canvass plan; in Teheran the boys' school has been purchased by the Christian group and turned into a flourishing church school and Christian center."

Travel in Yemen Seventy Years Ago

In 1891 the Editor met the son of a distinguished Jew at San'a, Hayyim Habshush, who accompanied Joseph Halévy on his travels in Najran in 1893-1894. Now the Hebrew University Press at Jerusalem has just published in Hebrew a remarkable, extensive diary kept by Habshush, the companion of Halévy. It deserves translation into English as it fills in the untold story of the intrepid French scholar and throws new light on his discoveries. *The Geographical Journal* remarks:

Habshush, a coppersmith whose interest in inscriptions may have been first aroused by his acquiring Sabaean bronze tablets simply as metal for his work, and who, like many Yemenis, used Sabaean letters for magic without knowing their meaning, was a grown man in 1858. After his journey with Halévy he was employed by Glaser and other later travellers to copy inscriptions and to collect old books. He died in the winter 1899-1900. Beginning to write late in life, twenty-three years after his journey with Halévy, he displayed wonderful powers of memory. Like some other oriental helpers of European travellers, he could recall places, people, and incidents in great detail. Some of the places visited with Halévy he had, indeed, revisited in the meantime, and he recorded additional facts, even geographical and archaeological details, omitted by Halévy. His service with the latter opened his eyes. He was interested in almost every aspect of the country. He characterized persons and groups with much insight. Though a townsman, he comprehended the pride, bravery, and frugality of the rough tribesmen. This insight into character was extended even to his employer and himself; for he frankly contrasts his own timidity and relative inability to endure hardship with Halévy's courage and frugality. While expressing immense admiration for Halévy, Habshush relates various tricks which he played on his master. In spite of realizing to some extent the attitude of mind of nineteenth-century Europe, Habshush always remains "a religious, shrewd and witty man of San'a"; herein, says the editor, lies the peculiar charm of the book.

While Halévy was detained by illness in San'a, Habshush went alone to Gheiman, some miles south-east, where, despite difficulties arising from the suspicions of the people, he copied many inscriptions and excavated part of the pre-Islamic city-wall. When at length Halévy and Habshush set out on their journey, the whole Jewish community, not excepting the Chief Rabbi, who alone understood the archaeological objects in view, thought the real purpose was to search for the lost Ten Tribes. Habshush enthusiastically hoped to find the warlike tribe of Dan.

A Turkish View of the Moral Crisis in Europe

Under the title, *The Moral Crisis of Our Time*, an author in *Jumhuriyet*, Istanbul, writes:

Europe which has set for the whole world during these last centuries the standard in the realm of thought, feeling and knowledge, to-day faces a spiritual rather than a material crisis. It is impossible to deny this fact. For the most authoritative voices both of the conquered and conquering nations proclaim loudly that civilization in its present condition is a rotten system. Marshal Pétain holds the French people responsible for their sudden defeat and he thinks the cause of this is their indulgence in pleasure and vice. On the other hand Hitler, seeing that the old order has gone to pieces, has driven Germany to a life and death struggle in the hope of building a new order. Churchill and Roosevelt may say what they like, there exists a crisis in Europe which is the brain of the world, and this cancer is first of all spiritual or moral. All the suffering which humanity is facing is the result of this disease. . . .

. . . Especially for the Turkish nation which, in the hope of finding a brand-new life, has destroyed every institution which had lost its vitality, this question of moral anarchy is a matter which should be dealt with before everything else. . . .

We are being westernized. But our old leader (the west) is seeking a new way. Obviously she has lost her way in the moral realm. . . .

A certain type of youth of to-day does not like to enter into any controversy over the religion which he has appropriated, or over the ethics that emerge from this religion. He lets his vicious instincts and passions go free, and feels no remorse over the satisfaction he receives from these things. The thing called remorse does not exist for these young people anyway. They are so sincere in their ugly actions that they are not aware of the ugliness of their deeds. All their lives are the glorification of instinct and desire. For they see the manifestation of their existence as a great reality only in these actions. It seems to be a necessity for them to carry their belief in matter so far as to deny their spirits, and they find unlimited happiness in this. They pass by, looking at everything, and never pause at any stage. They do not believe that anything can have an objective, independent value of its own. They act without thinking it necessary to judge whether their action is good or bad. They love without knowing whether it is the evil or the good they love. And their suffering is only chagrin over the pleasures of which they have been deprived. . . .

If we look at the book called "Sodome et Gomorrhe" by M. Proust, we immediately see that human consciousness has no place whatsoever in this book. In none of the characters filling the pages of this book is there any trace to be seen of the simplest moral anxiety, or the slightest remorse, or the slightest desire for perfection.

If literature is a material and moral portrait which is made more or less in the likeness of a society, it is obvious that this society whose ethics are thus pictured is rotten clear through. The intellectual person is like salt giving savor to everything. If salt loses its own savor, who can restore this quality to it? It is the mind which makes everything fit into permanent health and order, but if the mind loses its

way, who shall lead it in the right direction? Such a society is sliding down a precipice. While whirling down, she is drunk with the pleasure of her fall. Losing the soul is losing everything, both for an individual and for society. What shall it profit a man if he gain the world and all external things but lose his own soul? There is only one torture in life: that is not to be able to attain the greatest perfection through the grace, the virtues, the will and the ability which God has bestowed upon us. . . . The necessary strength in order to continue life comes from the conscious pressure we put on ourselves and from reasonable forcing of ourselves; and it dies under uncontrolled freedom. As Hallaji Mansur has said, in the realm of ideal love two rounds of prayer cannot be perfect without the baptism or ablution of blood (*kanla abdest*). In order to obtain permanence, self-sacrifice and virtue are necessary. It is only a society consisting chiefly of virtuous men that is a nation, and not just a herd. Virtue is the product of great unchangeable faith. . . .

Where there is no faith, there is no abiding beauty nor even ordinary truth.

Islam in Turkey Today

Ahmet Emin Yalman throws light on the present status of religion in Turkey (*Vatan*, Istanbul, Dec. 1941):

Every person who sees the interest shown by the people in mosques on the day of a Mevlud (singing of a hymn in praise of the Prophet, performed for the rest of a soul 40 days after death) or of a Bayram or Ramazan, must come to the conclusion that there is a real interest in religion, and that the need for it is felt. It is necessary to give our citizens the spiritual nourishment they are in search of, in its highest and most reasonable form. The emptinesses that exist in the social life and especially in the realm of moral sanctions would in this way be filled up, the wholesomeness, harmony and balance of society would be increased, and the general level of social values would be raised.

First of all, the tendency to belittle ourselves and the effort to blindly imitate outside examples would stop; the fact that we are proud of our own characteristics would be made manifest, and in this way and in its fullest sense our independence would be strengthened.

As a result of our wrong and very destructive understanding of progress and social revolution, religious institutions have been very painfully neglected. On the one hand, the Evkaf has taken an unprecedented care to see that the mosques are kept clean, repaired and well illuminated; on the other hand, the religious leadership profession has become very unpopular and shown that the religious career is in decay. To-day, there are those who have chosen "imamlik" (religious leadership) as a career whose salary is based on only seven liras (\$4.00) a month. Being related to the Department of Religion these men are considered as government officials and therefore the law forbids them to hold any other occupation. How can we expect those who are to keep us in touch with certain social values to work peacefully on seven liras a month? It is necessary not only to do everything possible in order to raise religious preaching to the level of a

popular and esteemed career, but also our mosques and the radio must be open to competent preachers who can meet the social need of the hour, and also for all other classes of men of knowledge and intellect. . . .

The Story of an Arabic Gospel of John

The following touching incident is from the report of the American Bible Society for 1942:

"One outstanding incident that has encouraged us all was when a very poor, aged Indian knocked at the door of the depot in Baghdad during the height of summer. Thinking he was shy to enter, as some people are, we held open the swing door for his entry and saw immediately how exhausted he was from the heat. We gave him a chair, and after he had been sitting under the whirling fan for some minutes in silence, and had regained his breath somewhat, he took from his bosom a very much-worn Gospel of St. John in the Arabic. The covers, which had come apart, he had tied together with a tape, and almost every page was loose; they were curled and, in some instances, torn from constant fingering.

"Handling it with great care, he put the little volume in tidy shape, and then rising to beg us handle it with care too, he held it out with both hands, and gave it to our keeping, and at the same time requested another, but as cheap as we could possibly supply it. Naturally we told him we would gladly give him another free of charge in place of his worn one, but this he would not accept; he insisted on paying.

"He was a most interesting gentleman. We learnt that he had been looking for the depot for several days, and, on our inquiring, told us he had bought the Gospel of St. John from one of our colporteurs some eight months previous. It was the very first portion of the Scripture he had had. It was interesting and became more so; for he read it often. It had been in his possession some months already, and as he was reading it one afternoon while sitting alone, the light dawned upon him. Salvation and the joy of his Lord had come out of the pages of the little volume into his heart. He told us much of his joy, and, after listening eagerly, we knew then why the little volume had become so precious.

"We wrapped the worn-out Gospel very carefully, and placed it in a drawer, where, we told him, it would be safe, and that he could have it any time he called. His gratitude for this little service he could not express; but we knew by the light in his face what he felt. He told us after a while that the Word of God was the greatest treasure he had ever possessed in his life.

"We offered him a complete New Testament free; for never having possessed one, he had never had the opportunity of discovering other precious things about his Saviour. Very reluctantly he declined our offer by saying he had paid for his little Gospel, and it had brought him life's greatest joy, and it was his own. He would very much like to possess one, but could only do that when he could actually buy it. We thereupon made an offer to loan him one, but even this he declined. We then made the further suggestion that we personally pay for the Testament now; that he take it and read it and pay us back in instalments whenever he could afford it. This he considered care-

fully, and at last, giving his consent to the suggestion, we entered the sale. He went away with a glow on his face and a joy in his heart, the proud owner of a New Testament."

A Slave Freed as Punishment

A slave in the Protectorate of Makalla (Southern Arabia) has been punished for spreading Axis propaganda by having his freedom restored to him. This odd punishment is one of the most severe that he could receive, states *Reuter*. It means that the man will be completely unemployed and will be the poorer by £5 a month.

The Sultan of Makalla freed the slave while on a tour of his kingdom during which he warned the tribesmen against the spreading of enemy propaganda.

Slavery exists in the Protectorate on a small scale, and on the understanding that any slave will be granted his freedom the moment he asks for it.

The Millenary of al Azhar in Cairo

There will be general regret in Egypt and in other Moslem lands that the celebration of the millenary—as computed by lunar months—of the famous University of Al Azhar in Cairo has had to be postponed in consequence of the indisposition of King Farouk. It may, perhaps, be decided to postpone this ceremony until after the conclusion of the war, which involves some Moslem nations and threatens others and must prevent the delegations of other Moslem universities from visiting the venerable foundation. Al Azhar has had a remarkable history. Supported by the endowments of the pious in Egypt and in many another land in the far-flung domain of Islam, it has given free instruction and maintenance to more than thirty generations of students drawn from every corner of the wide region that extends from Morocco to Java and from the Balkans to Somaliland and Zanzibar. It cannot be said of Al Azhar that its scholars played the same leading part in the preservation of Greek science and philosophy as the colleges of Baghdad and Nishapur in the ninth century of our era or the astonishing if all too brief succession of philosophers who were the later glory of Moslem Spain. Al Azhar by the twelfth century had become a stronghold of conservative orthodoxy, but as such it continued to exercise a mighty influence on Moslem thought and doctrine for many centuries, and that influence is far from negligible even to-day.

During the last decade there has been a persistent attempt to modernize the curriculum and the methods of the University which the Amir Gawhar founded at the behest of the Fatimite Caliph. Its Moslem critics felt that it had become something of a museum piece; that it had preserved the forms rather than the spirit of the middle ages, and that, however attractive its teaching remained to traditionalists, it represented an arrest, even a petrification of learning. Something has been done to adapt Al Azhar to present-day needs, but progress has been delayed by numerous conflicts between modernists and traditionalists, between the partisans of academic independence and the advocates of an increasing measure of State control. The numerous strikes of recent years should not be regarded merely as

manifestations of youthful indiscipline. The complete curriculum at Al Azhar may last for fifteen years and a high proportion of its scholars are old enough to take a passionate interest in the problems which are exercising the modern world and notably the problem of religious education in the national State. It is fortunate that the present Rector, Sheikh Mustafa el Maraghi, enjoys the esteem and respect of the progressive elements of Egypt and, indeed, of all the lands where the Arabic speech and culture are predominant.

—*The London Times.*

The Rev. George Hunter Released

Our readers will recall "A Tragic Call to Prayer," in the October, 1941, issue of our quarterly. We now print a sequel to that appeal.

Chinese Turkestan (or Sinkiang—"New Frontier"—as the Chinese have called it) from the point of view of missionary occupation is probably the most strategic of all the needy lands of Central Asia, surrounded as it is by no less than nine of them! These are Tibet, India, Afghanistan, Russian Turkestan, Siberia, Outer Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, China Proper (Kansu province) and Kokonor. Each of these actually borders on it. It is, therefore, something for which to praise God that for nearly fifty years up to 1940 Christian missions were operating there. Correspondingly it is something that challenges us to pray as never before that this great neighbor of so long closed Afghanistan must now be added to the sad list of lands where missionary activity is not permitted.

Last year Mrs. H. D. Hayward told of the serious restriction of missionary work in Sinkiang, of three of us leaving in 1938 via Kashgar, where the last three workers of the Swedish Mission joined us on the trek through the mountains into India, of the final closing down of the work . . . and of reports having come through of Mr. George Hunter's imprisonment in Tihwa (Urumchi) in 1940. Subsequent events will no doubt be of interest to those who read that account and to all who pray for Central Asia.

The reports referred to were little more than rumors but were sufficient to give rise to fears for the worst. Months passed by with no definite word till the silence regarding this lone warrior of Christ was suddenly broken on July 26, 1941, by a telephone message from the office of the air transport company in Lanchow, Kansu, to the C. I. M. missionaries there that (to quote their own words) "an old man named Hunter was arriving that noon from Sinkiang and there was the fare from Hami to pay on arrival." Their account continues, "A number of us waited eagerly at the square for the air bus, and a smiling face greeted us as it drew up. We quickly got jinrickshas and put him in and his few belongings, thrown together in a couple of blankets, and brought him home. He seemed very tired and dazed. The very first thing our dear friend requested was a Bible. For thirteen months he had been without one and it was a touching sight later that afternoon to see him sitting in his chair reading his precious possession."

Three days after his arrival was his 79th birthday. A little celebra-

tion was held at which he told of his experiences. He was printing hymnbooks in his house in Urumchi when the police came to search the premises. He was taken to the police office and finally brought before two Russians (!) who tried to make him confess that he was a spy, threatening to shoot him if he refused. Over a year's imprisonment followed, during which period he was taken out seven or eight times—to die, so he thought. He was without a Bible or any other book; was not even allowed a pencil, nor a needle to mend his clothes. He repeated Scripture and sang all the hymns he could remember. He was able to preach the Gospel to other prisoners—Chinese, Russian and Turki. At last he was released but only to be forced into a plane and flown away to China Proper. We are told that “although the door has closed fast behind him, his great desire and frequent topic of conversation is his return to that land.” Mr. Hunter himself says, “I have been nearly dead several times but God has preserved me. I have never lost my love for Him and I feel He has been very gracious. I think if God gives me a few more years of life I ought to use them for Him.”

Are we to regard the above story as the last chapter of Christian missions in Chinese Turkestan, or do we heartily believe that God can and will reopen the door of witness in that dark land, so many of whose 4,000,000 peoples have not heard the Gospel? Let us pray for this and for the Christians who are there now—Russians, Chinese and even ex-Moslem Turki. Let us dare to believe that defeat will be turned into victory throughout Central Asia. It will be, but only if we, like Joshua of old at the second attack on Ai, maintain uplifted the spear of intercession and faith till the work of evangelization is done. See Joshua viii; 18 and 26.

RAYMOND H. JOYCE.

China Inland Mission.

Mrs. J. Gordon Logan

On August 30th Mrs. Logan took her Bible Class for girls, and then spent a quiet evening at home in West Kilbride. That night she fell asleep quietly and from that sleep awoke in Heaven.

Through her death, those interested in the evangelization of the Moslems have lost a good friend, and sorrow with her husband and family. Mrs. Logan, many years a missionary in Egypt with her husband, under the Egypt General Mission, was organizer of the Fellowship of Faith for Moslems, a world-wide group which prayed and worked for missionaries to Moslems. Mrs. Logan's personal letters to hundreds of lonely workers throughout the world brought joy and inspiration and comfort.

Our great loss is their gain in the Better Land, but who will now take her place—give talents and time and faith and zeal to follow in her train?

ELIZABETH Z. PICKENS.