BOOK EIGHT

MODERN RENAISSANCE

Part 1. Renaissance in the Near and Middle East

Chapter LXXII

RENAISSANCE IN ARABIA, YEMEN, IRAQ, SYRIA,
AND LEBANON

MUḤAMMAD BIN ‘ABD AL-WAHHĀB AND HIS
MOVEMENT

A

The continuity of efforts for revival amongst the Muslims is a subject of profound interest. During the very early years of the period of decadence two leaders of thought rose to combat the forces of ignorance *(jāhilīyyah)* and tried their best to bring back the Muslims to the fountainhead of Islam. The first of these was Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb of Arabia whose spiritual influence spread far and wide in the Islamic world, particularly in the Arab countries: Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

B

Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was born about 1111/1700 in the heart of the Arabian desert, the region known as Najd. This puritan reformer kindled a fire which soon spread to the remotest corners of the Muslim world, purging it of its sloth and reviving the fervour of the olden days. As a religious reformer, as a standard-bearer of freedom, as an orator, he not only won and retained undisputed eminence but left in all these fields a deep and lasting imprint of his pioneering individuality. There was none amongst his con-temporaries in Arabia who could lash and sooth, plead and urge, preach and move from pulpit and platform with the same fire and eloquence as he had perenially at his command.

The Shaikh studied at Madīnah, travelled as far as Persia, and ultimately settled in his native place in the Najd. Amongst his teachers Shaikh ‘Abd Allah bin Ibrāhīm Najdi, Shaikh Muḥammad Ḥayāt Sindhi, and Shaikh Muḥammad

Majmū‘i are well known. The Shaikh displayed from his childhood a studious and religious bent of mind and thus acquired a reputation for his learning and piety even at the threshold of his life. During his period of study he developed intense love for the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, and decided that he should strain every nerve to bring his people back to the pristine glory of Islam. For the attainment of this objective he wandered up and down Arabia and raised the slogan "Back to Islam." His utterances, characterized by directness and candour brought fresh life and courage wherever he went and as such served a much-needed tonic to the people disgusted with sham and cant. He persuaded them to abandon all such practices as were antagonistic to the spirit of Islam.

After some time it dawned upon him that mere persuasion unaided by political power might prove effective in the case of an individual, but it was difficult to bring about any radical change in a people's outlook without the backing of a political force. He, therefore, decided to rally under one banner the different tribes of Arabia. For the achievement of this objective he ap-proached, through ‘Uthmān bin Ḥamad bin Ma‘mar, the Amīr of Uvainah. The Amīr at the very outset responded enthusiastically to the call of the Shaikh, but did not keep his word.[1] The Shaikh left Uvainah and proceeded to Darīyyah where he continued his preaching despite opposition from the ignorant ‘ulamā’. In the long run, he not only succeeded in converting the people to his point of view, but also won the heart of Muḥammad, the head of the great clan of Sa‘ūd and the most powerful chieftain in the whole of the Najd. Thus, the moral prestige and material strength of the Shaikh were considerably enhanced.

"Gradually the desert Arabs were wedded into politico-religious unity like that effected by the Prophet of Islam. Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was, in truth, a faithful counterpart of the first two Caliphs, abu Bakr and ‘Umar. When he died in 1201/1787, his disciple Sa‘ūd proved a worthy successor. The new Wahhābi State was a close counterpart of the Meccan Caliphate."[2] A great change was brought about in the political and administrative set-up of the country. "Though possessing great military power, Sa‘ūd always con-sidered himself responsible to public opinion and never encroached upon the legitimate freedom of his subjects. His government, though stern, was able and just. The Wahhābi judges were competent and honest. Robbery became almost unknown, so well was the public peace maintained."[3]

Having consolidated the Najd politically, Sa‘ūd was ready to undertake the greater task of purifying Islam from all those un-Islamic influences which had been slowly creeping into it for the last few centuries. A campaign was thus set on foot to eradicate from the society all those superstitious practices which had been eating into the vitals of the faith. An honest attempt was

[1] ‘Uthmān bin Bashar al-Najdi, *‘Unwān al-Majd fi Tārīkh al-Najd*, p. 9.
[2] Lothrop Stoddard, *The New World of Islam*, New York, 1925, p. 28.
[3] *Ibid.*

made to return to pure Islam. All later accretions—monstrous, many-sided edifices of scholastic interpretations of the medieval theologians, and ceremonial or mystical innovations like saint-worship—in short, all those practices which have no sanction from Islam were condemned and the masses were exhorted to abandon them. The austere monotheism of the Prophet was preached in all its uncompromising simplicity and the Qur'ān and the Sunnah were taken to be the sole guide for human action. The doctrinal simplification was accompanied by a most rigid code of morals.

Many critics of Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb condemn this movement as retrogressive. But this is an absolutely baseless charge. Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb stood up with determination to bring his people back to true Islam. He, therefore, tried to purge Muslim life of all innovations and declared a "holy war" against them. The feeling which he voiced was rather one of rationalistic dissatisfaction with the outworn palimpsest of cults than of the destruction of everything that he found before him. He wanted to separate grain from chaff and this work he performed with admirable courage and alertness of mind. He tried to demolish all those things which he found alien to the spirit of Islam and weeded out all those practices from Muslim society which he considered antagonistic to the spirit of the faith. He rightly believed that a certain amount of change is always essential in a living civilization, but the change should be organic, that is to say, it should come from within that civilization in response to the genuine needs of the society which claims to own it and should not be a mere imitation of another civilization. Imitation of another civilization implies the surrender of all creative powers which are essential for the life of a progressive society. The Shaikh was, therefore, very cautious about his decisions. He persuaded the people to discard only those things which he found un-Islamic, while he readily accepted the ideas and practices which could be fitted into the structure of Islam.

The Wahhābi movement is, therefore, not essentially retrograde and conservative in its nature. It is progressive in the sense that it not only awakened the Arabs to the most urgent need of heart-searching and broke the complacency to which they had been accustomed for years, but also gave the reformers a definite line of action. It taught them that for the revival of Islam it was necessary to give up reliance on second-hand formulas and sterile conventions, and that it was equally essential to come back to the realities of Islam and build only on the bases of these solid rocks new modes of thought and action. An attempt to slip away from the cultural forms and aims connected with Islam, and to accept aims of non-Islamic (often anti-Islamic) social organizations, would not spell regeneration but degeneration for Islamic culture.

In order to set his movement on the right lines and to perpetuate the influence of his teaching on future generations, the Shaikh made an elaborate programme of fostering education amongst the masses. As a result of his efforts every oasis was given its own *maktab*, and teachers who could both

teach and preach were sent to the Bedouin tribes. The disciples of the Shaikh pursued learning with great ardour. Ibn Bashr says that so many were the students attracted to his classes that if somebody were to attempt to give their number nobody would believe him. All his sons, Ḥusain, 'Abd Allah, 'Ali, and Ibrāhīm, had their own *maktabs* in their houses where students from distant places came to master Islamic learning. Their expenses were borne by the *Bait al-Māl*.[4]

Although the Shaikh was a follower of the Ḥanbalite school of *Fiqh*, yet he did not follow it rigidly. In his book *Hadyat al-San'īyyah*, he makes a frank confession of this. "Imām ibn Qayyim and his illustrious teacher ibn Taimīyyah," observes he, "were both righteous leaders according to the Sunni school of thought and their writings are dear to my heart, but I do not follow them rigidly in all matters."

As a matter of fact, the puritan beginnings of Islamic revival were combined with an elaborate programme of mass education and a reaction against *taqlīd* (blind following) broadened along more constructive lines. The teachings of Mu'tazilism which had long faded away were revived and the liberal-minded reformers were delighted to find such striking confirmation of their ideas, both in the writings of the Mu'tazilite doctors and in the sacred texts themselves. The principle that reason and not blind prescription was to be the test of truth opened the door to the possibility of reforms which they had most at heart.[5] They embarked on a process of introspection and self-examination.

These are the main characteristics of the Islamic revival in Arabia as everywhere in the world.

The leaders of thought began to sift the whole of Islamic literature handed down to them by their ancestors and with admirable skill purified Islam of all those un-Islamic practices which had nothing to do with the teachings of Islam but had unfortunately become parts of Islamic culture. Thus, as a result of the efforts of Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb a critical attitude was developed amongst Muslim scholars; they would not accept anything which came down from the past without testing its validity on the basis of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah.

Thus, the first change that was visible in society was an urge for stock-taking of *Fiqh*. It was felt that the pristine simplicity and reasonableness of the *Sharī'ah* had almost been buried in a forest of subjective deductions propounded by scholars several years ago. These deductions, however valuable, could not be held final for all times. New problems had cropped up with the march of time, and these demanded new solutions in the light of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Thus, with the development of the critical attitude, which in itself was the direct result of Islamic revival, the gates of *ijtihād* sealed for six hundred years were opened again. The whole of Muslim society was awakened to the need of a fresh approach towards *Fiqh*. There was a general feeling

4 'Uthmān bin Bashar, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
5 Lothrop Stoddard, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

of unrest towards everything which did not have the sanction of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, and the educated people began to feel that no finality and definiteness could be legitimately attributed to any interpretation or conclusion regarding any problem not justified by the *naṣṣ* of either of the two sources. In other words, they began to believe that the *ijtihād* of even the greatest Muslim scholar could not be binding on them.

It was the logical consequence of this critical attitude that the commentators of Ḥadīth like Ḥāfiẓ ibn Ḥajar, Dār Quṭni, Imām Nawawi, Imām Dhahabi, Imām Shaukāni became popular with the people. Their writings attracted the attention of scholars and they began to devote themselves to the study of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. The emphasis was, thus, shifted from *Fiqh* and logic to the study of the two main sources of Islamic teachings.

This change can also be observed in the attitude of Muslim scholars towards social philosophers. Al-Fārābi (d. 339/950) who had derived his theory of the State from abstract philosophical speculation was relegated to the background and scholars began to be attracted by the writings of ibn Khaldūn who based his theory of State on demonstrable facts and laid the foundations of a scientific theory of history.

It was the study of ibn Khaldūn's writings that paved the way for pan-Islamism. He had argued that since the power of the Quraish had gone, there was no other alternative but to accept the most powerful man in the country as Imām. "Thus Ibn Khaldun," observes Iqbal, "realizing that hard logic of the facts, suggests a view which may be regarded as the first dim vision of an international Islam fairly in sight today."[6] Such is the attitude of the modern Arab inspired as he is by the realities of experience, and not by the scholastic reasoning of jurists who lived and thought under different conditions.

The dazzling achievements of the West in the realm of science and the material benefits which the Western people have derived from them have also moved the people of Arabia freely to participate in them. They are trying to achieve this end by adjusting their own pattern of life to that of the West and adopting some of its outer forms. But they are also anxiously jealous to guard their cherished customs and values inherent in their own cultural pattern. Although there are visible changes in their political and social structures, yet the speed of change is extremely slow at the present time. The spread of the liberal principles and the Western means of progress go side by side with conservative forces. It can be said that of all the Muslim countries Arabia is the greatest country which is anchored in the traditional pattern of her past.

C

Role of the Arab Academy of Damascus in Syria.—In 1336/1918, Muḥammad Kurd 'Ali (1293/1876–1372/1953), a devoted scholar, founded the Arab Academy

[6] Sir M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 158.

in Damascus *(al-Majma' al-'Ilm al-'Arabi)*. The Academy was endowed by King Faiṣal. It assumed charge of al-Ẓāhirīyyah Library with 3,000 works, for the most part manuscripts. The Academy consisted of: (a) a literary linguistic committee *(lajnah lughawiyyah)* in charge of investigating linguistic problems, literature, and the ways and means of improving the Arabic language in order to make it an effective instrument for the expression of modern thought; (b) a scientific committee *(lajnah 'ilmiyyah fanniyyah)* in charge of enriching the language and broadening its scope for the expression of the various branches of science.[7]

In 1339/1921, the Academy started the publication of the journal *Majallah al-Majma' al-'Ilm al-'Arabi*, which welcomed contributions from Eastern and Western writers. The most important task which the Academy undertook at the outset was to establish a linguistic academy and initiate the compilation of an up-to-date dictionary after the pattern of the La Rousse or the Oxford dictionary. It continued its work with great vigour and zeal, surmounting various obstacles, and has achieved a good deal of success in the problems of language. The Syrian Government has always relied on the Academy for coining equivalents to foreign technical terms. Agricultural, medical, philosophical, and scientific terms have been coined, and published in the above journal.[8]

American University of Beirut.—The nationalist movement of the Arabs received its strongest impulse from the literary revivalism which was itself the result of so many forces. The impact of the French and the Americans enthused the younger generation of the Arab lands to take stock of their literary treasures and enrich them so as to suit modern conditions. "The Presbyterian College in Beirut (established in 1283/1866) which eventually became the American University was the first modern educational centre in the Near East where young Arabs could gain a scholarly knowledge of their great cultural and national past.[9] Thus, out of these many and variegated threads—the spread of Western ideas, the rediscovery and publication of the Arab classics by the Orientalists, the introduction of the printing press, and the establishment of newspapers and periodicals—was woven the rainbow-coloured web of literary revivalism in Arab lands. This movement implied a revolution against the artificial poetic diction of the twelfth/eighteenth century. In the literary field, the artist began to strengthen and reassert his individuality. It was thought that there was no artistic tradition to which he was forced to submit except one of his own choosing. All the canons of art, established by the generations of predecessors, existed only to guide him, not to enslave him or impose a check upon his genius. This implied an interest in the artist's own self and in the natural emotional environment in which he had his being. At the same time another group, similar to the Beirut group

[7] *Majallah al-Majma' al-'Ilm al-'Arabi*, 1921, Vol. I, pp. 2–4.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 223.
[9] R. Landau, *Islam and the Arabs*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1958, p. 256.

in many ways, was being created in Cairo by means of schools, educational missions, and translations initiated or encouraged by Muḥammad 'Ali and his successors. This group differed from the former in its greater concern with the question of Islam and modern civilization, and its greater caution in accepting ideas and innovations from Europe. These two groups, and similar but less important groups in other towns, laid the foundations of a new Arabic literature.[10] As a result of the efforts of these groups, the scope of Arabic language has been broadened. Western ideas have been popularized through translations and new literary forms—the poetic drama, the novel, the romantic autobiography—have been introduced. At the same time old literature is also being revived. The Arab children are now asked to memorize al-Mutanabbi. The books of ibn Rushd and ibn Sīna are again becoming popular in colleges, and ideas put forward by ibn Khaldūn and al-Fakhri on the problems of culture and State are being popularized. The speeches of Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād and other generals of Arabia are repeated on the platform in order to infuse the spirit of nationalism amongst the younger generation. The recent celebrations of the millenaries of the great figures of the past indicate the zeal for revivalism. The glorious past of the Arabs is used as a stimulus for the present revival, and the achievements of the present are utilized to promote future development. As a consequence there have arisen on the horizon of Arab lands some of the best brains, for example, the religious thinker Muḥammad 'Abduh, the social reformer Qāsim Amīn, the essayists Muḥammad Ḥusain Haikal and al-Manfalūṭi, the poets Aḥmad Shauqi and Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, the playwrite and novelist Taufīq al-Ḥakīm, and the scholar Ṭāha Ḥusain. All these are Egyptian names. But there have also been very important Syrian and Lebanese writers, many of whom worked for most of their life in Egypt, while others remained in their own country. They include the scholars and poets of Bustāni and Yazīji families; the religious reformer Rashīd Riḍā', the learned disciple of Muḥammad 'Abduh; the leaders of Arabic journalism, Shidiaq, Nimr, Sarrūf, Zaidān, and Taqla; the poet Khalīl Matrān; the best of women writers in Arabic, May Ziadah; the traveller Amin Raiḥāni; and the mystic Khalil Jibrān.[11]

Since the rapid progress of the literary movement during the past few years one has been impressed by the practical results of the efforts of Arab writers in adapting the classical Arabic language to the conditions of modern life, creating scientific terminology, and producing scientific works in Arabic, e.g., the various lexica of technical terms published by modern scholars, like Muḥammad Sharaf, Aḥmad 'Isa Bey, Mā'lūf Pāsha, Maẓhar Sa'id, and the scientific works of Ya'qūb Sarrūf, Fu'ād Sarrūf, al-Ghamrawaih, Musharrafah, etc.[12]

Role of the Arab League in Unifying the Arab World.—The most recent

10 A. H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, London, 1946, pp. 36–37.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
12 Zaki Ali, *Islam in the World*, Lahore, 1938, p. 236.

attempt to consolidate the Arab world and give its endeavour concentration and direction was that of the Arab League. It was on March 22, 1945, that seven independent Arab States signed the pact of the Arab League. "Unity and independence had from the first been the double aim of the Arab national movement. The two are inseparable in the mind of the Arab nationalist. Developments at first took another course when, after World War I, Arabia was split up into a number of States. But the farther the national idea spread among the peoples of these States, the stronger became their effort for unity. Arab nationalism never accepted the fact of partition. It was inevitable that within the independent Arab countries special interests of dynastic, economic, or of some other nature should develop and gain strength—interests with which the public movement for unity has to reckon."[13] Regional particularism and dynastic jealousies were indeed there. But despite these, there was a general desire amongst the Arabs to form a union of their countries. It was in response to this general need that Egypt, Libya, the Sudan, Jordan, Sa'ūdi Arabia, Syria, and the Yemen joined their hands together. The formation of the League was then considered to be a major and positive step towards the fulfilment of Arab hopes and aspirations.[14] In many respects the League was one of the most eloquent expressions of the spirit of pan-Arabism. It was acclaimed a good beginning, even though it was established on shaky foundations, and weakened by the half-hearted attitude and mental reservations of some of its members.

The role of the Arab League was further enhanced by the concerted participation of the Arab States in the United Nations as a "Political Block" and by their express and written pledges to defend Palestine at all cost. Palestine soon proved to be an acid test for the Arab States, the result of which was disheartening to all concerned. The defeat in Palestine not only meant the loss of a good part of Palestine, but was also the greatest blow within living memory to Arab unity, Arab pride, and Arab life. This created a feeling of general dissatisfaction amongst the Arabs about the leadership of the League. Moreover, with the failure of Arab League on the Palestine question, the particularizing aims and interests of its member States began to counteract its unifying trends and tendencies. Even attempts at co-ordination of their efforts in the economic and cultural spheres, in spite of some slight success, were overpowered by the stronger centrifugal forces of their political aspirations. The Arab League had united the Arabs in their fight against Western domination; it had been called into play whenever a constellation of power politics threatened some vital interests of all or some of the Arab States. But negative attitudes and impulses proved uncreative, even destructive. Significantly, the Arab League was declared all but dead by the Arabs themselves in March 1956, when its member States again rallied to an Arab cause in

13 F. W. Fernau, *Moslems on the March*, London, 1955, p. 153.
14 See C. A. Hourani, "The Arab League in Perspective," *The Middle East Journal*, 1947, Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 125–26.

the Suez crisis—once more against a threat from without, not for a constructive purpose within. The recent unification of Egypt and Syria and the federation between Iraq and Jordan in 1377/1958 were also defensive reactions against political pressures. Neither their effect on the movement towards Arab unity, be it favourable or adverse, nor their impact on the development of Islam can as yet be assessed.[15] What does the future hold for the Arab movement? Its future depends on the dissemination on a large scale of some factors of unity. The factors of language, history, geography, similarity of problems, the zeal for the maintenance of independence and sovereignty, quest for a respectable place among the comity of nations, common interests and aspirations are solid bases for Arab co-operation, if not for Arab unity. There have been many failings on the part of the Arab League. But, in spite of all inadequacies, in spite of all disappointments and frustrated hopes due to indecision and indiscipline, Arab nationalism is entitled to recognition for its stimulation of a general intellectual and political renaissance. Its work is not yet complete, the last word has not been spoken about the new Arab world, because the Arab peoples and States are still in the midst of a transition.[16]

D

1. In general all movements mentioned in the preceding sections show a deep influence of Western liberalism, as a result of which there has been a continuous attempt to interpret Islam "freely."

2. In general, again all these movements share a common feature not purely religious. Because of the dual nature of Islam as a religion and State, and because of the pressure to which Muslim society has been subjected in almost every field, these movements resent and resist Western penetration and influence, with methods almost modern.

3. Impressive strides have been taken throughout the Arab world towards Muslim revival. "The rapid multiplication of newspapers, periodicals, books and pamphlets, the great increase in the number of literary societies and intellectual organizations along modern lines, the exchange of academic visits of professors and students, as well as of scientific research missions, are phenomena that are witnessed today in Arab countries. The appointment of Egyptian teachers and experts in educational centres of Iraq, Arabia, the Yemen; the exchange of students; the organization of universities and the increase of new colleges; the dissemination of the wireless and its utilization for the propagation of cultural activities; the rising and surging tide of new thought; the flourishing movement of translation of foreign literature, all indicate a noble intellectual awakening."[17]

[15] I. Lichtenstandter, *Islam and the Modern Age*, Vision Press, London, p. 167.
[16] F. W. Fernau, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
[17] Zaki Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

4. Intellectual renaissance in these countries is going hand in hand with national awakening and interest in language. Thus, for more than fifty years, Arab intellectuals have viewed intellectual revival and national consciousness from the standpoint of language and historical traditions. As a result, there is an agreement amounting to consensus that Arabic is not only the faithful register of Arab cultural achievements, but the pillar of politico-intellectual revival throughout the length and breadth of the Arab world. This awareness of the importance of language has been practically universal in most Arab countries.

Father Kirmili (d. 1366/1947) of Iraq, who had a passion for Arabic from his early youth, devoted most of his energy to linguistic problems. He, on the strength of very strong arguments, proved that Arabic has a unique gift of adaptability and adjustment to new situations; it has the power to assimilate new words and phrases and coin its own when the need arises. But he at the same time warned the Arabic-speaking world against the danger of the unlimited use of foreign words since this would lead to the abandonment of Arabism and the loss of nationalism. Salīm al-Jundi (1297/1880–1374/1955), while discussing the importance of Arabic language, said, "Language is the model that represents the long-standing nobility of a community. It is the guide that points to the extent of its civilization and progress."[18] Similarly, Munīr al-Ajilāni of Iraq in one of his addresses remarks that Arabic is the earth; in it we have eternal poetry, eternal prose, and the Qur'ān. It is like the flag behind which soldiers (the Arabs) march.

To the great majority of Arab writers on nationalism, Arabic is the lifeblood and soul of the community, it is the strongest bond of unity; the mainstay and the strongest pillar of Arab nationalism, the main deterrent against internal and external dividing forces, the instrument of thought and emotions, and a link between the past and the present. It is the faithful guardian of Arab cultural heritage, the register of the Arabs' deeds and accomplishments, and of their triumphs and pitfalls, and is the most important factor in their unity.[19] As a matter of fact, the Arabic language has marvellously developed in the hands of modern Arab writers. It has been proved that this flexible and expressively powerful language is capable of depicting every manifestation of modern life without recourse to loan-words.

5. Industrialization is advancing in these countries at a notable speed and the standard of living of the people is slowly and steadily rising. The old prejudices against technical knowledge and scientific inventions are gradually withering away. The industrialization of the Arab countries has led to the transformation of labour which is being organized along modern lines; this is likely to have its effect in the whole Arab East, and even beyond. In the field of agriculture too "evolution in the Near East is witnessing a new state

[18] *Majallah Majma' al-'Ilm al-'Arabi*, 1922, Vol. II, pp. 283–84.
[19] See al-Ḥuṣri, "Waṭanīyyah," *Waḥdat al-Ummah*.

of affairs, by the gradual transformation from nomadism into sedentarism." In this respect, the improvement and multiplication of means of communication in their modern form have made a large contribution. The major and pressing problems of combating illiteracy and infant mortality, improving sanitation and applying the principles of preventive medicine, and educating women are being given serious attention.

6. Another feature of this movement is that the effervescent young men and the enlightened women are playing an important part everywhere. As a consequence of internal evolution in the realm of family life, the Oriental youth has become, within a remarkably short time, the hope of the old generation which has neither the possibilities of organizing a State, nor the scientific and administrative knowledge necessary for the comprehension and conduct of modern political movements.[20]

7. There is going on everywhere a movement for the reconstruction of Islamic philosophy and theology to satisfy the reflective and inquisitive minds of those trained in the philosophical traditions of Plato and Aristotle. Thus, an Islamic system of thought is being created which can adequately meet the intellectual doubts to which the modern world is prone. The leaders of Islamic renaissance have fully realized the need of an affirmation of Islam against the onslaught of modern scepticism which has come in the wake of modern science. This is how the door of ijtihād, sealed for centuries, has been re-opened. In their efforts to harmonize the scientific and social discoveries of the modern age with the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, they sometimes make a departure even from the fundamentals of Islam. Such a trend is rightly considered dangerous by the 'ulamā' and the masses.

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[20] Zaki Ali, op. cit., p. 251.

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Chapter LXXIII

RENAISSANCE IN NORTH AFRICA THE SANŪSIYYAH MOVEMENT

A

RISE OF THE SANŪSIYYAH ORDER

The rise of the Sanūsiyyah Order is closely bound up with that of other revivalist movements in Islam during the thirteenth/nineteenth century. For this reason it is not possible nor indeed advisable to discuss the rise and impact of this Order without first touching upon the nature of the events preceding and accompanying it; consideration must also be given to the forces which played a considerable role in preparing the way for shaping and directing the trend of thought and action of the Sanūsiyyah movement.

The second half of the twelfth/eighteenth century was a period of dormancy in the history of modern Islam, and the beginning of the thirteenth/nineteenth century proved to be a grave time for the Muslim peoples. The Ottoman Empire, once an edifice of glory and achievement, began to weaken both politically and spiritually. The world of Islam—to which the Ottomans had for centuries stood as guardians and to which they had claimed the right of primacy—started to disintegrate. Soon, therefore, the call for political and spiritual reforms began to be heard; attempts were now being actively made to resuscitate the Empire and to turn it once more into a vigorous and superior institution along the lines of the advancing European nations.

In the spiritual field the need was particularly felt for a rejuvenation of the Islamic faith, the source of inspiration and the very backbone of the Islamo-Arab Empire from the first/seventh to the seventh/thirteenth century. By the beginning of the twelfth/eighteenth century Islam had been practically forgotten, and a great many alien ideas and practices had crept into it. The original purity of the doctrine of Islam was to be found nowhere; abuse of its rites was increasing day by day. The feeling that reform was necessary was, thus,