BOOK REVIEW


The book under review is the abridged edition of a Ph.D. thesis which was submitted to the “Free University” of Berlin in 1965. In chapter I, under the caption “The Torpid Society”, the author describes the deep influence of Qāsim Amin on M. Husain Haikal. A result of this influence at the beginning of his career is the conviction that the European civilization “is the best that man can at present achieve”, a conviction that was common to all members of the circle associated with the paper “Al-Jaridā”, the editor of which was Lutfi as-Sayyid, who remained for many years Haikal’s tutor.

In chapter II Johansen deals with “Europe and Progress”, and after giving an account of the impressions which Paris and its “freedom” made on the mind of young Haikal he passes on to the influences of Carlyle and Rousseau which found expression later on in Haikal’s first novel: Zainab. At that period the thoughts and ideas of Haikal were still too immature and the reader feels almost inclined to question the utility of Johansen’s reproducing them. But it may be of a certain relevance in so far as they round up this analysis of the rather vexed process of continuous change of orientation which Haikal underwent during his life. The battle between positivistic reason (or the science of Europe) and revelation (or the traditional faith of the Muslim Orient), much dealt with in different works on Muḥammad ‘Abduh and the modernists, is depicted right here at the beginning. The evolution of this struggle forms the central theme of Johansen’s thesis. Chapter II ends with Haikal’s conclusion: “My reason has won the upperhand over the beliefs that I inherited through education and milieu.” He sees that the only way to a natural and moral fulfilment of life must lead through the reason of Europe. For the sake of not losing oneself in despair this reason has to be accepted even if that implies a breakaway from one’s own society.

In the following chapter, entitled “The Impotency of the Torpid Society”, Johansen discusses Haikal’s temporary conversion from liberalism to more radical ideas. This was due to the influence of Taine, the French philosopher of history, to whom Haikal ascribed even later in his life an “everlasting influence on the world”. Taine—and following him Haikal—has one thing in common with the British liberals, i.e., the appliance of the patterns of physical science to man and history, but the conclusions which he reaches neither admit Mill’s theory of modification nor the dynamic character of Spencer’s concept of evolution. Thus he arrives at a system of complete determinism.

Chapter IV, “Liberalism and Revolution”, presents a description of political events or rather the development of party politics in Egypt during the first World War as can be found in the writings of Landau, Klingmueller, Baer, and Safran, frequently cited by the author. The reader receives the impression that this is not so much “Europe and the Orient in the World-View of an Egyptian Liberal” as a political history of Egypt from 1912—22 with special reference to the active part played by
Haikal. But there is again that characteristic inability of Haikal to stick to earlier convictions, skilfully portrayed by Johansen while describing his change-over from a revolutionary with socialist leanings to an outspoken defender of the feudal class from which he hails.

The crisis of orientation is further illustrated by Haikal's varying interpretations of the genius. The origin of these conceptions is traced back to Carlyle, after the initial enthusiasm for the idea of hero-worship followed a period of desistance because of Haikal's aversion against the charisma of the popular leader, S'ad Zaghlul. The concept of genius is then confined to the realm of arts and literature, but later on it experiences a renewal, again embracing all spheres of life, however, with special emphasis on the military aspect. This is the time of Rommel's advance towards Cairo, when Khalid Ibn al-Walid has become a favourite theme in literature. With the end of the Fuehrer this last phase of craving for a genius too comes to an end.

In this context it would have been useful to examine—at least to refer to—the concept of genius in its wider Egyptian and Islamic setting. No doubt, Carlyle was popular with modernists all over the Muslim world. But, besides, there was also the influence of Nietzsche which made itself felt in Egypt too, being partly transmitted from Iqbal via 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Azzam to Ahmed Amim and others. Both the last-mentioned authors have written about the "Suharmān" and endeavoured to set an Islamic version (a neo-insān-kāmil) against what was to them a European distortion of the 'true' conception of genius. Today these widespread ideas still find their echoes and can be met with, e.g., in the concept of shakhṣiya projected by the Moroccan M. 'Aziz Lahbabi. When correlating the history of Haikal's conceptions of genius to those of his contemporary Muslim thinkers the changes of orientation may appear in another light. They may then be no more ascribed to the partly quite one-sided experiences adduced in Johansen's account of Haikal's intellectual journeys.

Chapter V, "Islam and Nationalism", in its first section entitled "The Political Dispute" contributes little to a deeper understanding of the actual issues at stake. It is a resumption of the most divergent and rather undifferentiated standpoints of conservatives like Rashid Rida and liberals like Haikal himself as is to be found in all the standard works on modern ideological development in Egypt, such as Horten, Gibb, Adams, Safran, Gardet, on which these observations are based. Otherwise the chapter mainly describes the battle between the two camps: Al-Azhar and the National University, presenting a very vivid picture of what happened to 'Ali 'Abd ar-Raziq and Tahā Husain on account of their courageous attempts to introduce freedom of thought. The political manoeuvres which led to the discredit and ultimate displacement of the liberals, illustrated through the example of Haikal's participation in the intrigues of party politics, are given a masterly description with a dramatic touch. The reader is prone to conclude that the disgust with the Egyptian scene which drives Haikal to migrate to France is a disgust with his own self, an escape from admitting his moral, rather than intellectual, failure.

Throughout the book the author displays a noteworthy gentleman's attitude towards his subject. While very accurately mentioning all the facts about Haikal's appreciable role in Egyptian politics he hardly ever takes into account motives other than those indicated by Haikal himself in his reflections mudakkirāt fi s-iyyāsahal-mirīya and (unpublished) diaries. Moreover, in Johansen's thorough analysis of Haikal's statements these reasonings assume philosophical dimensions. Thus what to
other critics might have appeared as want of a sense of responsibility and sacrifice ultimately finds an alibi. The somewhat peculiar terms of German philosophy like *Geschichtsmaehtigkeit, Heilsweise, and Herrschaftswesen* are used with an admirable clarity and become almost more comprehensible than with the thinkers who coined them. With his extensive knowledge of European philosophy and sharp insight into the modern Muslim mind the author, besides displaying an outstanding degree of *Gelehrsamkeit* (erudition), takes the pains of tracing back every line of thought in Haikal's miscellaneous writings to its manifold origins.

The second section (The Battle for the New Language) of the chapter gives an account of the major problems of reform: how to bridge the gulf between classical and colloquial Arabic and that between the traditional and the modern system of education? Readers who are familiar with the steps taken in this direction by Tāhā Ḥusain and Ahmad Amin will find nothing different in the proposals of Haikal.

Chapter VII is entitled "The Disappointing Europe". In the first section Johansen discusses "The Function of Reason" and describes how Haikal crossed over from the secularist camp to that of the religious dogmatists when his faith in positivistic reason was shaken. While discussing "The Unreasonable Freedom" and "Reason as the Base of Order" the author stresses Haikal's preference to the maintenance of order in society at the expense of freedom—a complete repudiation of his previous views. The special emphasis given to this question receives no doubt much vigour because it comes from a young German leftist who is very much allergic—and therefore alert—to any trend that may favour the slightest preponderance of the *Ordnungsprinzip* (principle of order) over the *Freihheitsprinzip* (principle of freedom):

"From Haikal's concept of time it seems to follow that the static element of order and acquiescence (*Einordnung*) has finally gained the victory over the dynamic element of longing for self-realization." (p. 152)

Haikal sees Europe's development as the development of reason and therefore the European crisis as the crisis of reason. The new basis of order is then found in "Inspiration". It is not the 'authoritative' (*herrschaftlich*) character of positivistic reason but its now established inability to vindicate 'authority' (*Herrschaft*) that brings about this new orientation.

Consequently, chapter VIII deals with "Islam—The New Basis". Tāhā Ḥusain and Tawāfiq al-Ḥakīm recognise religious truth and scientific truth as two equals which do neither agree nor conflict with each other because one is a truth of the heart and the other is a truth of the intellect. To Johansen "such a co-ordination does not solve the conflict between revelation and reason, between life in the concrete and religious commandment. It rather implies a double consciousness (izdiwaj) of the educated Muslim, which arises out of the tension between the knowledge gained through reason and the faith of revelation." (p. 161)

Haikal cannot accept this co-ordination. He is out for a new basis on which to establish a 'command over history' (*Geschichtsmaehtigkeit*) and thus to secure harmony and order. This he achieves by subjugating the relative to the absolute; reason cannot grasp revelation.

While speaking about Haikal's static conception of revelation and the limitation of reason to the practical sphere, Johansen comes to the conclusion:

"Neither theologically nor philosophically is he able to prove the necessity of limiting the binding character of revelation through reason for the sake of shaping the
concrete world because by putting forward such an argument he would have to make
clear that reason is not just an instrument which serves purposes but is sovereign
eough to establish a claim of its own as opposed to revelation. But he, who can base
the authority of revelation only on the weakness of reason would then again put in
question the harmony of reason and revelation.” (p. 194)

Haikal’s rejection of reason’s search after the knowledge of the truth of faith is
likened to the bila kafa of medieval orthodoxy. Therefore, in his best known work
“The Life of Muhammad”, he feels himself bound to accept every sentence of the
Qur’an with regard to historical events as an established fact and rejects the crucifixion
of Jesus without any historical argument because he holds the Qur’anic statement to
be divine truth. By contrast, Johansen sympathizes with M. A. Khalafallah, whose
thesis (Al-fann al-qissasi fi l-qur’an, Cairo 1957) has proved to him that a devout Muslim
can successfully establish harmony between reason and revelation:

“Since reason alone makes possible the understanding of revelation the latter has
to be understood in the light of the standards set by reason.” (p. 173)

The section “Contradiction and Weaknesses of Instrumental Reason” contains a
detailed criticism of the methods applied by Haikal in his Hayit Muhammad. Haikal
has rejected the allegation that the Prophet at one time compromised his monotheistic
message by accepting the intercession of Arabian deities. Johansen undertakes to
refute him. It is striking that the author who, being an agnostic socialist and on the
whole truly emancipated from the marked tendencies of such orientalists as are under
the spell of the mission of Christ, should have dwelt at such a length on one of the
hits paraded by those scholars. This might, however, be due to the irritation he must
have felt while coming across some inconsistencies, e.g., whereas Haikal argues in Hayit
Muhammad that the term gharantq was not used as a name for the goddesses—and
Johansen agrees that perhaps it was not—he makes polytheist Meccan address their
deities by that very name in his book on ‘Umar.

There is a shortcoming insofar as Johansen, whose bibliography is indeed com-
prehensive, has not availed himself of the work of Thor Andrae who, like Caetani, has
disproved Buhl, Weil, and Watt. If the well-known commentator Muhammad ‘Ali,
sometime considered by Western orientalists a mere apologist, is not acceptable to the
author for lack of Wissenschaftlichkeit (scientific method), as has to be supposed, this is
rather detrimental to his thesis, for in M. ‘Ali’s commentary (not listed among the
works consulted by Johansen) there is to be found an at least challenging exposition of
this controversy. Instead of noticing that according to the Bahrain, Ibn Ishāq, when
questioned about the story, called it a fabrication of the zanādiqa, Johansen insists on
the unfounded assertion that Tabari has taken it over from Ibn Ishāq. If it is at all
to be accepted that an incident happened which gave rise to the story, the most
credible explanation is given by M. Ḥamidullāh in his book “Le Prophete de l’Islam”,
pp. 87-88.

Sūra 41/26: “And those who disbelieve say: Listen not to this Qur’ān but make
noise therein (Bell: “babble in it”, i.e., interrupt the recitation of it), perhaps you
may overcome”, would in any case have a more probable connection with this
happening than 22/52, referred to by Johansen after the fashion of earlier writers.

The hypothesis that the strict monotheism of Islam is the result of a gradual
evolution of Muhammad’s conceptions after the call to prophethood has not yet
properly been dealt with by serious scholarship and Johansen does not elaborate either.
Buhl 158, cited in support, proves, on the contrary, that the prophet set himself against any semblance of polytheism from the very beginning of his mission with such a fervour that any sliding back by way of compromise would emotionally not have been possible for him.

It is regrettable that though Johansen’s answer to argument (i) of Haikal can be found in the book, the argument itself has—probably a printing mistake—not been given (after h follows j, p. 178). As a whole Johansen’s probe into the study of *sira* and Qur’anic exegesis is less convincing than his very able analysis of Haikal digesting European ideologies. As regards Haikal’s “Islamic Socialism” the author goes on to prove that it is but socialism in name:

“Standing on the firm basis of ethics which do not care for property and material things and exclude the striving after them, he leaves property with those who already have it.” (p. 196)

The author has done exhaustive research on all available material which might be of relevance to his thesis. He has thus been able to shed new light on one of the leading intellectuals of pre-revolutionary Egypt. During his stay of only one year in Cairo he has acquired a remarkable knowledge of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, there occur minor inadequacies as on page 36: *waqa‘a ‘alā* when used with a woman as the object, does not mean “to be led to”, but nothing short of the sexual act. In German it should therefore be translated, according to Hans Wehr, as *beiwohnen*. On pages 218, 220, 241 the frequent starting of sentences with *so* gives the German translation of Haikal’s writings a sort of biblical flavour which is hardly appropriate. It is further difficult to perceive why he mostly speaks of Sa’d Zaghliil, Tāhā Husain and Taufīq al-Ḥakim simply as Sa’d, Tāhā, and Taufīq since to Germans it would appear quite odd to refer to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as Karl and Fritz (putting them on one level with Max and Moritz). There is a parallel to this in F. Steppat’s excellent thesis on Muṣṭafā Kāmil (in *Die Welt des Islam*, IV, 1956) who is constantly referred to as Muṣṭafā. Nowadays the last name has assumed in most Arab countries the same function as the family name in Europe; if some orientalists have cogent reasons to make other suggestions it should be explained and given due publicity. But again, Johansen prefers to speak of Haikal as Haikal, instead of fraternally calling him Husain.

However, this does not in the least diminish the merit of the analysis under review which, should we search for its like on the Indo-Pak scene, can be compared to “The Image of the West in Iqbal” by Mazheruddin Siddiqui (Lahore 1965) with much of W. C. Smith’s “Modern Islam in India” added to it. It is a valuable contribution to the study of modern trends in Islam and may very well render an appreciable assistance to Muslims whose concern is the accomplishment of a critical self-analysis.

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