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MIKHAIL NAIMY

An Introduction

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PREFACE

The main purpose of this dissertation is to provide a comprehensive study of the life and literary works of Mikhail Naimy up to 1959, his seventieth birthday. Naimy, who started his career as a literary critic, a poet, an essay and story writer, a dramatist and a thinker as early as 1913, is now the author of twenty three original works in Arabic only the last three of which, *Sab'ūn*, 1959-60, *al-Yawm al-Akhīr* 1963, and *Hawāmish*, 1965, are not covered in this study.

What, we hope, should make the present work specially significant is not only that it is the first attempt made so far to offer a systematic and comprehensive study of a man whose literary output in Arabic has been so rich, but that in giving an almost up-to-date overall picture of Naimy, it puts before the reader one of those very few 20th century literary leaders and modernists in Arabic at whose hands Arabic creative writing has been able to emerge, after nearly seven centuries of decay, from its state of outward imitation to a state of original creativity and genuineness.

Though our main subject in this work has been Naimy, we have, nonetheless, found it more appropriate for the purpose of a fuller appreciation of his place and achievement, to introduce our study with a survey of the literary atmosphere previous to his age.

The first part of the introduction surveys the dark ages of the Arabic language up to the beginning of the 19th century. It is designed, extremely wide as is the field it tries to cover, more to give a vivid idea of the literary sterility then prevalent and of its nature, than to provide a research study into the literary history of that period and must, therefore, be seen in this light. The remaining parts are devoted to the literary atmosphere during the 19th century, characterized by the impact of the West on the Arab world and the beginning of Arabic literary renaissance. Here again, the descriptive and historical approach already and competently exploited by many literary students of this century is superseded by an explanatory attempt designed to trace the underlying ideological factors, mainly religious in outlook, which had kept Moslem writers, on the whole, conservative in outlook and incapable of improving essentially on the sterility of the previous ages. This has placed 19th century leadership of literary modernism, arriving at its most developed maturity in Naimy and his early 20th century Syro-American colleagues in al-Mahjar School, almost exclusivily in the hands of religiously non-committed Arabs.

In our study of Naimy we have devoted the first two chapters to a detailed acount of his early life and education in Lebanon, Palestine, Tzarist Russia, the United States and Europe up to his first appearance on the literary stage among the prominent writers of al-Mahjar. Our main emphasis throughout has been on the influencing factors that shaped his character and thought and exercised a lasting impact on his literary career, such as The New Testamen and the character of Christ, Tolstoy and 19th century Russian realism, American transcendentalism, British Romanticism and Eastern theosophies.

This we have supplemented in the subsequent eight chapters with an almost chronological study and appreciation of Naimy's works up to 1959, following the author's gradual development from the literary critic and rebel, the realist story writer and the romantico-lyrical poet in his early works during his sojourn in the U.S.A. up to 1932, to his complete ideological spiritual and artistic dedication to mysticism and theosophy since he made

his final retirement that year to his mountainous retreat in his home country, Lebanon.

Though we consider it the chief contribution of this dissertation that it provides the first comprehensive and elaborate study ever conducted on Naimy so far, we by no means claim that it can be regarded as a final and complete account and appraisal of the man and his works. Naimy's career, in the first place, can by no means be considered ended. Already three more works by him have appeared, as has been pointed out, while this study was in progress. Others are very likely to follow in the future. Our present attempt, which has mainly concentrated on the study of Naimy's life and background, and on the interpretation and assessment of his works, both on their own merits and in relation to the various stages of his intellectual, spiritual and artistic development, has not touched on the subject of Naimy's impact on present-day Arabic literature.

Far from being claimed a final word on Naimy, therefore, the present work is only meant to pave the way for more extensive and comprehensive studies in the future that would cover Naimy's life and career in full and assess his impact on modern Arabic literature. It is in this light that we have chosen to call our study, an introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been the practice with most students of modern Arabic literature, and not without justification, to consider, roughly speaking, the beginning of the 19th century as the starting point of the modern Arabic literary renaissance[1]. This, it is believed, is the period at which the western impact on the Arab East, through Egypt and the Syrian coastal area, reached a pitch capable of giving a shake to the sterilising, dull monotony brought over the land throughout the 16th to the 19th centuries by the Ottomans and their conquest. "During their age", says Butrus al-Bustāni, "the language fell to an alarming level, the gift of rhetoric decayed, the minds of writers stiffened, and were enfolded by an anaesthetic lethargy out of which they were awakened only by the cannon of Napoleon in Egypt and the bells of monasteries on the hilltops of Lebanon"[2]. Syria and Egypt, having managed, under the Turkish Mamelukes, to remain until 1517 the chief centres of Arabian life[3] and sole heirs to the Arabic literature of the East[4], came in the

1. See Kratchkovsky, I., "Modern Arabic Literature", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*Supplement*), London, 1938, pp.26-33; Gibb, H.A.R., *Arabic Literature*; an Introduction, London, 1926, p. 114; Zaidān, G., *Tārīkh Ādāb al- Lughah al-'Arabiyyah*, Vol. IV, Cairo, 1915, p. 9; Hitti, Ph., *History of the Arabs*, 6th edition, London, 1956, pp. 741—742; 745.
2. al-Bustāni, B., *Udabā' al-'Arab fi al-Andalus wa 'Asr al-Inbi'āth*, 4th impri., Beirut, 1958, p. 211.
3. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, 2nd edition, Cambridge, 1930, p. 442
4. Gibb, *Arabic Literature*, p. 102.

same year under Ottoman rule and entered, together with the rest of the Arabic-speaking provinces, " a period of universal stagnation and decay "[1].

Though it is true that the three centuries of Ottoman occupation that followed were the dark ages of Arabic literature, yet it is not as true to believe, with al-Bustāni and many other modern Arab literary historians[2], that that occupation is the main factor accounting for the sterility and darkness. It had, in fact, only given the death blow to a literature that had since the thirteenth century lost its claim to originality, virility and genuineness. We shall, in passing, attempt a general and quick survey of the conditions weighing on Arabic creative writing during its age of decadence, from the time of the Mongol invasion up to the nineteenth century.

With the complete victory of reactionary orthodoxy in Islam towards the turn of the twelfth century, rationalism as the independent endeavour of man to understand himself and the things of the world in which he lives, including religion, was dealt a mortal blow[3]. A military and culturally ignorant aristocracy, such as the Seljuqids, allied with conservative shcolastic theology and theologians, ruled despotically over the land. The Arab mind was therefore afflicted not only with dictators, who were by nature and, on the whole, incapable of appreciating any Arab intellectual activity, but also by narrow-minded Ash'arite theologians who were by nature suspicious of any intellectual activity outside their prescribed channels. Arabic literature, therefore, having already lost the activity of the Persian genius, which, we are told, had started,even before the fall of Baghdad, to express itself in its own native tongue instead of Arabic[4], was moreover deprived of the free use of its own genius. The victory of orthodoxy towards the end of the twelfth century brought forth with it the classical Islamic theory of knowledge, which prescribed that truth is one and eternal, and

1. Gibb, *Arabic Literature*, p. 103.
2. See al-Dasūqi 'Umar, *Fi al-Adab al-Hadīth*, Vol. I, 3rd edition, Cairo, 1954, Chapter I.
3. Nicholson, p. 460; also Gibb, *Arabic Literature* pp. 83-85, and Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p. 683.
4. Nicholson, p. 447.

that Islam has given it the best and final expression; nothing outside Islam is really important, and to seek knowledge and truth is therefore not to exploit the hitherto unknown but to amass what is already given. " The known ", as Professor Gibb puts it, " was not conceived of as changing and expanding but as given and eternal "[1]. As a logical consequence of this attitude to knowledge, the only understandably rewarding activity left for the Arab intellect was memorising the Koran and assimilating The Apostolic Tradition (Hadīth) with all the line of science and literature that the dominant Moslem church of the time recognised as relevant and orthodox[2].

Thus committed to memory work, " the Arab mind eventually could only find intellectual outlet for its creativity by moving endlessly within a closed circle of tradition[3], only to come out with additional commentaries, supercommentaries, glosses, super-glosses and abridgments on standard texts. It would thus appear that the Arab mind, which had once been kindled by Islam and set on an outward path to seek, to study, to learn and enrich religion, had now become the prisoner of dogma. For this situation, basically dogmatic, sterilised theology, and from there gradually weighed on other cultural fields and divorced them from originality. A theologian of this period could neither contribute something original to, nor discard anything from, the accepted, prescribed line of orthodox authority. In this, he had the tragic examples of both al-Suhrawardi (the murdered), 1153—1191, and Ibn Taimiyya (the qādi), 1263—1329, to mention only two. The first, suspected of heresy by the orthodox party for the neo-Platonic ideas and Shī'ite conceptions that coloured his teaching of Islam, was put to death in Aleppo[4]. The second, a thoroughgoing Hanbalite, attempting to reform Islam by drawing on the letter of the Koran and the teachings of the early church and

1. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, Chicago, 1947, p. 64.
2. See Nicholson on the canonical books, p. 337.
3. Gibb, *Modern Trends*, p. 65.
4. Huart, C. *A History of Arabic Literature*, London, 1903, pp. 274—275; also Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, 4th impri., London, 1956, p. 230.

by stripping it of what he considered superstitions of the popular faith, was likewise accused of heresy by the orthodox party and, after a series of imprisonments and persecutions, died of frustration in the citadel of Damascus[1]. What was really left for a theologian at work was usually either to deal with subjects that were neither black nor white, but rather trivial and insipid, or, in dealing with important ones, to repeat, paraphrase and often plagiarise the works of recognised authorities who went before him. To cite as an example a figure in whose works afflictions of this type are inherent, is to mention no less a name than the philosopher, historian and theologian Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūti, 1445—1505. His numerous works, touching on practically every field of knowledge in his day, are described by Hitti as showing no originality[2]. " He has been accused ", says Huart, " of taking the works of his predecessors, touching them up and transforming them and then sending them forth as his own "[3]. Indeed, plagiarism, which was the common practice in those days[4], was a natural and inescapable outcome of the dominant authoritarian atmosphere; so much so, that Arab rhetoricians were gradually led to look at it as a virtue rather than a defect. Since truth was already prescribed and finally given as the property of all men, then to take someone else's saying and put it in other, and presumably better, words is not plagiarism but a sign of originality[5].

This rather peculiar concept of originality springing from the skilful variation of form on a fixed and predetermined content, and so naturally emerging as the consequence of a closed orthodox theology, not only stifled theology itself, but was also decisive in its impact on literature. By the focussing of attention on form rather than on content, the efforts of writers were wholly concentrated on style and its embellishment. The study of language

1. Brockelmann, pp. 237—238; Nicholson, pp. 462—463; Huart, pp. 334—336.
2. Hitti, *History of The Arabs*, p. 687.
3. Huart, p. 357.
4. See Hitti, *History of The Arabs*, p. 689.
5. See Grunebaum, G. von, "Concept of Plagiarism in Arabic Theory", J.N.E.A.S III, October 1944, pp. 234—256.

in itself became a primary concern among writers of the age, and the art of rhetoric, with its three great branches of Science of Significations, علم المعاني Art of Exposition, علم البيان ,and Art of Euphemism, علم البديع gained a place of singular importance and popularity. This is witnessed during this period by the compilation of, and particular interest in, the lexicographic books of grammar, philology and verbal usages, which proved indispensable to students and literary men and which held their unchallenged authority on literary writing until late in the 19th century. Instances of these books are the voluminous dictionary of *Lisān Al-'Arab*, of Ibn Mukarram (Ibn Manzūr), 1232—1311, the *Qāmūs al-Muhīt* of Fairūzabādi, 1329—1419, a lexicographical work which had become so popular among students of the Arabic tongue that its name entered into the Arabic language as equivalent to the word "dictionary" (قاموس) and inspired a series of commentaries that continued up to the middle of the 19th century[1].

In other linguistic sciences stand, among many others, the numerous works of Ibn Mālik, 1203—1273, chief among which is the *Alfiyya* in grammar which, with the commentary on it by Ibn 'Aqīl, and the *Ajurrūmiyya* of Ibn Ajurrūm (d.1324), remained the standard texts for the mastering of the Arabic language even up to the beginning of the twentieth century[2]. If to this attitude of overconcentration on language and style, as distinct sciences in themselves, is added the fact that orthodox theology had claimed to itself the possession of final truth concerning man, God and the universe, both in general and in detail, it instantly becomes evident how narrow and alarmingly insignificant and superficial a role is left for literature. Not expected, and basically incapable in these circumstances, of dealing effectively with any fundamental truth in life, literature was divorced from truth and life and was transformed into a decorative art whereby a writer, knowing on every occasion what was expected and also appropriate of him to say, tried to impress his readers or listeners with the way in which he said it. The

1. See Zaidān, *Tārīkh Ādāb al-Lughah*, Vol. III, Cairo, 1913, pp. 145—146.
2. See, for instance, Naimy, M., *Sab'ūn* I, Beirut, 1959, pp. 123—124.

example set by al-Harīri 1054—1122, in his *Maqāmāt* as early as the eleventh century was taken very seriously to heart by subsequent generations, and is said to have been esteemed for its literary merits well into the nineteenth century " as, next to the Koran, the chief treasure of the Arabic tongue "[1].

It is, of course, beyond the scope of the present work to enumerate all the types of rhetorical affectations, linguistic artifices and metric devices introduced by poets and writers during the seven centuries following the Mongol invasion. Taking poetry, for instance, a quick glance at any Dīwān composed during this period instantly reveals the high degree of poverty in content and sophistication in form to which poetry had reached. It would perhaps suffice for the present to cite some instances from the poetry of Safiyy al-Dīn al-Hilli, 1278—1351, who has been described as the greatest poet of his period[2]. One finds in his poetry scarcely any attempt which does not aim at supercrogation (لزوم ما لا يلزم). His " Urtuqiyyāt " (الارتقيات) in praise of the Urtuqid kings at Maridīn[3], probably the most famous among his poems and most imitated by later poets[4], consist of twenty-nine qasīdas, the number of the Arabic alphabet. Each qasīda is built throughout on one of these letters with which every couplet is made to open and also rhyme. Picking one couplet of his " qāfiyyah ", for instance, we find the letter'Q' repeated at the beginning and the end, as it does in all the rest of the poem.

قفي ودعينا قبل وشك التفرق فما أنا من يحيا إلى حين نلتقي

Halt and bid us farewell ere we depart,
I shall not live until we meet again[5]

In his *Dīwān*, we meet again and again ingenious diabolic attempts, such as a long qasidah of no less than seventy-five lines, where the language of

1. Gibb, *Arabic Literature*, p. 89.
2. Zaidān, *Tārīkh Ādāb al-Lughah*, Vol. III, p. 129.
3. See *Dīwān Safiyy al-Dīn al-Hilli*, edited by Muhammad Jawād al-Kutubi, al-Najaf, 1967.
4. See the introduction to the *Dīwān*.
5. *Dīwān*, p. 525.

strangers, as he calls it, mostly Persians, is merged with Arabic in a smooth, poetic flow. The poem, instigated by a friend, as Hilli says[1], who had urged him to reproduce for him the language, practices and cunning of strangers (probably beggars, vagabonds and other foreigners wandering at the time in the Arab land), can be understood neither by Arabs nor Persians alone but by people well versed in both, and probably other, languages of the time. This is how the poem opens, with the foreign Arabised words underlined[2].

بتبريخ أدصاي وتربيخ مشتاني غدت سائر الأخشان والفرس تخشاني

Another example of highly intricate rhetorical artistry is one composed on a youth called ʿIssa (عيسى), who is said to have been making his living out of gathering herbs and selling them. The poem[3], consisting of twelve couplets, is double rhymed, with the second rhyme consisting regularly of the word ʿIssa, holding each time a new meaning as it is slightly modified by one or another alliteration. Equally intricate attempts, are his seven separate poems on the different days of the week, each rhyming and ending with the name of the particular day in question[4].

His famous sixteen couplets, corresponding to the sixteen original metres for Arabic poetry, where,in the first part of each couplet, he mentions the name of the metre it is built on, and in the other,its actual (تفعيلات) feet[5], is still used by schools in the Arab world to help students memorise the poetic metres. In addition to the great number of poems in his *Dīwān* which al-Hilli composed in answer to requests asking him to compose on this or that theme or topic[6], on this metre and rhyme or the other, a great many others are devoted to puzzle work, or jokes and wit[7], not infrequently

1. *Dīwān*, p. 423.
2. *Dīwān*, p. 424.
3. *Dīwān*, p. 400.
4. *Dīwān*, pp. 344—346.
5. *Dīwān*, pp. 416—417.
6. *Dīwān*, Chapter X.
7. *Dīwān*, Chapter XI.

verging on open obscenity and licentiousness[1]. The root of all this literary play and linguistic exercise is, of course, found in Harīri's *Maqāmāt* which actually set the literary norm for generations to come. But the impact of Harīri is most striking where al-Hilli is careful to meet al-Harīri's challenges on his most intricate and crafty rhetorical figures. His poem of fifteen lines (p.407) meets Harīri's sixth Maqāmah containing the passage consisting of alternating dotted and undotted words[2]; so do his Yā'iyyah of dotted words (pp. 405—6), his Mīmiyyah of half-dotted, half-undotted (pp. 406-7), his totally undotted Yā'iyyah, his two poems the letters of which are all separate in the first and all joined in the other (p. 408), his palindrome (p. 403) and his fifteen-line poem of paronomasia (p. 402). All these seem to respond to the challenge of Harīri in his 16th, 17th, 26th and 28th, and especially 46th, Maqāmas, where all these rhetorical figures, now in prose and now in verse, are aptly performed.

It may be claimed, however, that Hilli's rhetorical climax is reached in his " al-Kāfiyah al- Badī'iyyah fi al- Madā'ih al-Nabawiyyah " (the complete Euphuistic poem in praises pertaining to the Prophet)[3]. Having intended to write a book including all types of Badī', Hilli explains, he fell ill. In his sleep he saw a messenger from the Prophet requiring the poet to compose a poem in his praise as a condition of restoring his health. The agreement was made, and al-Hilli availed himself of the opportunity to use the poem to demonstrate all figures of Badī', which came up to one hundred and fifty-one. These he embodied in the one hundred and forty-five couplets of the poem as he went, making each couplet a demonstrative instance of the figure or figures of Badī' it alluded to[4].

If it is remembered that al-Hilli is justly considered among the greatest poets throughout this period[5] extending up to the 19th century, if not the

1. Dīwān, pp. 537—547.
2. See al-Harīri, *Kitāb al-Maqāmāt al-Adabiyyah*, al-Matba'ah al-Husayniyyah al-Misriyyah ed., Cairo, 1908.
3. Dīwān, pp. 475—488.
4. See his prefatory notes to the poem, *Dīwān*, pp. 474—475.
5. See Fākhūry, H., *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabi*, Beirut, 1951, p. 868.

greatest, and that it was considered a poet's ideal to imitate him or vie with him, it becomes instantly clear to what alarmingly superficial level poetry had deteriorated.

Nor was the situation any better with prose. Creative writing in prose, since al-Harīri, had become less and less concerned with the subject matter and more and more concerned with the form and manner of presentation. With the total domination since the twelfth century of orthodoxy over the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, creative prose writing had to seek prospects for originality outside these realms. As in poetry, the relation was finally severed between the intimate self of a prose writer and what he wrote, and his work, without the intellectual and the spiritual elements, was reduced to crafty attempts to display his linguistic skill and rhetorical literary verbiage. The role of belles lettres was left to essayists and to scribes or secretaries in the service of kings or princes or other individuals of some particular high social distinction. In either case, the stress in writing was on the literary embellishment and form of presentation betraying the writer's craftsmanship, and not the substance presented. Essayists sometimes engaged in exchanging what were called " brotherly epistles " (إخوانيات), probably after the example of al-Ma'arri and Ibn al-Qārih, frequently choosing subjects which, though of little or no significance in themselves, offered ample opportunity for linguistic and literary formalism. A good example of the topics selected is the essay of Qalqashandi entitled *Hilyat al-Fadl, wa Zīnat al-Karam fi al-Mufākharah Baina al-Saif wa al-Qalam* (the Ornament of Merit, and the Excellence of Benevolence in the Competition between the Sword and the Pen), or another similar essay on the debate between the bow and the arrow by Ibrāhīm bin Sālih al-Hindi, 1102 A.H., entitled *Barāhīn al-Ihtijāj wa al-Munāzarah fi ma Waqa'a baina al-Qaws wa al-Bandaq mina al-Mufākharah.*

Secretaries and scribes, on the other hand, had no worries about selecting their subject matter. Engaged in carrying out the correspondence of their employers and patrons on various matters and in drafting their documents on different concerns, they found ample opportunity to concentrate on the manner of presentation and artistic handling. Secretarial work had

engaged the best literary men of the age[1] and included such names as Diyā' al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, 1163—1239, in his book of correspondence entitled *al-Washy al-Marqūm*, and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qalqashandi, who, after having practised secretarial work under the Mamelukes in Egypt, 791 A.H.[3], compiled his manual on the art of graceful composition, *Subh al-A'sha*, for the use of candidates for that type of occupation. Perhaps the greatest of these littérateurs is Muhyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Abdullah al-Zāhir, 1223—1292, one of the private secretaries of Sultan Baybar I of Egypt[3], whose writing in this type of art, according to Qalqashandi, can be depended upon as absolute authority[4]. The overstress on literary form in such writings makes it exceedingly difficult to render them in English. But it may be worthwhile to translate a small extract from the diploma of investiture drawn up by al-Zāhir, installing King Mansūr's son, al-Mālik al-Sālih 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Ali, from which an idea can be formulated of the degree of utter impersonality and empty formal rhetorical embellishment to which literary writing of this age had reached.

In the opening part of the diploma, where al-Zāhir praises God for having honoured the throne with such a king and such an heir, he goes on with his praise as follows[5]:

"We thank Him for his blessings which have added fruition to the blossoms, have gathered the sea and blessed the river, beautified the subject (beginning) and made well the predicate (end), and gathered within the sweetness and exquisiteness of time the gloriousness of evenings and the tenderness of mornings. And we testify that there is no God but God alone, having no partner, a testimony with which each hour we clothe the tongue with a new robe, and shade ourselves with its long shade, and see within reach those hopes which others deem far. And we pray to our lord Mohammad,

1. See Fākhūri, *Tārīkh al-Adab*, Beirut, 1951, p. 871.
2. See Zaidān, *Tārīkh Ādāb al-Lughah*, Vol. 3, p. 133.
3. See Sadeque, S.F., *Baybar I of Egypt*, Dacca, 1956, p. 3.
4. Qalqashandi, *Subh al-A'sha. fi Sinā'at al-Insha*, Vol. 10, Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyyah edition, Cairo 1922. p. 160.
5. Qalqashandi, *Subh al-A'sha*, Vol. 10, p. 173.

by whom God has purged this nation of evil and through whose guidance he has rendered its trees fructuous ."

In addition to the many minor euphuistic figures of various kinds in this small passage, sufficient to say that one could count in it at least twenty-one rhymed figures and no less than six different homonyms.

Having already become empty and sterile during the Mongol period and wholly dependent on linguistic formalism, Arabic literature therefore could hardly be said to have suffered essentially from the Ottoman occupation of the Arab world in 1516. The Ottoman occupation, it may be felt, had only offered a further unfavourable climate which hastened the death of a literature already dying. Not only did the Ottomans keep the orthodox dogmatic authority which had benumbed the Arab intellect and creativity, but they intensified it in attempting to incur the favour and ardent support of Moslems by claiming to rule in its name as Kalifs and defenders of the faith, no matter how unjustifiable that claim may have been[1].

If to this is added the fact that the Ottomans were primarily a military aristocracy, and consequently uninterested in culture, that under their rule Turkish had totally replaced Arabic as the official language, and that the Arabs had become a secondary race, ruled as provinces by foreigners from outside their land, it becomes evident why Arabic literature, already sick, could not survive under the Ottomans. The Ottoman masters, so utterly foreign to the Arabs, could no longer be used as patrons by Arab poets and littérateurs. And, since Turkish was their official language, a mortal blow was virtually dealt to Arab epistolary and secretarial literature. Indeed, the question at stake under Turkish rule was, not only whether the Arab belles lettres could possibly survive, but also whether it was possible for the Arabic language itself to remain intact. Even as early as the fourteenth century, Arab officials in the service of the ruling Turks, we are told, were already reluctant to use Arabic even with their fellow Arabs lest they became despised by

1. See Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p. 489.

their superiors for using the language of the subject race[1]. The Ottomans, following the lead of the Persians centuries before them, went on to create their own literature in their own language, adopting Persian patterns, rather than Arabic, and leaving the Arabic language, save in their theological works[2], along with the people who spoke it, to dwindle into negligence under their domination.

The belles-lettres in Arabic during this period can, for all practical purposes, be considered dead. Here and there, however, in the vast stretches of the Arab lands, so ominously screened from the outside world by the Ottoman shadow and the suffocation of orthodoxy, isolated poets would be heard, straining themselves over their broken language and unyielding metre and rhyme, to compose an anecdote, an epitaph, a monograph to record the birthday of a child, the wedding of a friend, or the date of a special incident, or to sing the praise of a certain Ottoman wāli or appointed local Amīr in return for some meagre livelihood. Examples of such poets are among those who frequented the courts of the Mameluke princes in Egypt, or among others in Syria who composed for the Jazzār (d. 1804) of 'Akka, or Prince Bashīr, 1767—1850, of Mount Lebanon (reigned 1799—1840), or other appointed Wālis. Famous among the latter are the poet and historian Niqūla al-Turk, 1763—1828, Ahmad al-Barbīr, 1747—1811, 'Umar bin Muhammad al-Bakri, 1759—1818, Mikhāil al-Bahri, 1740—1799, and Ilyās Iddeh, 1741—1828.

To study the works of almost any one of those poets is to see the alarming level to which poetry had descended under the Ottomans. To the emptiness it had inherited from previous generations, it added a marked weakness in language and an obvious incompetence to cope with metre and rhyme. In the few selected stanzas and poems cited by Father Cheikho from a manuscript of the *Dīwān* of Niqūla al-Turk[3], who is considered among the best of this group, one comes on a fantastically large number

1. See Lewis, B. *The Arabs in History*, London, 1950, pp. 158—159.
2. See Gibb, E.J., *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, Vol. I, London, 1900, p. 9 et seq.
3. See Cheikho, Louis, *al-Ādāb al-'Arabiyyah Fī al-Qarn al-Tāsi' 'Ashar*, Vol. I, Beirut, 1944, pp. 36—40.

of grammatical mistakes and ill use of words and idioms. A great effort is exerted in the attempt to fit the words into the metric and rhyming pattern, sometimes with the unfortunate result of estranging the words or straining the metre and coming out with superficiality, or even no meaning at all. Typically representative, is al-Turk's poem in praise of Prince Bashīr[1].

Almost all of the thirteen couplets of al-Turk's poem present the reader with one flaw or another. Nor do the other ten subsequent extracts by the same poet or those of his contemporaries prove any better. Of particular interest is al-Turk's poem in bitter criticism of poets of the day[2]. It is quite informative on the state of poetry and poets during this epoch. Poetry, he says, has become as cheap as barley and even cheaper still. Trash composers come out with cheap works corrupting the poetic metres and, being the thieves that they are, prey like wolves on the couplets of their predecessors. Many a dumb man among them pretends to be a Qiss[3], and many a braggart has his jaws wide open like those of a beast. The trade of poetry has passed away, oh men, pour your warm tearse in abundance over it.

Poetry, and, one might add, prose literature as well, had, as al-Turk says, passed away. But the causes of this death evidently lie deeper than his diagnosis could detect. Not only because poetry became ill- patronised and cheaper than barley, nor because of trash and dishonest composers, deficient in both language and metric schemes, did literature die. The lack of patronage with an Abu al-'Alā' al-Ma'arri, 973—1057, for example, did not corrupt his great literature, whether prose or poetry, nor his literary honesty; nor did the masterly command of the linguistic and metric schemes by a Būsīri, a Hilli or a Qalqashandi make him or any of his contemporaries a second Jāhiz or Mutanabbi or Abu Nu'ās. It would seem that the main reason behind it all is that to al-Jāhiz, to Abu Nu'ās, al-Ma'arri and the rest, life was open. To them, as compared to their successors of the 13th century and after, truth and beauty were not authoritatively given, prescribed and final,

1. Cheikho, *al-Ādāb*, Vol. I, p. 37.
2. Cheikho, *al-Ādāb*, Vol. I, p. 40.
3. Alluding to Qiss Ibn Sā'idah, the great pre-Islamic orator and preacher.

but things to be personally sought, discovered grasped and presented. Fully based in the culture of their day, whether Moslem, Christian, Jew, Greek or Persian, they set out to probe into the unknown, only to come back in their own way with their own genuine version of things, whether in prose or poetry, with their own version of truth or beauty as they personally had communed with it, not allowing themselves to be curbed or tutored by superimposed authority. What has indeed given greatness to the living writings of an agnostic Ma'arri, a Mu'tazilite Jāhiz, a Qarmatian (قرمطي)[1] Mutanabbi and the rest, is in many respects precisely that which would have been ruled out as flagrant heresy under the rule of orthodoxy in later centuries.

The Arabs, up to the end of the eighteenth century, having been screened for so long from the rest of things in the world by the allied forces of the despotic Turkish rule,on the political level, and the traditional orthodox dogma, on the cultural and intellectual, lost the awareness of their rights and capabilities as individuals to think, feel and create. They were, as a consequence, neither in a position to absorb tradition and the given, nor,for that and other reasons, to liberate themselves from it and reach out through the shell for that which was as yet new and unattained. To be able to do the first, they lacked the free, invigorating national life which draws a nation's history to the dynamism of the living present and projects it onto the ever widening screen of the future. But to do both, they needed the prompting open contact with a new and inspiring greater culture. "Nowhere in the history of this period", says Professor Nicholson, "can we discern either of the two elements which are productive of literary greatness: the quickening influence of a higher culture or the inspiration of a free and vigorous national life"[2].

The opportunity for an open contact with a new and inspiring higher culture did, however, soon come about. It is important to see in what manner that opportunity was offered and how, as a consequence, it was received.

1. See Tâha Husain's book *Ma'a al-Mutanabbi*, in which al-Mutanabbi is seen as a Qarmatian rebel intent on revolutionizing Moslem Arab society, Cairo, 1936.
2. Nicholson, p. 443.

II

The nineteenth century opened to find that Europe had already preceded it into the Arab world. Napoleon had captured Egypt in 1798 and "shattered", in the words of Professor Lewis, "the illusion of the unchallengeable superiority of the Islamic world to the infidel West"[1], while on the coast of Syria, and mainly in Beirut, Western enthusiastic believers of different sects and nationalities were competing, even as early as 1652, as missionaries[2] to spread the Word of God among the so-called "forty millions of perishing sinners" in the "infidel" Moslem Arab East[3]. In this, each mission enjoyed the co-operation of such groups among the Christian natives as were favourably disposed to its particular teaching. To speak of an Arab literary renaissance during the 19th century is therefore to see it in the light of the renovating spirit which the Western impact had come to breathe into the parched lungs of the Arab East.

It is obvious from the outset that the western venture in the Arab world had taken the form of a challenge in the name of civilisation to the two main pillars which had been supporting Islam through the last seven centuries and driving it to isolate its own people from the impact of external world currents. Napoleon's successful invasion of Egypt had put the military power of Islam, and hence its political, social and economic order, to the test. Addressing his soldiers on the eve of that invasion, Napoleon said, "You are going to undertake a conquest, the effects of which upon commerce and civilisation will be incalculable"[4]. On the other hand, the Western religious missionaries to Syria, mainly Jesuits and Evangelists,

1. Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, p.p. 166 — 167.
2. See Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, London, 1957, p. 40 et seq.
3. Jessup, H., *Fifty Three Years in Syria*, Vol. I, London, 1910.
4. *Copies of the Original Letters from the Army of General Bonaparte in Egypt, intercepted by the Fleet under the command of Admiral Lord Nelson* (English translation), Vol. I, London, 1798, p. 237.

challenged Moslem theology. "The chief and ultimate object of missionary work in western Asia", says one outstanding member of the Protestant Mission to Syria, "is the conversion of the Mohammedans to the Christian faith"[1]. The justification for such conversion may be obtained from the appeal to the United States sent by a committee of American Protestant missionaries in Beirut, in 1848, on behalf of a new translation of the Bible into the Arabic language. "To give the Word of God to fourty millions of perishing sinners", they go on to explain, "to write their commentaries, their concordances, their theology, their sermons, their tracts, their school-books and their religious journals; in short,to give them a Christian literature, or that germinating commencement of one, which can perpetuate its life and expand into full-grown maturity, are great, gigantic verities taking fast hold on the salvation of myriads which no man can number, of present and all future generations"[2].

The significance of this Western venture in both Syria and Egypt, is that by challenging these two main pillars on which Islam had succeeded in immobilizing its own society, it put the Arab world in a position where immobility had of necessity ceased to be possible. The Arab world could either ignore this Western military and religious challenge,and consequently collapse and submerge under Western domination, wearing the particular mantle which the West chose to lay on its shoulder, whether religious, political, cultural or otherwise, or rise on its feet to meet the challenge by revolutionizing itself in a process of overall cultural re-examination, sifting and regeneration which would restore to the Arabs a genuine living character of their own. In either case, there was no escape for them from the West and the impressive model of Western civilisation. For even if the Arabs chose to treat and overcome ther Islamic mediaevalism and rise, as the West has risen, they had inescapably to avail themselves of Western secrets and means of advance

1. Jesuup, I, p. 85.
2. Jessup, I, pp. 68—69.

Unfortunately for the Arabs and Islam, those early contacts which the West established with the East aimed primarily at something other than despatching to the East those secrets and means of Western advance which since the Renaissance had been pushing Europe on the road of progress. Such concepts as secularism, science and the scientific method, nationalism, democracy, individual initiative, freedom and other transforming ideas expressive of the true spirit of Western civilisation were not really what the Westerners had primarily come to deliver unto the Arab East. Such ideas only reached the Arabs through the backdoor, so to speak, and have therefore been constantly confused and overshadowed in the Arab world, even up to the present time.

Napoleon, the son of the French Revolution, who had outwardly proclaimed to the Egyptians as he occupied their country, that "all men are equal in the eyes of God", and that he had come to liberate them from their Mameluke despots and give them social justice, had, in the same declaration, minimized confidence in his sincerity by claiming the French to be the defenders of Islam, "to have at all times been the true and sincere friends of the Ottoman Emperors", and by praying that "the Empire of the Sultan therefore be eternal"[1], which, if taken seriously, is tantamount to praying for the eternity of Arab social stagnation. The real intentions behind his Egyptian conquest, however, so carefully screened from the Egyptians, were clearly stated in a proclamation to his own soldiers, in which they are made to understand that their coquest "will give the English a most sensible blow, which will be followed up with their destruction" and that the destruction of the Beys "who favour the English commerce exclusively" is imperative for the welfare of the French[2]. Napoleon's direct aim in Egypt, therefore, was not primarily to deliver French enlightenment to the Arabs but to utilise the Arabs for the building of French glory.

In much the same way, the Western missions in Syria were primarily concerned with fitting Easterners into their own particular Western faith,

1. *Copies of the Original Letters*, pp. 235—236.
2. *Copies of the Original Letters*, p. 237.

whether Catholic, Protestant or other, which they unquestionably believed to be the only true one, instead of working on the people's own local faith to loosen its rigidity and make it fit them. Instead, Jesuits and Evangelists, the two main missionaries in the Middle East, together with their native Christian supporters, engaged among themselves in a most bitter theological controversy where even the most shameless accusations were not spared. To the Jesuits and their local Maronite supporters, the Protestants, were the "accursed Anglis" (English), alluding to the language which they spoke[1] and the "incarnate devils"[2], while to the Protestants, all Eastern churches and ecclesiastics were "idolatrous" and "masters of political intrigue and hypocrisy"[3], and "Rome is Rome in all ages in her bitter hostility to the word of God"[4]. Accordingly, the American (Protestant) and Catholic Arabic presses, to mention only two chief ones out of many operating in the area during the first seventy years of the 19 th century, almost all of which belonged to Christian religious institutions of various sects[5], devoted the major part of their efforts to the issuing of Christian religious books of intricate polemical nature aimed at propagating their dogma and defaming that of their opponents, and at inciting people to theological argumentation and sectarian indoctrination. One might mention as typically representative of such books: *Widā'āt Yūnis Keen* (Farewell Letters), a book of thirteen chapters written in Arabic, 1825, by Dr. Jonas King of the Syria Mission of the American Presbyterian Church, in which he tries to illustrate his belif in Protestantism by attempting to refute the thirteen points on which he objects to Catholicism; or the *Thirteen Lettres* in refutation of Catholicism by Mr. Isaak Bird of the same Mission, firts published in Malta, 1833, and reprinted several times in Beirut after the Americans moved their Arabic printing press from Malta to that city in 1834.

1. Jessup, I, p. 43.
2. Jessup, I, p. 170.
3. Jessup, I. pp. 43—44.
4. Jessup, I, p. 37.
5. See Cheikho, "Fann al-Tibā'ah Fi al-Mashriq", *al-Mashriq*, Vol. II, IV and V, Beirut, 1900, 1901, 1902.

Representative of the Catholic publications in Beirut in the early sixties are such books as *The Safe Guide to the Refutation of The Protestants* الهدي الأمين في دحض آراء البروتستانتيين by Niqûla 'Abd al-Nûr, or *The Fitting Answer and the Valid Proof in Refutation of the Biblicists* (as all Protestant missionaries in Syria were often called). الجواب السديد و البرهان الوطيد رداً على البيبليشيين by Father Yousof al-Murayyid. It was estimated that more than two-thirds of the approximately one hundred and fifty books published in Lebanon during the first half of the 19th century were of such nature[1].

With the missionaries so keenly preoccupied among themselves with their dogmatic differences and theological controversies, it would seem, paradoxically enough, that the Arab East, already overridden and sterilised by theology and dogma, had to be further dogmatised by the very people who professedly had come to liberate it. As a consequence of this, the clefts, already charp, between the various Christian sects in the area, and between Christians and their countrymen of other denominations, were pulled further apart, and the differences increasingly cultivated and embittered to the point of open persecution[2]. In this, each sect was naturally prompted to draw more and more on the protection and support of a particular ally among the Western powers, who were greedily competing throughout the nineteenth century for the spoils of the disintegrating Ottoman empire and were only too happy to avail themselves of pretexts for intervention in Syria[3]. Catholics looked to France for protection, the Greek Orthodox to Russia, while the non-Christians, especially the Druzes among them, left with the Ottoman empire as their natural guardian, enjoyed the patronage of Great Britain[4], who, on the whole throughout

1. See the introduction to *al-Rawa'i'* 41, by Fu'âd al-Bustâni, Beirut, 1952.
2. A vivid instance of this is provided in *Qissat As'ad al-Shidyāq*, (The Story of As'ad al-Shidyāq), a Lebanese Maronite who was converted to Protestantism and was, as a consequence, tortured to death by the Maronite Patriarch. The book, written by Isaak Bird and published anonymously in Malta, 1833, has hitherto bee mistakenly attributed to Butrus al-Bustâni. (See Jessup I, p. 40.)
3. See Hitti, *Lebanon*, pp. 430—433.
4. Brockelmann, p. 368.

the so-called Eastern Question, played the part of the Sultan's friend for the sake of preserving her interests and forestalling French and Russian ambition in the Ottoman empire. English-speaking missions in Syria, so antagonistic to the French-protected Catholics and Maronites and the Russian-patronised Greek Orthodox, consequently felt more at home with the local Druzes, Mohammedans and Ottoman authorities[1]. Not only were they relatively untouched during what has been called the infamous year of 1860 when more than 30,000 Christians, chiefly Maronites and Greek Orthodox, were massacred in Lebanon and Syria by the Druzes[2], with the encouragement of the Ottomans and to the satisfaction of the Mohammedan inhabitants, but they also enjoyed the protection of the Druzes, who guaranteed their safety and freedom of movement in the infected areas[3] and even guarded some of their belongings in their sacred Khalwas (خلوات) where none but the Druze initiates are allowed to appear[4]. Druze leaders, some of whose successful plans for the massacres, it is claimed[5] were actually drawn up by Colonel Churchill, a British Agent in Lebanon who acted as their confidential adviser and military counsellor, often reported to the chief Evangelical missionaries in the area, warning them of the situation, or even sometimes asked for their mediation with Western powers to stop the religious conflicts[6].

It is not the purpose here to elaborate on the sectarian antagonisms leading, between the forties and sixties of the nineteenth century, to terrible religious massacres that put Syria, and mainly Lebanon, an area reported to have lived even up to the 1840s in a state of peaceful religious co-existence, toleration and amity, in utter turmoil[7]. Reference in this respect can be made to several books and chapters on the disturbances, their different

1. See Jessup, I, p. 168.
2. Brockelmann, p. 368.
3. See Jessup, I, pp. 168—169; 186.
4. See Jessup, I, p. 189.
5. See Jessup, I, pp. 174—175.
6. See Jessup, I, pp. 172—188.
7. See Hitti, *Lebanon*, pp. 433—434; also Jessup, I, p. 159.

causes and results, written by people who were eyewitnesses or even participants[1]. What is of interest at present is to shed light on the particular face with which the Christian West, out of all the faces of its civilisation, happened to appear before the Arabs, and especially the non-Christians among them, and the particular eye with which the Arabs looked at that face. This is of particular interest here because it is crucial in acounting for the attitude — and in this connection, the literary one which the Arab world as a consequence adopted, and the course of development it chose to follow.

With Western colonial competition taking every advantage of, and even nourishing, sectarian animosity and antagonism to justify and consolidate its intervention and penetration in the Middle East, and with Mohammedans, and especially Druzes, rising against compatriot Christians, slaying them by the thousands, even at the altars of their churches, burning their cities and villages, pulling down their churches and throwing them into desolation in one of the most terrible religious massacres in history; with all this in progress in Syria in 1860, it became obvious that the prime purpose which the missionaries had come to serve in the Arab world had failed completely. Not only had their religious competition and polemics engendered suspicion and hatred between the different local Christian sects, which helped weaken the Christian front physically and morally before the onslaught of an alarming, antagonised Druze Mohammedan front, but it also labelled them, together with their Christian co-religionists in the area, in the eyes of the non-Christian communities, as enemies of Islam and agents of Western imperialism, in virtue of thier close association with the different Western powers. Even the fairly enlightened among the Moslems still find it difficult today to dissociate the two from

1. See Churchill, C., *The Druzes and The Maronites, Under the Turkish Rule from* 1340 *to* 1860, London, 1860; Jessup, I, Chapter VIII; Abu-Shaqra, H., *al-Harakah fi Lubnān*, edited by 'Ārif Abu-Shaqra, Beirut, 1952; Mushāqqah, M., *Mashhad al-'Ayān bi Hawādith Sūriyya wa Lubnān*, Cairo, 1908.

the aims and motives of the crusades a few hundred years back[1].

In this atmosphere of mutual suspicion and enmity between the Christian sects themselves, and between Christians and Mohammedans, it became difficult to see how East and West in Syria could possibly be brought together in a process of mutual cooperation and understanding, whereby Mohammedans could willingly reach out for what education those missionaries had come to offer, or still less for the revolutionising culture of the Christian West from which these missionaries had come, and which in the eyes of non-Christian Arabs they symbolised. It would have been extremely naive to share the opinion of a major Western missionary to Syria who, scanning at the time the Druze — Christian massacre of 1860, believed that "the plowshare of the divine judgement was rending the soil of Syria to prepare the way for a new seed sowing in the future"[2], meaning the seed of Christianity. Already, the popular war song of the Druzes, repeated all over Syria, was: "How sweet, how sweet, to kill the Christians" (ما أحلى، ما أحلى قتل النصارى)[3]. What a Druze is reported to have said to one of his Christian victims during these troubled times, as the latter was calling on Jesus for protection, is rather symbolic of the gap separating Christians and non-Christians, and consequently East and West, mentally as well as physically in the area: "Call upon your Jesus and see whether He can help you now" he said as he hit him. "Don't you know God is a Druze ?"[4].

III

In a society such as the Moslem where secular life in all its workings and aspects springs from and is totally dictated by religion, such a concept of

1. A vivid instance of this is *al-Tabshīr wa al-Istiʿmār, ʿArd li Juhūd al-Mubashshirīn allati Tarmi ila Ikhdāʿ al-Sharq li al-Istiʿmār al Gharbi*, by Farrūkh, ʿUmar, and Khālid, Mustapha, 2nd edition, Beirut, 1957.
2. Jessup, I, P. 187.
3. Jessup, I, pp. 168—169.
4. Jessup, I, p. 181.

God as being exclusively Druze or Moslem, in which the Arab mind seems to have taken refuge in the face of Christian Western impact, had substantial implications with regard to the course of development the Moslem Arabs chose to take. The Western impact on the Arab world during the nineteenth century, whether in the form of missionary work and direct political and military intervention in Syria, resulting in the autonomy of Mount Lebanon (متصرفية جبل لبنان), 1861[1], or in the form of conquest and occupation, as Napoleon's in Egypt, actually revealed the weakness and helplessness of the Moslem Arab mediaevalism in the face of Western progress. If the true God was believed to be exclusively Druze or Moslem, then the only logical step left for the Moslems to avert their weakness was not primarily to avail themselves of means and secrets of progress adopted by the Christian West, but to fall back on Islam, the true word of God, and consequently upon those days when Islam was glorious. The main tenet held by practically every Moslem reformer, whether in Syria or Egypt, throughout the 19th century was that the helplessness of the Moslem East in the face of Western intervention was not so much due to Western strength as it was the outcome of the Moslem departure from true Islam in its purest form. Hence came the call for the reconstruction and rebuilding of Moslem society on the basis of an enlightened revivication of Islam that would come out with the pure Moslem principles so badly observed and diluted through the centuries to suit the purposes and whims of ruling authorities[2]. Such a call reached its climax in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt, towards the last quarter of the 19th century when the ruling dynasty of Muhammad 'Ali, who, having originally risen to power by helping to drive the "infidel" French from Egypt, 1801, in the name of God and the Sultan, gradually succumbed to the West, and in frustrating the 'Arābi revolt[3], invited the British occupation of Egypt, 1882.

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni (1839 — 1897) and Muhammad 'Abduh

1. For details, see Hitti, *Lebanon*, Chapter XXVIII.
2. See Gibb, *Modern Trends*, p. 39 et seq.
3. See'Arābi's account of his revolt and his reasons for it in *Tarājim Mashāhīr al-Sharq* by Zaidān, G., Vol. I, Cairo, 1910, pp. 254-280.

(1849 — 1905) are usually considered in one way or the other by almost all students of modern Arab history as the first serious doctrinaires and leaders of modern Islamism in the face of the impact of the Christian West[1]. It is neither desirable nor possible in this present work to study in detail the works and achievements of these men, but a general contemplation of both their teachings is necessary here to indicate the spirit with which Islam in the Arab world received the Western impact and the particular way in which it thought to conduct its renaissance in an attempt to face it.

It was partly because of the missionaries who came to the Arab world primarily to Christianise the Moslems and partly because of the different Western powers who frequently felt it their duty to protect the missions and who, through claiming to patronise the different local Christian sects, found a convenient way of penetrating into the Arab East, that Moslem reformers in the Arab world, and in this context, al-Afghāni and 'Abduh, understood the West as being primarily the enemy of Islam as a religion and the East-West struggle in the Arab world as, in fact, a Christian attempt to break down Islam as a means to dominate the Moslems. This thesis is repeated and elaborated upon again and again in the *al-'Urwat al-Wuthqa* paper, 1884, which al-Afghāni and 'Abduh started in Paris and which was described as the first, basic stone in the foundation of modern Islam[2]. All the articles in *al-'Urwat*, we are told[3], though written by 'Abduh alone were jointly conceived by him and al-Afghāni. A fairly representative instance of the general spirit permeating this paper, which has also been described as the mother of all present papers and the example still followed by all leaders calling upon the East to arise[4], is an article on "Fanaticism" that

1. On both men, see Adams, C. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, London, 1933.
2. See Tarrâzi, Viscount Philip de. *Tārīkh al-Sahāfah al-'Arabiyyah*, Vol. II, Beirut, 1913, pp. 269—262.
3. See Rida, Muhammad Rashīd, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām, al-Shaikh Muhammad 'Abduh*, Vol. II, Cairo, 1933, p. 229.
4. See the introduction to the book *al-'Urwat al-Wuthqa, Li al-Imāmain al-Hakīmain al-Sayyid Jamāl al Dīn al-Afghāni wa al-Shaikh Muhammad 'Abduh*, a collection of all the articles contained in the 18 issues of the *'Urwat* that ever appeared, ed. and published in Beirut by Jamāl, Muhammad, 1910.

appeared in the sixth issue[1]. Fanaticism is here described as a God-sent feeling, the divine purpose of which is to draw people of one denomination together in an attempt to unite them as one man in the face of the pressing enemy. The loftiest bond that unites all Moslems is Islam. In it, all the dissenting traces of race and nationality vanish, leaving all Moslems in a consolidated front that would glory in its firm stand in the face of intruding forces. Preachers of anti-fanaticism in Moslem lands in the name of modernism, are agents of the Christian West, who, having realised that the secret of Moslem strength is in its unifying religion, have concentrated their strength on attacking this religion in the name of toleration, in a process of bringing the Moslem world under Western Christian domination. Or else, the article goes on, how is it that in spite of all differences and enmities that divide the Western world, religious fanaticism among them remains the common principle which they meticulously observe and on which they all meet? In fact, the defence of their religious enthusiasts and missionaries is one of the very basic principles on which their political government rests. Western powers forget all their intrigues against one another and all ther bitter political hatreds when it comes to religion and unite in directing their political and military forces to the protection of their co-religionists, no matter how remote or to what race or nationality they belong. A man among them, such as Gladstone or the like, may rise to the highest degree of freedom and yet infuse every word he utters with the spirit of Peter the Monk. Nay, the spirit of Gladstone is but another copy of Peter's.

After tracing the bitter experience with aggressive Christianity, from the time of the Greeks, who are said to have Christianised their subjects by force, to the Crusades, to the Spanish Christian war against the Moslems of Andalusia, and other minor incidents, in a chain of Christian aggressions, of which the modern East-West conflict in the Moslem lands is thought to be another link, the article ends by calling fervently and solemnly on the

1. This and all other articles of *al-'Urwat* are also found in Rida's *Tārīkh al-Ustādh*, Vol. II, pp. 229—332.

Moslem nation to retort by falling back on Islam, in which alone is "their life, their blood, their soul, and their happiness". Islam is a God-sent bond, only by firmly clinging to which can Moslems become powerful, glorious and invincible.

The conclusion established in Moslem minds, therefore, is that since the Western attack is religious, the counter-attack must spring from religion. Consequently, power for the Arabs cannot be derived from Western sources, but from the pure founts of Islam, the right observance of whose principles in earlier days had made, and is therefore still capable of making, the Moslem nation the strongest and greatest in the world. Muhammad 'Abduh even goes to the extent of preaching that the whole European civilisation is but the outcome of the putting into practice by Europeans of the teachings of Islam made accessible to them during the wars of the Crusades[1]. He seems to believe that the Protestant movement in Europe is the origin of the whole Western civilisation and progress and that such movement, having developed, in his opinion, as a consequence of Western contact with Islam during the Crusades, is simply Islam in disguise; "not that they believe in the message of Mohammad", he says, "but that what they believe in is Mohammad's religion differing only in name and form of worship"[2]. The story of the Moslems, therefore, 'Abduh believes, is that of a physician who has cured others, only to catch the disease himself. They are suffering pain and torture while the cure is in their own home and all they need is but to take it[3].

al-Afghāni on his part is said to have consecrated his indefatigable energy and ceaseless agitation to "the accomplishment of the unification of all Moslem peoples under one Islamic government, over which the one Supreme Caliph should bear undisputed rule, as in the glorious days of Islam before its powers had been dissipated in endless dissensions and divisions, and the Moslem lands had Lapsed into ignorance and helplessness

1. 'Abduh, M., *Risālat al-Tawhīd*, ed. by Rashīd Rida, Cairo, 1918, pp. 135—136,
2. 'Abduh, *Risālat*, p. 136.
3. 'Abduh, *Risālat*, p. 140.

to become the prey of Western aggression". In this way, "Moslem peoples would be able to work out for themselves a new and glorious order of affairs without dependence on, or imitation of, European nations"[1]. Accusing leaders of having departed from true Islam for the pursuance of their own ends and of having as a consequence weakened the Moslem nation in the face of Western aggression, al-Afghāni is reported to have engineered in the name of Islam a plan for political assassination and coups d'état in Moslem countries which succeeded in killing the Shāh of Persia and his Prime Minister, of threatening the life of Isma'īl, the khedive of Egypt, and of openly urging the assassination of Nūbār Pasha, an Armenian Prime Minister of Egypt (1884 — 1888) during the English occupation. The 'Arābi revolt in Egypt, 1882 the movement of the Young Turks, 1906 and the Persian revolution of 1906, are all said to have been linked in one way or another with his name and teachings[2].

There is evidently more than one reason which would make a student of modern Islam stop and wonder whether the rulers of Moslem countries, no matter how corrupt, are really the stumbling block to the formation of an all-Moslem unity under a Supreme Caliph, ruled according to the unalloyed principles of orthodox Islam, and whether the lack of such unity is really the explanation of the helplessness of Moslem countries in the face of the vigorous West.

al-Afghāni, 'Abduh and other so-called modernists in Islam were, it would seem, too concerned with their disapproval of Christianity to be able to detect in Western progress what would guide them to the real causes of Moslem backwardness. They constantly understood Christianity as a dogma, but never as a culture, and consequently missed the whole inner meaning of Western civilisation. What, for instance, made them welcome the Ottoman rule of the Arab world, though embittered against the rulers, and reject Western occupation, is apparently not because the Ottomans

1. Adams, p. 13.
2. Adams, pp. 11—12.

were less oppressive, but because the West was Christian[1]. But when they come to discuss this Christianity, they lapse into abstract Christian dogma or into some generalised truths about some doings of the Church in history where they find it easy to prove the superiority of Islam and confirm their claim to Moslems that a reversion to the pure principles of their religion is the sure means of beating the Western combatant who is of an inferior faith.

There is no clear evidence in what al-Afghāni or 'Abduh taught or wrote that they ever understood how a Western nation can have State and Church separated and yet be considered Christian in civilisation, or how a scientist or a philosopher, like Darwin or Kant, can show or prove that theology is rationally or scientifically unjustifiable but not that religion is spiritually untenable, thus opening the way for religion to grow with the growth of human progress without allowing science, thought and progress to be choked by theology. Instead of introducing this Western type of procedure into the Arab world, whereby Islam might be pushed into the spiritual realm, leaving the Moslem mind to investigate freely the different fields of human knowledge and hence enrich religion with its own discoveries, Moslem reformers, and especially 'Abduh, busied themselves in propagating the idea that Islam is the religion of reason, and that, as compared to Christianity, known for its bitter enmity to science, it requires in its doctrine of the Unity of God "the clarifying of the mind, and forbids such foolish and extravagant notions as idolatry, incarnation and the suffering of the deity"[2]. Having filtered the findings of Greeks, Persians and Romans, and cleansed them from all impurities, Islam 'Abduh claims, kindled the torch of science that pierced the darkness of barbaric Europe in spite of the attempts of the Christian clergy to put it out[3]. It was only

1. See "al-Jinsiyyah wa al-Dīn al-Islāmi" (Nationality and Islam) originally published in *al-'Urwat*, in Rida, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh*, Vol. II pp. 231—235.
2. See 'Abduh, M., *al-Islām wa al-Nāsrāniyyah Ma'a al-'ilm* wa *al-Madaniyyah*, 8th edition, Cairo, 1373 A.H., pp. 46—51; also 'Abduh, *Risālat*, pp. 106—119.
3. Rida, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh, II*, pp. 398; also 'Abduh, *al-Islām wa al-Nasrāniyyah* pp. 129—130.

when Moslems departed from the science of their religion, 'Abduh claims, that they were denied the fruits of reason, and the sciences of the world forsook them. Unlike people of other faiths, meaning Christians, whose antagonism to science varies directly with their indulgence in their religion, Moslems in the past found themselves more and more indulgent in the universal sciences as their studies of theology increased[1]. What Moslems need, therefore, in order to cath up with modern science and progress is not, in the belief of 'Abduh, to free science from theology, but to reach science and achieve progress through the study of the Moslem religion. Science has always followed the light of the Koran wherever it shone, East or West. Once this book is back in the hearts of Moslems, science, whose only associate is the Koran, will follow as well[2].

It would therefore be safe to conclude that Mohammad 'Abduh, as representing a modernistic and reform movement in Islam, was not really working "to restate the truths of Islam in terms of modern thought", as he is often described[3], nor was his legacy that of the "adaptation of the fundamental positions of Islam to the demands of modern life and thought"[4] as Professor Gibb was led to think. In spite of his command of Arab history and culture, and especially theology, and his adequate knowledge of the traditional Moslem wiews and stands in respect to Christianity, whether in the East or West, there is little or no evidence in what 'Abduh wrote and preached, to indicate that he knew enough about modern thought and Western culture to entitle him to the role which he is claimed to have taken and to justify Professor Gibb's assertion that he was reconstructing modern Islam "by the aid of the vivifying elements in the rationalistic and progressive culture of the West"[5].

1. 'Abduh, *al-Islām wa al-Nasrāniyyah*, p. 140
2. *al-Islām wa al-Nasrāniyyah*, pp. 123; 141
3. Gibb, H.A.R., "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature", B.S.O.S. Vol. IV, 1927—28, p. 754.
4. B.S.O.S., Vol. V, 1929, p. 447.
5. B.S.O.S., Vol. v, p. 547.

What 'Abduh wrote shows that he was less concerned in dealing with Islam in the light of modern science and thought than in proving that science is Islamic and that Islam is scientific. The main ideological line behind 'Abduh's movement is not the reconstruction of Islam in the light of the present civilisation, but a call to Moslems to become civilised through falling back on the all-providing principles of their religion. Islam, being in 'Abduh's belief, the final stage which the divinely-revealed truth has reached in its evolution across the centuries, and the most perfect word revealed to man for the running of all aspects of life in both this world and the next, must, by definition, be in a position where it can only give civilisation to people but never be influenced by other civilisations[1]. How seriously this idea was taken by Moslem minds is apparent in the introduction to *Risālat al-Tawhīd* written by Shaikh Muhammad Rashīd Rida, one of 'Abduh's students and ardent followers. Islam, he claims, has brought man to the stage of complete independence. The Koran has proved to be the natural religion of people of every kind. To the primitive, it is a guardian, and to the advanced, it is a forerunner and a guide. Islam, therefore, is good for every place and for all time.

With this idea strongly popagated, the chances for Moslem Arabs of drawing on Western civilisation for the reconstruction and development of their life and society were reduced to the minimum. Instead of moulding their past in order to fit the developments and conditions of present civilisation, Moslem reformers apparently hoped to reconstruct and reform the present by a return to the past. Our only remedy, 'Abduh preaches, is in our return to and the putting into practice of, the principles and dictates of our religion as it was in the beginning . . . whoever attempts to reform the nation through means other than this shall be reversing the order of the universe and only increasing the misfortune and misery of this nation[2].

Consequently there is no sympathy in 'Abduh's teaching for those who argue, on the other hand, that it is the all-supervising and dictating

1. See 'Abduh, *Risālat*, pp. 115—120.
2. See Rida, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh*, II, pp. 242-243.

character of orthodoxy in Islam governing every field of human endeavour that really stifles the healthy growth of the natural sciences, and the free use of the human intellect in the independent exploitation of the world in which man lives. To Arab Christians like Farah Antūn and to Europeans like Hanoutaux, who suggested the separation of the theological and civil authority in Islam, the Church and State, as was the case in Europe, for the advancement of the East[1], 'Abduh replied accusing such men of weak judgement and lack of historic knowledge and discrimination. If Christianity is truly anti-worldly and anti-scientific, 'Abduh affirms, Islam, on the contrary, is the religion of reason and science, whence the West had first imbibed its learning and the basic principles of its civilisation[2]. While Europe advanced in science and civilisation only when it departed from its Christianity, science and civilisation have abandoned the Moslem world only when Moslems have forsaken the true teaching of their religion.

It is presumably because of his conviction that science is basically Islamic and totally non-Christian that 'Abduh singles out Western sciences as something worthwhile for Moslems to study and adopt from Europe[3]. This move on the part of Muhammad 'Abduh would, in itself, have been of tremendous consequence in the development and revolutionising of Moslem society, had he really meant it as one might first think he did. In what light Western sciences are to be taken by Moslems, is apparent from the different attempts made by 'Abduh to deal with some findings of modern science. One instantly feels that his primary aim in those attempts was more to understand modern science through the Koran than to understand Islam scientifically. Microbes, for instanse, are thought to be a certain species of "Jinn" frequently mentioned in the Koran, and volcanoes are

1. See for the controversy on this point between 'Abduh and Hanoutaux, once French Minister of Foreign Affairs, and between 'Abduh and Antun, then editor of *al-Jāmi'ah* (periodical), Rida, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh*, II, pp. 382-411; 452-484; also *al-Islām wa al-Nasrānīyyah*.
2. See also 'Abduh, *Risālat*, pp. 135—136.
3. See Adams, pp.39; 135; Gibb, H.A R., *Modern Trends* in *Islam*, p. 63.

taken to confirm the existence of Hell, deeply covered under the seas[1]. This tendency to understand modern scientific discoveries as illustrations of what the Koran had long ago anticipated became the practice of other Moslem reformers in line with 'Abduh, eager to prove the truthfulness, universality and miraculous origin and nature of that book[2].

It is hardly necessary to point out in this connection, that nothing could be more stifling to science than imposing on it a set of preconceived principles, especially of a religious nature, such as those of Islam, whose truth, being absolutely predetermined and a priori, is ever expected to be illustrated by science, but never freely examined by it.

IV

In the light of this brief survey of the 'Abduh movement, as representing the generally proclaimed ideological basis for Arab revivalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is made clear that the growing attitude is not to relax the grip of theology and religion on the different aspects of Arab life, but to seek the reconstruction, development and revivification of that life, from every side, through the revivification of the Sunnah, السنّة in its purest form. Not that the Sunnah was not in control since the days of the Abbasids but that it was since then, it is believed, abused and violated because Caliphs, as 'Abduh explains, had accepted rule in the name of Islam without being theologically qualified[3].

It is not within the scope of the present work to discuss the impact of this attitude of return to the pure Sunnah on the course and nature of development Arab revivalism had taken in its different fields, whether

1. For these and other instances, see Adams, pp. 134—143.
2. See, for instance, al-Kawākibi, 'Abd al-Rahmān, *Tabāi' al-Istibdād*, Cairo, 1931, pp.24—27, where the author attempts to list a series of scientific discoveries with the corresponding Koranic verses in which they are said to have been forecast.
3. See Rida, *Tārikh al-Ustādh*, II, P. 253

political, scientific, social or otherwise. Confining the discussion to the purely literary field, one cannot fail to note that Arab literary revivalism among the Moslems could not but follow the religious and theological.

Granted that the salvation, welfare and glory of the Arabs can only be achieved through a return to the all-civilising principles of religion and through the revivification of the glorious age of Islam, the only natural and logical course left for literature to follow in the hope of achieving originality and greatness, is to fall back on the golden age of Arabic literature, in an attempt to reproduce the great classic models of the Jāhiliyyah, Omayyads and Abbasids. The same logic which led Muhammad Farīd Wajdi of 'Abduh's circle, for example, to the conviction that no hitherto established principle or theory of any consequence in the raising of civilisation can be other than an echo of a Koranic verse, or a tradition of the Prophet, or that all the findings of learning dedicated to the uplifting of mankind appear as though they were practical evidence of the truthfulness of Islam and its principles[1], was also at work behind the literary movement contemporary to 'Abduh during the second half of the 19th century. It even continued with some enthusiasts well into the 20th century, when a man like Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyāt could still write: "Of all literatures, the Arabic is the richest because it is the literature of mankind from the beginning of man until the disintegration of Arab civilisation ... like brooks and rivers the languages of all various nations sprang, branched and then met and poured into one ocean, which is the Arabic language"[2].

This, of course, implies that just as Islam is the full embodiment of what is true and of any significance in human life and civilisation, and just as a return to pure Islam would once again guarantee for the Arabs the return of their lamented glory and supremacy, the classical Arabic literature is, in itself, likewise the embodiment of all great literature, and

1. See Wajdi, Farīd, *al-Madaniyyah wa al-Islām*, 2nd edition, Cairo, 1904 p. 40.
2. al-Zayyāt, H., *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabi*, 6th edition, Cairo, 1935 "The Introduction", p. 1.

the return to which is consequently the sole guarantee of literary greatness. If to this is added the belief, quite aptly stated by even as relatively recent a writer as Mustafa Sādiq al-Rāfi'i, that the Koran is the miracle of the Arabic language which shall remain eternal while man lives, that it has preserved the language from oblivion and will consequently ever serve as the eternal perfect standard against which this language should be tested, and that it is the perfect model for literary expression that should ever be sought, though ever unachievable, by writers in every age seeking literary excellence[1], it then becomes clear how closely tied was the literary revival of this period with Islam and how ideologically and artistically incapable it was of seeking inspiration outside Islam and its sphere of classical literary greatness.

Again, therefore we find theology and religion supplying the intellectual and philosophical framework which a Moslem writer , by virtue of being a Moslem, finds himself automatically adopting, while the Koranic literary style, on the other hand, and that of standard writers in what is believed to be the golden age of the Arabic language, extending roughly up to the end of the Abbasids, supplied him with models for technique and literary expression. "When the renaissance spread in the whole East", says al-'Aqqād of the literary revival in the second half of the 19th century, "there spread with it the regret among Moslems at the weakness and defects that befell them after their power and supremacy. Then arose in them the confidence that they had no resort, no hope of restoring their power and invincibility other than by falling back on Islam in its early days, the days of vitality, victory and pure spontaneity . . . consequently everything subsequent and new became, in their eyes, the symbol of artificial luxury, distorted doctrine and corrupt Arabic, and everything classical and close to Islam in its first stage became the symbol of truthfulness and solidity and a guarantee against weakness and linguistic inadequacy[2].

1. See al-Rāfi'i, M.S. *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* wa al-*Balāghah al-Nabawiyyah*, Cairo, 1928, pp. 11—13 (This book is the second of three volumes entitled *Tārikh al-Adab al-'Arabi*).
2. al-'Aqqād, 'A., *Shu'arā' Misr wa Bi'ātuhom fi al-Jil al-Mādi*, Cairo, 1950, p. 43.

The Arab literary revival among the Moslems, therefore, was not basically, as one might first believe, a step forward, whereby a writer, made conscious of the sterility which Arabic literature had reached from the days of al-Harīri up to his own day, sets himself the task of reforming that literature in the light of the superior cultures of the day. In complete accord with the religious modernists, Moslem literary revivalists were attempting to meet the modern literary age, not by simply stepping into it and benefiting from its experiences in an attempt to reform what they already had, but by shrinking back from it, leaping nearly seven centuries in an effort to evade the deficiency of the present by taking refuge behind the sufficiency of the past. It is not therefore an accident that no single Moslem Arab literary figure of this period, whether in Syria or in Egypt, the two leading Arab countries of the time, could boast in his writings, whether in poetry or prose, of a particular system or attitude of thought or of style that was his own, or that betrays a genuine awareness on his part, of the particular phase in which modern thought in the world, and particulary the West, was passing or had already passed, or the particular new concepts and ideals to which it was drawn. Just as the religious reform movement in the Arab world, as is illustrated by the activities of Muhammad 'Abduh and his circle, betrays no signs of awareness of the workings and development of modern philosophy and thought since the Middle Ages, but is in its basic doctrines and principles traceable in one way or the other back to mediaeval Moslem philosophers and scholars like al-Ghazzāli (d. 1111) and Ibn Taymiyyah, whom it tried to revive[1], so also do the literary revivalists contemporary to that movement reproduce one by one the thoughts and ideas of the great Arab writers of the past together with their manner and form of expression.

Poetry affords an excellent example in this respect. Neither Ismā'il Sabri (1854 — 1923), 'Abdullah Fikri (1834 — 1889), 'Abdulla al-Nadīm (1843 — 1896), nor Mahmūd Sāmi al-Barūdi (1840 — 1904), the chief

1. See for the impact of both men on 'Abduh and other Moslem reformers, H.A.R. Gibb's *Modern Trends in Islam*, pp. 32—53.

poets of the 'Arābi revolution, 1880, with which the poetic movement of revivalism in Egypt has been identified[1], show real signs of departure in their poetry, whether in general form or in content, from the poets of the Jāhiliyyah and the golden age of Islam. It is true, for example, that al-Bārūdi, justly described as being undoubtedly the leader (Imām) of this movement[2], rescued poetry from its superficial rhetorical artistry as it is found in the poetry of al-Hilli, and of the linguistic and metric weaknesses to which it had descended during the previous five centuries and has given it the natural flow, the strength of idiom and the reverberating music which it had previously enjoyed with an Umru' al-Qays, a Jarīr or a Mutanabbi. But it is also true that, while doing that, he has done nothing else for poetry; nothing to justify his having lived and composed towards the end of 19th century Egypt and not in the Jāhiliyyah period or Omayyad or Abbāsid. His only credit is that, unlike his predecessors in the few centuries before him, he has succeeded in coming close to poetry in its true classical form, although he has not brought classical poetry any nearer to the nature of the modern age. He can be said to have surpassed his immediate predecessors in the sense that he was more classical than they were, more of a Mutanabbi or even a Jarīr, than a Būsīri a Hilli or a Harīri. In other words, he was closer to the Sunnah of Arabic poetry than to those who distorted the Sunnah in later ages, but not in the sense that, in grasping the poetry of the golden age, the Sunnah, so to speak, of Arabic poetry, he has any more than his predecessors succeeded in bringing that Sunnah closer to himself and his age. Instead, al-Bārūdi could at best say:

"I spoke like those before me of the past did speak,
Of what is the common practice of man to talk about"[3]

al-Bārūdi, therefore, does not promise to contribute anything of his

1. See al-'Aqqād, *Shu'arā' Misr* p. 8.
2. al-'Aqqād, *Shu'ara' Misr*, p. 12.
3. *Dīwān al-Bārādi*, edited by 'Ali al-Jārim and Muhammad Shafiq Ma'rūf, Cairo, 1940, V.I, p. 5.

own to poetry, whether in form or content. Given the material and the pattern, he is left only with his particular skill, in which he was greatly gifted, to weave the one into the other, and produce what would enrich the poetic heritage in volume but not in kind or quality. Consequently "he has only roamed", as some see fit to praise him, "in the same skies that have been previously encompassed by Basshār, Abu Nu'ās, al-Buhturi, Abu-Tammām, al-Mutanabbi, Abu Firās and the like"[1].

al-Bārūdi's poetry in his Dīwān falls neatly into the broad classical categories of eulogising مدح, description وصف, vainglory حماسة, boasting فخر, wisdom حكمة, elegising رثاء, love غزل, and the like, in every one of which he sounds like one or other of the great classical poets who excelled in that field. The form of the Qasidah with its rhyming and metric schemes, he has kept intact just as the Abbasids had left it, not to mention his further classicality even in frequently complying with the rigid observance of the traditional divisions of the pre-Islamic Qasidah. Like the poets of that period, he introduces his main theme by a series of digressions, famous among which is the love presagement (الوقوف على الأطلال) in which a pre-Islamic poet, imagining himself standing in a place recently vacated by the tribe of his beloved, demands of his imaginary companion that they stop and weep over the traces of the departed beloved.

"al-Bārūdi", says al-Dasūqi, "has not contributed anything new to the poetic aims known to poets of the Abbāsid period. He eulogises, describes, elegises to the end of what there is of the known and familiar themes. How it is wished that he had only stopped there, for themes might be old while meanings new. But he has imitated the old in style and content as well as in the topics they composed on, and in imitation has reached a point where he forgets that he is in Egypt, and is far from Nejd, its hills and valleys and its stones and meadows"[2].

1. al-Dasūqi, Vol. I, p. 163.
2. al-Dasūqi. Vol. I, p. 163.

al-Bārūdi's movement in poetry, therefore, seems to be a perfect corollary to 'Abduh's movement in theology and religion. 'Abduh, in prose writing, aimed at reforming the Arab Moslem world by declaring the practices of the seven centuries before him as distortions of the previous all-civilising Sunnah up to the Abbasids, to which he urges the Moslem nation to return. Al-Bārūdi accordingly dismisses in his poetry the literature of the preceding seven centuries and aims at reforming poetry by imitating and reproducing the great classics of Arabic poetry from earliest times up to the Abbasids. Both worked under the impression that they were recovering a perfection that had once indeed existed but which had been neglected and forgotten. Each, in his own field, saw the present imperfection of the Arabs, not through his personal genuine study and understanding of the secrets of progress in the rest of the present world, but through his conviction that the Arab past was perfect. Both movements, therefore, are more based on faith than on understanding. They tend more to recollect than to inquire, to remind more than to instruct, and to re-state more than to revive. To them, the Arab past seemed like a Platonic archetype, detached, perfect and eternal. All that a Moslem needed in order to escape his present state of aberration was not essentially to go out into the world, to seek and learn and inquire, and accordingly develop his situation, but to shrink and gradually retrace his steps by reminiscences, in the hope that, by ridding himself of all alien matter, he might recapture that old state of Moslem excellence and glory in which lay the realisation of himself and of all that the good and perfect life required.

What al-Bārūdi did in poetry, other creative wtiters of the time, as convinced as 'Abduh that the Arabic language was the basis of Islam[1] and that a return to the past Islamic glory implied a return to the Arabic language as it had flourished in the golden age of Arabic culture, were doing in prose.

The purely classical driving spirit in language, form and theme permeates

1. See Rida, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh*, Vol. III, p. 259.

the prose writings of such literary leaders of this generation as Muhammad al-Bakri (1870 — 1933), Muhammad al-Muwailihi (d. 1930), 'Abdullah Fikri (1834 — 1890), 'Abdullah al-Nadīm (d. 1896), Hamzah Fathallah (1849 — 1918), 'Ali-Mubārak (1832 — 1923) and a host of others. Just as the old poets, and especially al-Mutanabbi, were to al-Bārūdi the perfect models of poetic excellence which he set out to imitate, so also were the great prose writers of the past, particularly the writers of al-Maqāmāt, the ideal literary models which 19th century prose writers aimed at copying.

The Abbasid Maqāmāt continued to be imitated as late as the beginning of the 20th century. Representative instances are *Hādīth 'Isa Ibn Hīshām* (Cairo, 1907) by al-Muwailihi, *Layālī Satīh* (Cairo, 1907) by Hāfiz Ibrāhim, and *Layāli al-Rūh al-Hā'ir* (Cairo, 1912) by Muhammad Lutfi Jum'ah. Abdullah Fikri mastered the style of Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamazāni of the 10th century to such an extent that he is said to have been named a second Badī' al-Zamān. "Had he come at an earlier time", it was said of him, "there would have been two Badī's"[1]. His firm belief, shared with others among his colleagues such as 'Ali Mubārak and Hamzah Fathallah, was that the classical Arab culture was all-providing and that there should be no need for any Arab to draw for inspiration on any other culture. Since the classical Arab heritage was able to produce mature intellects in all ages, there was no reason why it should not be able to produce them now. The Arab heritage therefore was alone sufficient for the education and development of the Arab mind[2].

In the light of what has been said, it seems difficult to agree with al-'Aqqād when, speaking of al-Bārūdi, he claims that imitation is a step towards originality and that al-Bārūdi's imitation of the old was probably most beneficial to modern Egyptian literature because he had thereby restored to his contemporaries confidence in their being able to equal the Abbasids, the Mukhadramites and the pre-Islamites in language, style and

1. See Khaffāgi, M., *Qissat al-Adab fi Misr*, Vol. IV, Cairo, 1956, p. 9.
2. See khaffāgi, Vol. III, p. 133.

literary endeavours, having himself excelled in this field. "Nothing like this confidence", al-'Aqqād goes on to say, "is more inviting to originality, independence, self-dependence and emancipation from the fetters of imitation"[1].

This claim of al-'Aqqād would have been more tenable had al-Bārūdi's attempt in poetry, reaching its climax in Hāfiz Ibrāhim (1871 — 1932) and Ahmad Shawqi (1868 — 1932), and that of his contemporaries in prose, been a stage in an open process and not a manifestation in literature of a closed philosophy — the philosophy of believing a priori that the past is the ideal perfection where excellence in every aspect of life should be sought, and had not post-19th century literary attempts to improve on those imitators, as al-'Aqqād himself later admits, been more of a break away from this legacy than a continued development of it. Those new attempts mainly sought inspiration in realms other than classical Arabic literature.

"The rising generation after Shawqi", says al-'Aqqād, "was not influenced by him, neither where language nor substance was concerned". The relation was severed between al-Bārūdi, Shawqi and the rest on the one hand and the generation that followed, he continues, for reasons that go back to a difference of attitude regarding the very spirit of poetry, its nature and its aspirations[2].

If by the break with 19th century literary traditionalism one may understand the attempt on the part of early 20th century modernists to seek guidance and inspiration in the living literature of the West, and if in the rising generation we choose to include the generation of al-'Aqqād (1889 — 1964) himself and his Egyptian and "Mahjar" modernist contemporaries, such as Gibran K. Gibran (1883 — 1931), Amīn al-Rihāni (1874 — 1940) and Mikhail Naimy (1889-) "with whom", says Professor H. A. R. Gibb, "begins contemporary Arabic literature in the strict

1. al-Aqqād, *Shu'arā' Misr*, pp. 147—148.
2. *Shu'arā' Misr*, P. 191.

sense''[1], then what is called a break from an old phase in literature and a beginning of a new one, is not really a break nor a beginning — it only seems to be a fulfilment of a certain trend in 19th century Arabic literature which, though faithful to classical Arab culture and literature, had evolved independently of religious ideologies such as 'Abduh's and had well preceded any serious 20th century attempt to liberate Arabic literature from traditionalism and subservience to superimposed religious ideals and inhibitions and to draw freely on the inspiring elements in Western culture.

It is through this 19th century trend which we shall presently survey, and which was chiefly evolved by Christian Arabs, mainly from Lebanon, that Arabic literature, we believe, can be said to have entered, in kind, its modern era as contrasted with its classical one.

V

Though the Arabic written language had well established itself as early as the beginning of the 17th century among the literate Arab Christians, in Lebanon, mainly the clergy centred in the monasteries of the lebanese highlands, and had since then gradually taken the place of the hitherto reigning Syriac as the literary language[2], and though it had also claimed as early as that age many Christian scholars, grammarians, poets and translators, mainly of the theological order, such as the monk Gubrā'il al-Sahyūni (1577 — 1648), Archbishop Gormanius Farhāt (1670 — 1732), Youssof al-Sam'āni (1687 — 1768) and many others, yet Arabic with these Christians was still very far from being considered at home or capable of dispelling the belief persisting among Moslems well into the 19th century that Christians were incompetent to deal with the

1. B.S.O.S. Vol. IV, p. 746.
2. See al-Bustāni, B., *Udabā' al-'Arab*, p. 229 et seq.

Arabic language, whence comes their well-known saying "Arabic has refused to be Christianised" أبت العربية أن تتنصرا . A Moslem 19th century poet, Salih al-Tamīmi, when asked by his patron, Dāwūd Pasha, the Wālī of Iraq, to refute يعارض a poem, "al-khālīyyah", by Butros karāmeh (1774 — 1851) the Christian Poet Laureate of Bashīr al-Shihābi, Prince of Mount Lebanon, asked to be relieved of this task on the grounds that it was below his dignity to pay attention to an Arabic poem coming from a Christian[1].

Not until the middle of the 19th century did some writers appear among the Christians, chief among whom were Nāssīf al-Yāziji (1800 — 1871) and Fāris al-Shidyāq (1804 — 1887) who, by their masterly command of the Arabic language and their many works in poetry, grammar and composition that rank in linguistic subtlety at least with those of the great classics of the Arabic language, raised the literary status of Christians in Moslem eyes and gained for themselves recognition as standard Arab writers. Sufficiently indicative of this is a poem in praise of Nāssīf al-Yāziji by the well-known Mufti, Shaikh 'Abd al-Hādi Naja al-Abyāri (1821 — 1888)[2] which sharply contrasts with Tamīmi's earlier indignation in admitting that there could ever be a Christian with good Arabic. Says al-Abyāri of al-Yāziji,

"Never before have we heard like him,
A Christian who challenges with what is like Muhammad's Miracle.*
Brilliant is he, yet Christian.
He is more worthy to have been a Mohammedan"[3]

The dominant feeling up to the middle of the 19th century that the Arabic language with all its literature was primarily a Moslem specialty

1. See 'Abbūd, M., *Ruwwād al-Nahdah*, Beirut, 1952, pp. 60—61; also Cheikho, *al-Ādāb al-'Arabiyyah*, Vol. I, p. 60.
2. See on him, Cheikho, *al-Ādāb al-'Arabiyyah*, Vol. II, p.88.

* (meaning the language of the Koran).

3. See Zaidān, *Mashāhīr al-Sharq*, Vol. II, p. 13.

and that other Arabic writing sects should be dismissed as incompetent intruders was, therefore, successfully challenged. This was chiefly done not so much through any specially significant originality in the works of al-Yāziji and his colleagues as through their successful attempt to study and master the Arabic language in its golden age and compete with its classical masteres on their own ground. In his *Majmaʿ al-Bahraīn*[1] Nāssīf al-Yāziji successfully imitates al-Harīri, and even beats him in the number of Maqāmas bringing them in his book to sixty. So thoroughly competent was he in imitating al-Harīri in language, form and theme, and so careful was he to sound in his literature as a whole like one of the purely classical Arab writers, that it has justly been said about him: "Anyone not knowing that he (al-Yāziji) was born in Kafarshīma (a Lebanese village), reached manhood in Bteddīn (the court of Prince Bashīr, for some time patron of al-Yāziji), and arrived at old age in Beirut, would imagine him to have been born in Nejd or Yemen"[2].

In his poetry, published in three parts[3], al-Yāziji labours to imitate and reproduce al-Mutanabbi, whether in the subjects he deals with or in style and poetic diction. He was so wholly carried away with this classical poet that, besides thoroughly studying his poetry and preparing a commentary on it[4], he is reported to have been famed as saying when composing, "It is as though I am sitting in the very heart of al-Mutanabbi" كأني قاعد في قلب المتنبي[5]. "If I were to cite the presagements or couplets in which the reader scents the breath of Abi al-Tayyib" (al-Mutanabbi), says Fuād Ifrām al-Bustāni, commenting on Yāziji's poetry, "I would cite three-quarters of the Shaikh's poetry" (Shaikh Nāssīf al-Yāziji)[6].

1. First published in Beirut, 1856.
2. 'Abbūd, *Ruwwād al-Nahdah*, pp. 66—67.
3. *Dīwān Nāssīf al Yāziji*, Beirut, 1852, *Nafhat* al-*Rihān*, Beirut, 1864, and *Thālith al-Qamarain*, Beirut, 1883.
4. This commentary, left unfinished by Nāssīf, was later completed by Ibrāhīm al- Yaziji, his son, and published under the father's name with the title *al-ʿArf al-Tayyib fī Sharh Dīwān Abi al-Tayyib*, Beirut, 1882.
5. al-Bustāni, Fuād Ifrām, *al-Rawāʾiʿ*, 21, Beirut, 1929, pp. iii-iv.
6. *al*-Bustāni, F. *al-Rawāʾiʿ* 21, p. vii.

Apart from *Majma' al-Bahrain*, which lived only for its purely linguistic merits, and the collections of poetry, al-Yāziji's other works[1] mainly deal with grammar, rhetoric and prosody, in the spirit of the old classics, even following their ways of exposition and presentation. Like the famous old grammarian, Ibn Mālik, for example, al-Yāziji put many of his works on language and grammar, such as his famous *Nār al-Qira* (Beirut, 1863), *al-Jumānah* (Beirut, 1867) and *Lamhat al-Tarf* (Beirut, 1854), in poetry.

Although al-Shidyāq, al-Yāziji's Christian contemporary[2], cannot be considered as rigidly classical and as conservative in literature as his colleague, yet the marked stress on language and on the display of his profound knowledge of words, their synonyms and usages, in his chief literary work, *al-Sāq 'Ala al-Sāq*, overshadows the many aspects of literary originality contained in that book, and classifies the author more with al-Harīri and classical linguists than with modern creative writers. In this book, which is actually an autobiographical sketch of al-Shidyāq, covering different aspects of his early life in Lebanon and Egypt, where he helped the Protestant missionaries with their works in Arabic, and his various impressions and encounters while doing the same work in Europe before he left for Tunisia and embraced Islam, one can trace many lines of originality. Such points of originality are the forceful character of al-Shidyāq that remains living and distinct throughout the book, the successful attempt at times to use a lucid and simple language instead of the affected rhymed prose, the vivid description of what had struck the writer in European life, especially in London and Paris, and its contrast with the East, the lively and dramatic exposition of certain social evils, such as ignorance, religious naivety and hypocrisy among missionaries and men of the Church, whether Protestant

1. See a list of al-Yāziji's works in *Masādir al-Dirāsah al-Adabiyyah*, II, by Dāghir, Y.A., Beirut, 1956, pp. 754—756.
2. Ahmad Fāris al-Shidyāq was converted to Islam during his stay in Tunisia in the late fifties of the 19th century, after his literary career had already matured. His chef d'oeuvre, *al-Sāq 'Ala al-Sāq, Fī ma Huwa al-Fāriyāq*, first published in Paris, 1855, was written during his sojourn in Europe before going to Tunisia. See a bibliography on him in Dāghir, II, pp. 471—478.

or Catholic, the serfdom and ignorance of the Eastern woman, and other similar themes that were new to the Arab ear, not so much perhaps in essence as in the manner of exposition and presentation. It remains true, however, that in dealing with any topic in *al-Sāq*, al-Shidyāq, it is felt, is not primarily so much keen on pursuing the subject at hand by itself and for its own sake, as he is interested in the extent to which it allows him to exploit it for the display of his tremendous linguistic resourcefulness. In page after page, for instance, one meets words or idioms or expressions which, once used in the context, are followed by dozens of synonyms or alternatives or alterations. It is enough for him, for instance, having introduced the subject of women and man's insatiable love of their unlimited types of beauties, to state over a quarter of a thousand names for the different types of beautiful women in the Arabic language[1].

If, in addition to this, we note that this book, containing several accomplished Maqāmas, is also conceivable as a whole in the Maqāma light, in that it is, generally speaking, made up of several relatively separate and independent scenes, each of which is concerned with a particular incident or situation, the main purpose behind which, apart from the fascinating display of linguistic and grammatic capability, is to amuse by provoking ridicule and laughter, it becomes clear why we feel that al-Shidyāq, in spite of his originality, is more properly classified with the classical linguistic masters of the Harīri school than with the modern creative writers. He is more of a linguist who is specially gifted in the art of displaying his linguistic versatility than a gifted creative writer with a notable proficiency in language. It might be mentioned also in support of this thesis that, apart from *al-Sāq*, al-Shidyāq's literary fame rests on other of his works that were exclusively written on language and grammar[2]. Whatever the case may be, it

1. See al-Shidyāq, A.F., *al-Sāq 'ala al-Sāq*, (al-Bustāni edition,) Cairo, 1919, pp. 68—77.
2. Chief among these works are *al-Jāsūs 'ala al-Qāmūs* Constantinople 1299 A.H., *Sirr al-Layāl fi al Qalb wa al-Ibdāl*, Constantinople 1884 and *al-Lafif fi Kulli Ma'na Zarif*. Malta 1840.

remains safe to say that through al-Shidyāq, as through al-Yāziji, Christian Arabs attained mastery of the classical Arabic language and brought it to a perfection that has not yet been surpassed in its modern history.

This much achieved, however, there was no other ulterior motive with the later Christian Arabs, as was the case with their Moslem contemporaries, that could impel them to persist in the same direction. The Arabic language and literature to them were not necessarily and psychologically linked with Islam, nor, for that reason therefore was the revival of the classical Arabic language and literature for them a necessary and accompanying manifestation of a psychological drive to re-establish Islam and the past Islamic civilisation and glory, of which that language and literature are but one vital aspect. Consequently, to recapture and master the Arabic language and literature could not be conceived by Christians as an end in itself, as an ideal of literary greatness and perfection towards which one should be continuously drawn and with the achievement of which one should be satisfied. Though a Christian writer feels an intimacy with the Arabic language he speaks and may even justify himself by tracing his ancestry back to the Arabs before or after Islamic times, as many Christians do, yet he feels no special intimacy with Islam as a dogma. The Moslem past, therefore, no matter how great and inspiring to a Christian, has no particular sacrosanctity about it for him, nor for that matter has the open future anything to intimidate him. Faced, as an Arab, with the civilisation and progress of the modern age through his contact with the West, the Christian feels no religious or cultural inhibitions, no fear of contradiction that would restrain him from opening himself freely to the influences of the age. He is proud of his Arab heritage, but, not being involved with Islam as a dogma, is capable of coceiving that heritage as a legacy of the past which, no matter how glorious, is no longer sufficient and should, like any other culture, be open to the renovating impact and conditions of the present age. This is why classical Arabic language and literature, once masterly revived by such leaders as al-Yāziji and al-Shidyāq, had to be boldly reformed by later Christian Arabs and redirected to new horizons in order to meet the demands of the age.

Significant and genuine traces of this new drive are detected in the works of Butrus al-Bustāni (1819 — 1883), the third remarkable figure among these mid-19th century Christian revivalists. Most representative in this connection is his speech entitled "Khutbah fi Adab al-'Arab", delivered in Beirut in February 1859[1]. He opens by carefully tracing the development of the Arabs in science and learning from pre-Islamic times until the decline of the Arab civilisation, indicating the high level which that civilisation reached. The fact that he constantly calls it 'Arab' civilisation and 'Arab' culture instead of 'Moslem' is consistent with the flow of the speech in which it is implied that Islam is only one of the many phases of Arab development in history and that Arab civilisation is explainable, not in the light of Islam alone, but in the degree to which the Arabs were gradually opened to the rest of the civilised world and in the eagerness with which they absorbed and revitalized the greater cultures with which they had come into contact. To al-Bustāni, the readiness and persistence of the Arab mind, coupled with the malleability and absorptive capacity of the Arabic language, had enabled the Arabs to preserve and vitalize the old sciences and act as mediators between the old learning and the new. There is therefore no reason that should restrain the present Arab from opening himself to the world again.

This much established, al-Bustāni turns to attack the feeling of self-sufficiency among living Arabs, and their timidity in the face of present world culture. That our forefathers had reached the highest summit of learning, he says, does not make us learned as well. It is not only what they did that we should observe, but also the spirit with which they did it. They have done their part; we should do ours[2]. "The claim by some, that the Arabs (meaning the culture) have everything that is required in arts and sciences is the strongest proof of their utter ignorance. Just as the Westerners did not, in their days of ignorance, scornfully neglect the literature of the Arabs

1. The speech *Khutbah* was published the same year in book form.

2. *Khutbah*, p. 26.

for the mere fact that it was attributed to the Arabs, it does not likewise become the Arabs to neglect scornfully the learning of the West for the mere fact that it is western. In fact, it is becoming of us to welcome the sciences irrespective of whoever presents them to us, whether they come from China, India, Persia or Europe''[1].

Speaking of the language, al-Bustāni insists that if Arabic is to accommodate the learning of the age, as it did in old times, and escape the fate of being neglected or of being over shadowed by the colloquial, or even by intruding foreign languages, it must grow with the age and be subject to a process of regeneration and reshuffling whereby new words are coined or borrowed or regenerated from the old. Old and tedious rules of grammar and other intricacies that our forefathers have laid down at their leisure and developed as a pure art in itself must be dropped or simplified where possible so that only one year instead of a lifetime becomes necessary for the study and mastery of the Arabic language. What some consider to be divinely inspired in the Arabic language, and hence not to be changed, is only something engineered by the ancients to meet certain occasions and would, if maintained, simply distract the children of the present age from attending to real matters and, in occupying their time, prevent them from arriving at the true and beneficial arts. ''If some there be, however rich and important'', says al-Bustāni ironically, ''whose interest it is to search into antiquities and to look for past material for its own sake, we should allow them absolute freedom in this quest and charge them with the preservation of the classical language, leaving the 'Taka'ko' (huddling) of the Bedouin[2], the rhymed prose of al- Harīri and the 'Fairūzabadies' of al-Fairūzabādi[3] as topics for their constant contemplation and eternal study''[4].

1. *Khutbah*, p. 36.
2. Referring to a well-known linguistic puzzle atributed to a Bedouin who is said to have challenged the linguistic versatility of his hearers by addressing them with far-fetched and uncommon words. لماذا تكأكأتم علي كتكأكئكم عل ذي جنة افرنقعوا عني (Why have you huddled around me as though to watch a jinn? Go hence from me.)
3. The linguistic subtleties of al-Fairūzabādi.
4. *Khutbah*, p. 23.

"Our writers", says al-Bustāni, "are very ignorant and artistically poor and yet consider themselves to have arrived at the highest stage of learning. He who has learnt the Koran and the Psalms among them is said to have finished his learning, and if he learns something of the basic rules of language and grammar, he is said to have become the scholar of his time, and if he gives utterance to poetry, people are left with no title with which to honour him"[1].

Creative essay writing of the time, al-Bustāni describes as mere copying of works inherited from the blessed dead, while poetry has its door open for whoever wishes to enter. "Whoever preserves the rhyming scheme and garbs the meanings of the ancestors with rugged garments is a poet. But if he excells in using words that are amphibolous and shows skill and mastery in literary allusions and quotations from the old classics, not to say plagiarism, he is then considered great"[2].

"So long as the Arabs", says al-Bustāni, "are contented with copying and imitation and refuse to exert themselves in verifying and inquiring, there is no hope for their progress in the arts and sciences"[3], al-Bustāni, however, sees hope for progress in the impact of the West on the Arabs through Lebanon and Egypt during the 19th century. He pays special tribute to the move started by Muhammad 'Ali in Egypt to draw heavily on Western culture by a process of translation and printing at the printing press of Būlāq, and places the Western missionaries in Lebanon, whether American or Latin, and especially the Jesuits and Lazarites with their schools, libraries and printing presses, at the head of the enlightening movement among the Arabs.

"If we look to the 19th century", he says, "a door for hope opens to us. Good news to the sons of Sham (meaning the Arabs), for their cousins, the sons of Japheth, (Europeans) have started to return to them, and in print,

1. *Khutbah*, p. 31.
2. *Khutbah*, pp. 32—33.
3. *Khutbah*, p. 33.

what learning they have previously taken from them, together with all their recent discoveries, as interest for a period of loan covering four hundred years''[1].

This enthusiasm for modernism on the part of al-Bustāni, based on a high degree of openness to the West in the light of whose findings the Arab heritage can be readjusted to meet the requirements of the present age, is partly explainable on the grounds of his lifelong association with Western missionaries in Lebanon. Having spent ten years (1830 — 1840) at 'Ayn Warqah College[2] in Lebanon, a Maronite institution, wholly modelled after European, and especially Jesuit, colleges[3], he moved to Beirut where he joined the American Protestant Mission to Syria, with which he collaborated for the rest of his life.

Although al-Bustāni was primarily an encyclopaedist and a scholar, his activities extended to journalism, translation and education. In every aspect of his work, however, he seemed to breathe a new spirit and was bent on looking at things with a Western eye. His work reveals a man labouring to reform the Arab present in accordance with the spirit and demands of the age, and not in accordance with the norms and standards of the once-glorious past. This is why he stands in many fields as an innovator and a pioneer. He is credited with having started the first Arabic encyclopaedia in the Western sense[4]. His *Muhīt al-Muhīt* (محيط المحيط) in two volumes, published in Beirut, 1870, can also be considered the first dictionary in Arabic in the modern sense. For the first time in Arabic, words are listed alphabetically, with regard to the first letter of the basic root. Attention is given to many of the new scientific and artistic terms that

1. *Khutbah*, p. 27.
2. See a biography of al-Bustāni in *al-Rawā'i'* 22, by al-Bustāni Fu'ād Ifrām, 2nd. edition, Beirut, 1950.
3. See Hitti, *Lebanon*, pp. 401; 417.
4. al-Bustāni started work on his *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif* (Encyclopaedia) in 1875. Publication began in Beirut, 1876 and continued at the rate of one volume a year until al-Bustāni died in 1883, leaving the seventh volume unfinished. (See al-Bustāni Fu'ād, *al-Rawa'i'* 22, p. 82).

have entered the language but had hitherto been neglected by linguists as being foreign. Many of the colloquial words are examined and re-admitted as being suitable for modern usage.

As a journalist, al-Bustāni is considered one of the very few in the Arab world who first established privately-run papers and magazines. He is also reported, though there is some reason to doubt this claim, as having been the first to establish a nondenominational national school in the Arab world at a time when all other schools were solely founded and run by missionaries or various other religious orders[1].

Probably the greatest contribution of al-Bustāni to modern Arabic literature is the large and basic part he took in the translation of the Bible into the Arabic language, a translation currently called the American, as contrasted with the Jesuit translation a few years later (1872 — 1881). The actual translation from the Hebrow, Greek and Syriac into Arabic, we are told, carried out between 1848 and 1865 under the auspices of the American Protestant Mission to Syria and the American Bible Society, was done by al-Bustāni[2]. It is true that the translation was supervised by Dr. Eli Smith and later by Cornelius van Dyck, both of whom were American missionaries and basically foreign to Arabic, and that the language was revised and grammatically checked by Nāssīf al-Yāziji and Sheikh Yussof al-Asīr (1815 —

1. We have sufficient reason, however, to modify this claim made by all biographers of al-Bustāni that we have so far read. Henry Jessup, one of the chief members of the American Protestent Mission to Syria, tells us (Jessup, Vol. I, p. 270) as he reviews the works of the Mission for 1863 : "Mrs Watson, an English Lady, used a certain fund given her by the London Committee (of the British Syrian Schsool and Bible Mission) in opening a boys' shool in the house of Mr. Bistani of Beirut. Mr. Bistani took charge and the school soon developed into « al-Wataniyyah » (the National) and was subsidised for a time by the College" (Syrian Protestant College, later the American University of Beirut). All biographers of al-Bustāni that we have so far read, speak of him as the founder of al-Wataniyyah, but no one makes any mention of this statement by Jessup the truth of which we have no reason to doubt.
2. For this and other details on how this project was carried out, consult Jessup, I Ch. IV.

1890)[1], but the overall simplicity and straight-forwardness and cut-to-shape language, savours more of al-Bustāni than of his collaborators.

From the literary aspect, the American edition of the Bible emerged as the first book of real importance in Modern Arabic literature in which the Koranic style is totally absent. It is revealing as to the direction in which the Christian Arab literary mind was then moving, to learn that it was the Christian scholars, as Jessup tells us[2], who decidedly objected to the adoption of a resonant and decorative style in the translation of the Bible. "It was agreed," he goes on to say, "to adopt a simple but pure Arabic, free from foreign idioms, but never to sacrifice the sense to a grammatical quirk, or a rhetorical quibble, or a fanciful tinkling of words".

When the Jesuit missionaries in Lebanon came forth a few years later (1872 — 1881) with their much superior edition of the Arabic Bible, their improvement was not in that their translation was more exact, nor, as a result of having adopted another style that was more decorative and resonant, but merely in the great extent to which they had succeeded in bringing the simple and straight-forward style of the American edition to perfection. Credit for this must undoubtedly go to Ibrāhīm al-Yāziji (1847 — 1906)[3] who provided the Arabic texture. Ibrāhīm al-Yāziji, who had even surpassed his father, Shaikh Nassīf, in the mastery of the classical Arabic language and culture, stands in his career as a journalist, essayist encyclopedist and translator in the line of al-Bustāni, and breathes of his spirit.

The translation of the Bible into Arabic and especially the Jesuit edition, marks a new epoch in Arabic literature among the Christians. Apart from the rich and boundless treasures of literature it opened to a writer, it presented him with a living example of how great literature can still be achieved without rhetorical affectation, stylisation and literary

1. A Lebanese Moslem scholar and linguist trained at al-Azhar. See on him Zaidān, *Mashāhīr al-Sharq* II, pp. 185—7.
2. Jessup, I, p. 75.
3. See for his biography and bibliography, Dāghir, II, pp. 759—63.

embellishment. Literary language was perhaps for the first time used throughout only as a vehicle for expression, gaining charm and beauty not in so far as it was made to expose its own, but in as far as it yielded itself to the easy simple exposition of the substance it expressed. Instead of fitting the subject into the fanciful words and idioms that the writer pleases to use for stylistic purposes, translators of the Bible, forced to keep the content intact, had to let the substance itself dictate the kind of words to be used. Hence came such poetic summits as some parts of the Prophets, Job and the Psalms, where poetry and language, for the first time in modern Arabic literature, specially derive music and rhythm, not primarily from the words themselves and the particular ways in which they are arranged, but from the sweet melody of the inner thought itself, the feeling and the passion with which the language is charged and impregnated. The success of the Biblical experiment in the second half of the 19th century, and especially those parts of it like the Psalms, the Songs of Solomon and the New Testament as a whole, more and more reassured the Christian Arab writers in their attempted departure from the classical decorative Arabic style, and more and more convinced them that a literature of power is achievable, without its necessarily being a literature of form.

With the rising generation of Christian Arab writers during the second half of the 19th century and after, form had gradually ceased to occupy the first place in literary works, and attention was more directed to literary content. Writers had started to look for originality and novelty in what is to be actually expressed, rather than in the linguistic and rhetoric way of expressing it. Consequently there developed among the Christian writers of this period, and especially Francis Marrāsh (1836 — 1873), Adīb Ishāq (1856 — 1885), and Farah Antūn (1874 — 1922)[1] what might be called a Biblical style, as contrasted with the Koranic, which was despised by Moslem critics as being poor "Rakikah" (ركيكة). Christian Arab writers ceased to feel any special attraction towards the Arab literary heritage.

1. See for bibliographies, Dāghir II, pp. 396—96; 111—14; 147—52.

In the face of the superior literature of 19th-century Europe, the Arab literary heritage, so far as content is concerned, could hardly offer them anything new. Nor did it possess anything that could counterbalance or blur the fascination exercised by Western literary genres, such as the Drama, the Novel, the Short Story, the Epic and the like, on the minds of both Arab writers and readers. With their religious loyalty attached to the Bible rather than to the Koran, Christian Arab writers were left with little or nothing to restrain them from overcoming their timidity, and from plunging deep into the rich culture of the West now lying at their doors. French, English and American, along with other Christian institutions similarly modelled by local religious orders were established in practically every important centre of Lebanon, Syria and Palestine[1]. By 1914, the French alone, we are told, "must have had in Lebanon-Syria - Palestine, some 500 schools, representing 20 different congregations, with an attendanse of about 50,000 boys and girls.

While Moslems were still hesitant, eyeing these schools with suspicion and enmity, and dismissing them in the words of Muhammad 'Abduh as the works of "European devils" intent on misleading and misguiding Moslems, and bringing them under Western Christian domination[2], Christian Arabs were entering them in tens of thousands, and reaching freely, through their acquired knowledge of English and French, to the rich treasures of 19th century Western literature. As a consequence of this, literary modernism throughout the second part of the 19th century, firmly rested with the Christian Arabs, where it found competent leaders in a host of journalists, translators and creative writers, such as Mārūn al-Naqqāsh (1817 — 1855), Salīm al-Bustāni (1848 — 1884), Adīb Ishāq, Najīb al-Haddād (1867 — 1899), Jurji Zaidān (1861 — 1914), Francis Marrāsh, Farah Antūn, Ya'qūb Sarrūf (1852 — 1927) and others[3], all of whom were invariably graduates of one or the other of the

1. See Hitti, *Lebanon*, pp. 447—454.
2. Rida, *Tārikh al-Ustādh* II, pp. 339—40; 359; 361—62.
3. Consult for bibliographies Dāghir II, pp. 748-51; 186-88; 300-303; 442-48; 540-548.

missionary schools in the Arab world or men who had received some of their training in Europe.

With these Christians the main literary issue had shifted to completely new grounds, whence their modernism arises and can only be appreciated. In them the legacy of al-Bustāni was working its way and arriving at its extreme conclusion. By this shift of grounds is meant that language in itself had finally ceased to be regarded as a means for literary excellence, and that the Arab heritage was no more looked upon as containing and providing the perfect literary ideal to be exclusively pursued. Instead the literary ideal was sought in a totally different realm. With the linguistic and religious problems resolved, Western literature instead of the classical Arabic, had now become with the Christians, the highly admired model for literary excellence. Christian literary efforts, therefore, were focussed on carrying modern Arabic literature on Western lines. What specially marked their shift of emphasis was not only that their literary achievement as a whole was a reflection of French and English literature with which their education and readings at the time had brought them into contact, but that it was also largely concentrated on the imitation and reproduction of those aspects in Western literature, that were absent from the Arab literary history and culture. At their hands, therefore, Arabic literature can, for the first time be said to have entered, at least in kind, its modern era as compared to its classical one.

Mārūn al-Naqqāsh, a Maronite, who was educated in Lebanon, came back to Beirut from a short visit to Rome, and presented in 1848, on a stage he erected at his house, before a group of celebrities in the city, his own Arabic but distant version of Moliere's *L'avare*[1]. This attempt by al-Naqqāsh, followed by two other farces[2], written in the spirit of Moliere, in

1. This version of *L'avare*, together with two other plays by al-Naqqāsh, and selections from his poetry were published posthumously in one volume, with an introduction by Mārūn's brother Niqūla, under the title of *Arazat Lubnān* (Cedar tree of Lebanon) Beirut 1869.
2. *Abu al-Hassan al-Mughaffal or Hārūn al-Rashīd* and *al-Hasūd al-Salīt*, both included in *Arazat Lubnān*.

which the classical language, whether in prose or verse, is used alongside different local dialects, was destined to be the first stone in the founding of dramatic art in Arabic literature[1]. After Mārūn's death, the line was picked up by his nephew, Salīm al-Naqqāsh, who, together with Adīb Ishāq and Yūssof al-Khayyāt, formed a group and went to Egypt in 1876, where, in the spirit of Mārūn, they produced many plays most of which they translated or adopted from the French[2].

With the dramatic art established by Christian Arabs in both Syria and Egypt, many other companies were formed through which loomed the names of many playwrights, who flooded these companies with plays that were on the whole translations or adaptations from English or French, picked at random and often published under different titles and claimed as original works of the particular translator. A quick glance at the works of Najīb al-Haddād, perhaps the most famous and industrious playwright and translator of this period[3], shows the tremendously wide range of Western literature from which he picked his plays, and consequently the great and absolutely new literary treasures he introduced into the Arabic language. His twenty plays, out of his other works coming up in Dāghir to thirty-two, the number of years he lived, include translations from such varied names as Sophocles, Racine, Corneille, Moliere, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Hugo, Walter Scott and others. If to this is added the similar efforts in this field, by other equally known colleagues and contemporaries of al-Haddād, such as Adīb Ishāq, Khalīl al-Yāziji and Salīm al-Bustāni and Farah Antūn, who, like him, were labouring in opening and adapting the Arabic language for the accommodation of the rich treasures of the West, it becomes clear how new a course Arabic literature was taking, whether in form or content, at the hands of those writers.

1. See Zaidān, *Mashāhīr al-Sharq* II, p. 231.
2. See Barbour, Nevill, "The Arabic Theater in Egypt" B.S.O.S. VIII, 1935, pp. 174—75; also Najm, Muhammad, *al-Qissah fi al-Adab al-'Arabi al-Hadīth* Cairo 1952, pp. 54—55.
3. See on him, Ghadbān, 'Ādil, *al-Shaikh Najīb al Haddād*, Beirut 1953.

Journalism, a Western innovation, was first picked up and developed in the modern sense, whether in Syria or Egypt, by the Syrian Christians, who remained throughout the nineteenth century its undisputed masters[1]. It was through journalism, and through the style of Christian Arab writers who, in the words of Professor Gibb "showed a tendency to cultivate fluency at the expense of style, and incurred the reproach (still laid at their door) of using unduly European turns of phrase"[2], that it was made possible for other Western literary arts besides drama to enter the Arabic language in an effective manner for the first time in its history. Following the lead of such early papers and magazines as: *Hādīqat al-Akhbār* (1858) of Khalīl al-Khuri, *Līsān al-Hāl* (Beirut 1877) of Khalīl Sarkīs, *al-Jinān* (1870) of Butrus and Salīm al-Bustāni[3], other subsequent papers and periodicals gave the novel and the short story special attention. Monthly magazines such as *al-Hilāl* of Zaidān, al-*Muqtataf* of Ya' qūb Sarrūf and *āl-Jāmi'ah* of Farah Antūn occasionally encouraged their readers by offering them a separate complete edition of novels which they published in series during the year. The result was that before the end of the century dozens of short stories and novels by innumerable Western writers were translated into the Arabic language[4]. Many, encouraged by such translations, ventured to attempt the creation of the Arabic novel on Western lines, whence appears the name of Salīm al-Bustāni, son of the famous Butrus, as the author of the first real novel in the Arabic language (1870)[5]. After al-Bustāni came the more mature attempts of such wirters as Jurji Zaidān in his

1. Professor H. A. R. Gibb in Vol. IV of the B.S.O.S. p 752 quotes *al-Manār* xvi (1331), 875, a Moslem Egyptian paper established 1898, as saying "Journalism in Egypt before the *Mu'ayyad* (1889) was exclusively dependent on the Syrian Christians".
2. B.S.O.S. Vol. IV, p. 752.
3. See Tarrāzi, *Tārikh al-Sahāfah* Vol. I, pp. 55—60; 73—5; and Vol. II pp. 45—47.
4. A quite informative list of some such translations together with the names of original authors, the translators and the papers in which they were published is attempted by Najm in *al-Qissah* pp. 65—67.
5. The novel is *Huyām fī Jinān al-Shām* published piecemeal in *al-Jinān* 1870. For a description and discussion of this and another five of his pioneering novels, all published in serial order in *al-Jinān*, see Najm, *al-Qissah*, pp. 65—76.

historical novels, Ya'qūb Sarrūf in his rather moralistic novels, Farah Antūn in his philosophic novels[1], and many others whose works stretch well into the twentieth century.

Along with this active process of opening Arabic to the inflow of Western literature, some of the Western ideologies and philosophies underlying that literature also crept into the Arab world. Just as Western literary genres, such as the novel, the drama, the story, the essay and the rest were, at the hands of Christian writers, taking the place of the "maqāma", the "epistle", the linguistic and literary anecdote, so also were there attempts among some Christian writers to become emancipated from the traditional Moslem philosophic outlook on things and to see the world in ways that were more at home with contemporary European trends of thought. What is actually meant here can be deduced from the writings of two almost contemporary writers of the same city, Aleppo, one being Francīs Marrāsh (1831 — 1873), a Christian, the other 'Abd al-Rahmān, al-Kawākibi (1848 — 1902), a Moslem[2].

Taking *Ghābat al-Haqq* (the Forest of Righteousness) by Marrāsh (Aleppo 1865) and *Umm al-Qora* (Aleppo 1898) by al-Kawākibi, being the most famous and also similar in theme among the works of both writers, we find that both try in a novelistic and symbolic form to suggest a remedy for the deteriorating state of affairs in the Arab East. Marrāsh unfolds before our eyes, in a way that reminds us of the Vision of St John, a dream in which he sees himself in a forest, watching the succession and struggle of nations from the beginning of history up to his time. One by one they rise and fall before his eyes until at last he sees what is like a gate on whose arch is written: "Reason Rules". Behind it he sees a flag bearing the words "Learning Overcomes" held high by the armies of civilisation mounted on steeds of mysterious inventions and armed with wisdom, justice and human liberty. Enthroned in this forest is a king and a queen. On the crown

1. See detailed discussions of their novelistic attempt in Najm, *al-Qissah*.
2. See for a biography and a bibliography, Dāghir II, pp. 672—75.

of the king is written "Long live the king of liberty" and on the queen's crown "Long live the queen of wisdom". The king of liberty, furious with the kingdoms of injustice decides on using violence to crush them, but the queen of wisdom holds him back. The philosopher comes to her aid and engages the king in a dialogue concerning the means through which the kingdom of liberty and justice can actually overcome all and live until the end. In the dialogue are lengthy and interesting ideas on social reform expressed by the imaginary philosopher, relating to education, love, separation of religion and state (whereby religion can be confined to the spiritual and moral realms) and various other topics, which recall to the mind the different ideas in the social Philosophies at work in the Europe of that time which Marrāsh had previously visited. Towards the end of the book Marrāsh sees himself back in his country, which he finds all happy and prosperous. "Whence comes all this" he asks himself suggestively, and a voice comes through the clouds saying: "Our Sultān has done it". There the dream ends.

Al-Kawākibi, in a similar vision, sees a conference in Umm al-Qora (one of the famous names of Maccah), consisting of twenty-three representatives, coming from all the different parts of the world of Islam. The main question discussed is why it is that discord and inefficiency have so permeated the world of Islam to the extent that learned men are starting to believe that Islam and order are incompatible. As the different members air their various views the turn of al-Sayyid al-Furāti (meant to signify al-Kawākibi himself) comes and he summarises the conclusions reached, adding some of his own, bringing the total to eighty-six reasons for the sterility of the Moslem world, all converging into one major theme. Islam in itself, it is stressed, is the embodiment of truth and the ideal guide in every way of life and civilisation. In it is the secret for every advance. Civilisation has departed from the Moslem world only in so far as its rulers have departed from the true teaching of Islam. Only a movement that sweeps away those rulers, and redirects the nation according to the true prescriptions of its religion, can put the Moslem world back again on the road to

civilisation and restore to it its old state of glory and great leadership. Turks should be done away with, Moslem leadership should go to the Arabs, where it naturally belongs.

It is not the purpose here to elaborate on either Marrāsh or al-Kawākibi, but to illustrate the direction in which Christian intellectual development had started to move as compared to Islamism, fast held in the area as the all-providing and final system of thought and life. Not only was not Maccah the stage of Marrāsh's visionary experience of social justuce, but it was the Forest, which betrays the shimmering ideas in the author's mind of the social philosophies initiated by Rousseau, which he must have picked up during his visit to Paris. Civilisation, on the other hand, he sees in terms of the workings of human reason and science, and social justice is achieved through the regularising efforts of philosophy. Religion is dealt with as a purely spiritual concern.

There is, it is true, no clear system of thought in Marrāsh. His values are confused, as is evident from his oscillation between Rousseau and rationalism, with no way of seeing how reason, science, liberty, justice, religion and the rest are fitted one into the other in a clearly thought sequence. But confused and elementary as is his attempt, it remains one of the pioneering attempts in the Arab world to think independently on those things, in rather modern and purely non-religious terms.

After Marrāsh other and even bolder attempts on the intellectual level followed among the Christians. One striking example is Shibli al-Shumayyil (1860 — 1917), a medical doctor and graduate of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut[1], who took it upon himself throughout his life to expound and propagate the Darwinian theory of evolution and the origin of species in the Arab world. The Darwinian naturalism through which he expressed his views regarding such issues in the Arab East as religion, immortality, literature, history, politics and the like[2], proved very disturbing, and

1. See Dāghir, II, pp. 497—500.
2. See *Majmū'at al-Daktūr Shibli al-Shumayyil* (collected articles written between 1879—1910) Cairo 1910.

provoked heated discussions[1].

Another distinguished intellectual figure is the novelist, journalist and essayist, Farah Antūn. The philosophic element is marked throughout his writings. His novels[2] can on the whole be described as the writer's acquired views, from his readings in Western literature on various issues such as religion, science, property, love, virtue, social justice and the like, put into a novelistic form. Or, as he himself says in the introduction to one of his novels[3]:

> "It is with allowance that we call it a novel, because it is in truth a philosophic and social study in the characteristics of property, science and religion, as costituting what they call in Europe the social issue, which to them is a matter of first importance, because their civilisation rests on it".

Antūn's basic theme concerning the Arab world is that the Moslem East will only catch up with civilisation and progress if, like the West, the union between the civil and the religious in Moslem life is dissolved, and the Arab intellect is left to function freely and independently as it does in the West. This thesis, which he followed up in his Magazine *al-Jāmi'ah*, is especially distinct in his book on Ibn Rushd (Averroes), where Moslem theology is thought to have been responsible for the persecution of that great thinker and consequently for the discontinuation of original thought in the Moslem East[4].

1. See his replies to some of his opponents in his booklet *al-Haqiqah*, Cairo 1885. *al-Haqiqah* is also included in *Majmū'at al-Daktūr*, Vol. I, 2nd. ed., Cairo, 1910, pp. 227—307.
2. See Dāghir II, pp. 149—50.
3. *al-Dīn wa al-'Ilm wa al-Māl aw al-Mudon al-Thalāth* (Religion, Science and Property or the Three Cities) Alexandria 1903.
4. This book, *Ibn Rushd wa Falsafatoh*, originally published piecemeal in Antūn's periodical *al-Jāmi'ah*, invited an attack on the author by Muhammad 'Abduh, which led to a controversy between the two that resulted in completely and finally paralysing *al-Jāmi'ah* in the Arab world. (See al-'Aqqād, *Mutāla'āt fi al-Kutob wa al-Hayāt*, Cairo 1924, p. 63). The controversy contained in twelve articles, six from each side, is included in the appendix to *Ibn Rusd*, first published in book form in Alexandria 1903.

Though Antūn could not boast of a particular system of thought that he could call his own, yet the body of thought, whether Eastern or Western, with which he chose to orient the Arabs through his writings, indicate the type of intellectual aspects with which he was chiefly concerned, and betray his eagerness to introduce into the Arab world the spirit of a non-theological approach to life and religion. Probably the best description of the role of Antūn as a creative writer, translator and journalist in the Arab world, is contained in a statement by Mārūn 'Abbūd, in which he says:

> "It was he who introduced the Middle East peoples to Buddha and Confucius, and oriented them with the code of Hamurābi. He was the first to make known the philosophy of Tolstoy and had carried out successful combats with al-Imām, Muhammad 'Abduh, concerning Ibn Rushd and his philosophy, which occupied the Arab world for some time. And it was he who revealed to us the noble face of Ruskin, and spread the teachings of Rousseau, of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, translated a good part of Zarathustra, Nietsche's masterpiece, and finally fell on Maxim Gorky and translated the most famous of his novels. And it was he who discoverd the teachings of Karl Marx, even before white Russia had turned red. And it was Farah who introduced us to Renan ... Farah did all this at a time when the East was still dreaming of its classic past in which only it saw all that is good"[1].

It is beyond the scope of this work to elaborate in more detail on the work of 19th-century Christians in Arabic literature. What is here intended is to give a clear idea of the switch of emphasis affected in that literature for which the Christians, not because they were at all religious-minded themselves or anti-Moslem, but by virtue of their being basically non-committed to supra-literary religious ideologies and inhibitions, were largely responsible. Not being religiously tied to the past, they could more

1. 'Abbūd, M., *Ruwwād al-Nahdah*, p. 210.

freely move into the future, and widely draw on Europe for inspiration and guidance. They had ceased to look to the future as something that ought to come from behind — that ought to be conceived in terms of a revivication of a glorious past, and had started to regard it,as their works imply, as a step forward, that would carry them further from a past to which they felt they were still unjustifiably near. Hence came their tremendous activity during the second half of the nineteenth century, in drawing widely on whatever they considered new and inspiring in Western culture.

It remains to be said, however, that this Christian movement, no matter how rewarding to Arabic literature, can by no means be called mature. In essence it was as arbitrary and as imitative of the modern West as was the Moslem of the Arab past. In both cases the efforts were being made to transform the present before it had even taken form in the minds of those operating on it. As a consequence, the fittings through which the present was wanted to assume shape, whether they were borrowed from the Arab past, or from the modern West, were on the whole baggy and obviously indicative of the fact, that they were originally cut to other shapes than the ones for which they were presently intended.

For Shibli al-Shumayyil, for example, to expect from the Arab individual or society, so totally strange to the social, philosophic, scientific and all in all cultural structure and development of the West of which Darwin is a natural outcome, to see the significance of the Darwinian theory, and appreciate whatever implications it may have on their own lives, is as false a predicament as Muhammad 'Abduh's assertion that Islam provides for the rise of all modern science, without either him self or the people he addressed having any appreciable knowledge of modern science and scientific development. To an enlightened Western scientist 'Abduh's claim would seem religiously fanatical, while to an Eastern believer, Shumayyil's stand would seem totally heretical. Among people of the area Shumayyil and 'Abduh would ultimately be propagating heresy and religious fanaticism, while sincerely meaning to serve science and religion.

Other instances of this situation can be offered. Infatuated by the art

of drama in the West, Christian writers set about introducing it to Arab society. After trying their hands at translation, writers such as Mārūn al-Naqqāsh, Salīm al-Naqqāsh, Najīb al-Haddād, Farah Antūn, proceeded as has been previously indicated, to produce directly in Arabic. In this they either imitated the Western works with which they had come into contact, in that their characters, though Arabs in name, move, talk, think, react, even love, not as every-day Arabs do, but as those described in Western literature, or adopted Western works, modifying them and claiming them as their own. "It was the practice of that age", says Abu Shabakah, "for the copyist not to mention the name of the author copied. It was sufficient that he change the name so as to claim the body. Probably the first who had followed this method was the writer Marūn al-Naqqāsh ... In this way revivalists in the Arab world during the second half of the 19th century were set on copying and adoption... But no one conceived the idea of bringing to account, for instance, Najīb al-Haddād, for copying the play, *Gharām wa Intiqām* (Love and Revenge) from *Le Cid* by Corneille, his play, *Hamdān* from *Hernanī* by Victor Hugo, the novel, *Ghusn al-Bān* from the story of Raphael by Lamartine etc. etc. ..."[1]

In actual fact, therefore, the living Arab society of the time remained unrepresented in those works. Instead of making their society see its own intricacies, peculiarities and characteristics depicted, utilised and perhaps reformed, on the stage or in a book, just as the societies of Corneille, Moliere, Shakespeare, Racine, Voltaire and the rest, from whom Christian Arab writers mainly copied, had the chance to do, those writers simply imitated Western authors and presented their people with something that they could not, on the whole, recognise as their own. When watching or reading such writing, they found it difficult to connect what they read or saw, with their immediate life. Instead they met with characters whose mode of life, thought and behaviour did not fit into their own moral and

1. Abū-Shabakah, I., *Rawābit al-Fikr wa al-Rūh Baina al-'Arab wa al-Faranjah*, 2nd ed. Beirut 1945, pp. 88—89; 94—95.

social code. A Shakespearean Juliet, inspiring to an English audience, the idea of unblemished tenderness and innocence of youth immortalised by love, may possibly not have appeared so innocent by 19th century Eastern standards, as she secretly kissed her lover across the window, or followed him at night to the graveyard and committed suicide over his dead body. No wonder that no less a learned man than Louis Cheikho was led, as late as 1908, to say when speaking of the plays of Mārūn al-Naqqāsh, "... in them (the plays) Mārūn followed the course of the French dramatist Moliere... His work was followed by his brother, Niqūla, and Salīm, son of his brother Khalīl. As a consequence the drama trade flourished, but how it is wished that it should have abated, since its evils are numerous, while those who observe the good morals in it are scarce"[1].

Other writers of this period, however, tried to steer a middle course between East and West, whereby they applied modern Western literary techniques to topics derived from classical Arab life, like Gurji Zaidān in his historic novels[2] and Khalīl al-Yāziji (1856 — 1889) in his historic play, *al-Murū'ah wa al-Wafā'*[3]. But these, and especially Zaidān's, are more Arab history put in the form of a play or a novel to illucidate it and make it more tenable to the public than creative literature availing itself of the rich literary potentialities that history offers. For Zaidān himself is reported to have written his plays in serial order, so as to avail his readers of a general history of Islam[4].

Though these attempts have escaped the Western extremism of their contemporaries in that they utilised Western technique to develop something that was more familiar and more appreciated by an Arab society, yet in another sense they cannot be said to have avoided falling into the same predicament — that of not being able to provide the living Arab society with a literature that can be really called its own. Apart from the fact that al-Yāziji and Zaidān have both sacrificed the technique for the material, in

1. Cheikho, *al-Ādāb al-'Arabiyyah*, Vol. I, p. 101.
2. See a list of them with a study of Zaidān as a writer of the historic novel, in Najm's *al-Qissah*, pp. 188—209.
3. See on the author and play Cheikho, *al-Ādāb al-'Arabiyyah*, Vol. II, pp. 32—3.
4. Najm, *al-Qissah*, p. 189.

that theirs can hardly be called plays or novels by Western standards, their treatment of past Arab history is a statement of facts—a report on the dead past with no effort to vitalise it as a Scott or a Dumas would do, and make it part and parcel of the present in which people live. An Arab reader, it is true, may be more familiar with an Abu Muslim al-Khurasāni[1] than with any other character in Dumas or Scott. But in being presented with al-Khurasāni, in his purely historic setting as Zaidān had left him, without having vitalised his character and action so as to have genuine bearing on the living moment, an Arab reader would ultimately feel as detached and as removed from him as he would from any other character in a foreign literature.

It seems safe to conclude that the basic difficulty with Christian Arab writers was not that they had gone too far West and had forgotten about their classical Arab culture, but that in going West, just as their Moslem contemporaries went East, they had on the whold ignored the requirements of the present. The problem was not that the existing Arabic literature was too backward and ought to be pushed forward and westernised, nor that it had very much decayed through centuries and ought to be pushed back and revived. It was that the then existing Arabic literature had to be reformed, not transformed. What both Moslems and Christians of the period did not seem to realise was that the present, like any other historic fact cannot be externally dislocated; it can neither be pushed backward to the Arab past nor pulled forward to the Western future. It can only be developed and broadened to include both past and future in a way appropriate to its own nature, and can only rise to match the modern West or the Arab past, in as much as it can render West and East into an integral part of its living present.

Arab writers cannot, for example, become the Molieres of their own language by simply imitating or adopting Moliere, but by grasping Moliere and his culture together with their own culture to such an extent as to be able to depict their own living society as artistically, skillfully and dramatically as Moliere depicted his. They cannot achieve the greatness of

1. The hero in one of Zaidān's novels by that title (Cairo 1904) depicting the Abbāsid leader and rebel killed by al-'Abbās al-Saffāh the Caliph.

Western literature, nor recapture the glory of the Arab classics by simply imitating or adopting them, but by writing the literature of their own living society, their own present world, in poetry and prose, in novels, dramas, stories, essays and the rest in the same artistic, understanding and enlightened manner with which great writers of both East and West have written of theirs.

To do this, no Arab writer of the 19th century seemed to have been sufficiently equipped. Moslem writers in the tradition of 'Abduh, were on the whole solely preoccupied with their own history, with little or no understanding of modern learning, which could enable them to see their past in perspective, while Christian modernists such as Antūn, Zaidān Naqqāsh and the rest, contented themselves with what fragments of Western education their schooling or their independent reading in the Arab world could offer. These, at best, could not enable them in their pioneering Western literary quest to be more than translators, adopters and imitators. It is true that they enjoy the distinction of having been the first to usher Arabic literature into its modern era, but it can by no means be said that they were able to acclimatise that literature and give it a sense of belonging.

The need was for men whose knowledge of Arab history and culture is supplemented with a thorough grasp of the Western heritage as it is, and as it has developed and matured in its own land. Men, who have spent enough years of training in the West to be as much at home in the West as in the East, and who, in expressing themselves in literature, imitate neither the East nor the West, but write of their own experiences in which both East and West are integrated. It is in this context that the role of Mikhail Naimy as a prominent figure among twentieth century literary modernists, both Moslem and Christian, is one of the most distinguished in Modern Arabic literature. His abundant and genuine works, touching on practically every field of creative writing, and emerging from a resourceful educational background consisting of long periods of training in the Arab world, Tzarist Russia, the United States and Europe mark in many ways the emergence of a new epoch in modern Arabic literature.

CHAPTER I

NAIMY : EARLY LIFE

Mikhail Naimy[1] was born in Baskinta, Lebanon, October 17, 1889[2]. Lebanon then, after the 1860 Christian-Druze massacre, was an autonomous region (Mutasarrifiyyah) under the direct rule of an Ottoman Christian (Mutasarrif) appointed by Constantinople and approved by the six European powers which were signatories of the 'reglement organique' for Lebanon, June 9, 1861[3]. Lebanon the Mutasarrifiyyah was confined only to the mountainous region of its present territory, stripping it of its coastal ports of Tripoli, Beirut and Sidon to the West, and of its fertile plains of Al-Buqā' and Wādī al-Taym to the East, all of which remained under the Ottomans[4].

1. In Arabic it is Mikhā'il Nu'aymah (ميخائيل نُعَيْمَة) . The present spelling, which we have chosen to adopt throughout this work, is how the author himself writes his name in English.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 107; the third and also last volume of Naimy's autobiography, *Sab'ūn* (Seventy), appeared in Beirut, 1960, only a few months after the appearance of the second volume. The first volume appeared in Beirut, 1959, on the seventieth birthday of the author, whence the three volumes derive their title. To avoid as much repetition as possible, we shall only concern ourselves here with the major lines in Naimy's life that are necessary for the smooth running of this work, and for the full understanding of the development of Naimy's character and thought. The present writer will also draw on his close personal association with the author, with whom he had the opportunity of living the major part of his past years. For further details, the reader is referred to the three volumes of *Sab'ūn* in which is found the only detailed account so far of Naimy's life from early childhood up to the age of seventy.
3. See Hitti: *Lebanon in History*, London, 1957, p. 441.
4. See for "The Mutasarrifiyyah of Jabal Lubnān", Hitti, *Lebanon*, Chapter XXX

So cut off from the sea and the plains, the Lebanese had to make the best out of a mountainous country, more rich in gorges, cliffs and rocks than in soil, and "whose soil", as Hitti puts it, "was less fertile than its women"[1]. The result was that thousands of sturdy Lebanese men crossed the seas, forming settlements in rich countries all over the world where they could work and send back money to support their poverty-stricken dependents at home. By the opening of the twentieth century, nearly a quarter of a population of about 400,000 were scattered all over the globe, in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, South Asia and Africa, from where enormous amounts of money poured into the home country[2]. "The Lebanese Empire", it has been said in jest, "is like the British Empire — the sun never sets on its territories"[3].

The rest of the Lebanese who stayed at home turned to their mountain slopes, building terraces upon terraces to check the thinly dispersed crust of soil left by the heavy winter rains, snow, brooks and streams, and, during the long, dry Meditrrancan summer, culivating their vineyards orchards, tobacco, vegetables and cereals. There was neither money nor space for the use of machines. Tilling was done by direct manual labour and by hand-made wooden ploughs, drawn by cows, oxen or donkeys. The hard toil of every member of the family was needed. Men did the manual labour in the fields, women did the housework and assisted their husbands during the rush months of summer, and children grazed the cattle. During the long, snowy months of winter, stretching roughly from late October to April, all would retire to their homes, which were built of clay and stones with roofs of highly compressed soil and which usually had only one or two rooms, and there live quietly on their stored summer products, spending the long, dreary evenings around a wood or charcoal fire, engaged in quiet village talk and innocent amusements.

A few settlements developed some small hand industries, chiefly silk,

1. Hitti, *Lebanon*, p. 473.
2. See "Lebanon the Emigrant", Hitti, *Lebanon* pp. 473—477.
3. 'Abbūd, Mārūn: *Judud wa Qudamā'*, Beirut, 1954, p. 139.

which encouraged the raising of silkworms by the different villages and provided the Lebanese family with an extra income by which it could acquire such items of food and clothing as it could not raise on its own. Some children, during the idle winter days, were sent to the local church or missionary schools. The majority of them would leave as soon as the working season started and would on the whole satisfy themselves with the bare knowledge of reading and writing. Very few indeed were those who could afford to go to Beirut for higher learning in one of the Catholic or Protestant missionary institutions[1].

On the whole, people in the mountains of Lebanon enjoyed a life which though hard was nonetheless peaceful and contented. "Mount Lebanon", says Hitti, " — thanks to the resourcefulness, energy and adaptability of its people — enjoyed a period of cultural vitality and economic prosperity. ... Its rock-strewn slopes were dotted with neat settlements, encircled by orchards and farms terraced like hanging gardens. It came to be acknowledged as the best governed, the most prosperous, peaceful and contented country in the Near East"[2].

Naimy was born in one of those settlements of hanging terraces in Central Lebanon. Baskinta, his birthplace, a village then of nearly 2,000 souls, overlooks the Mediterranean from a height of 1,200 — 1,500 metres, and stretches along a slope right at the foot of Mount Sannin, which rises to 2,800 metres and is snow clad for eight months of the year. Embraced by the towering Sannin on its three sides, Baskinta is open to the outside world from the western side where it overlooks the Mediterranean through a deep, ravined valley named the Valley of the Skulls, (وادي الجماجم), probably in allusion to the hazards that used to befall travellers to and from Baskinta in days of old. Consequently, as though in a hermitage, the people of Baskinta, two-thirds Maronites (a local Catholic sect)[3] and one-third

1. An excellent account of the life and society of Mount Lebanon during this period is given by Professor Anis Frayha in his book *Hadārah Fi Tariq al-Zawāl* (A Civilisation in the Process of Disappearing), Beirut, 1957.
2. Hitti, *Lebanon*, p. 447.
3. See Hitti, *Lebanon* pp. 247—254.

Greek Orthodox, lived in amity, tilling their soil, tending their cattle, raising silkworms and managing, with the help of money from emigrant relatives, to be almost independent and self sufficing. Only a few muleteers, rarely reaching the teens in number, ventured to make their hazardous weekly journey to Beirut, forty-five kilometres distant on the sea coast, or to Zahleh, twenty-five kilometres away in the Buqā' valley to the east, to do Baskinta's transactions with the outside world.

The Naimys belonged to the Greek Orthodox clan in the village, and, like the majority of the Baskinta people, lived mainly on the soil, and from hand to mouth, with occasional strain on both. As a result, Naimy's father, Youssof (Joseph), decided to try his luck in California, U.S.A. in 1890, when Mikhail was only ten months old, leaving the management of the family of three sons to his wife Latifah, and his father and mother, both of whom were in their seventies. The earliest that Mikhail remembers himself praying was when his mother, illiterate as all the rest of the grown-ups in the family, taught him to repeat with her the Lord's Prayer, as she had learned it, asking him at the end: "Son, say with me: 'O Lord, bless my father in America with success. May the soil he touches turn in his hands to gold, O Lord, bring him back safe to us. Lord, keep my brothers'"[1]. Naimy's father came back safely after six years away, but with no success, no gold. His young and beautiful sister, who died in his arms in California, made him scorn the place and despise the dollar and all riches for the rest of his life. Instead, he turned to cope almost single-handed with the soil of his thorny and craggy little family strip of land called al-Shakhroob to secure a livelihood for his family, which by 1902 had increased by two more sons and a daughter[2].

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 15.
2. Al-Shakhroob, a piece of land about a square kilometre in area, perched at the foot of Mount Sannīn, about 1,700 metres above sea level, and five kilometres to the east of Baskinta, still belongs to the Naimys. It has now become famous in the Arab world as the summer home of the author, often mentioned as "The Hermit of al-Shakhroob" (ناسك الشخروب). See a full description of al-Shakhroob with pictures in *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 45—51.

Mikhail's childhood was spent at al-Shakhroob in summer working with his brothers to graze his father's cattle and enjoying the free life of the country, and at the village school in winter, where he competed with his brothers and other boys in learning the ABC of the Arabic language. "The Greek Orthodox dignitaries in Baskinta were indeed proud of having prepared for their sect a school with two classrooms and two teachers, after they had previously had only one that used to shift from one church to another. The teacher was a half illiterate man with no more salary than his daily bread"[1]. Naimy's first day of schooling was encouraging. "The teacher welcomed me with exceeding kindness... No sooner had the class hour begun than he shook his stick, hit the table in front of him with it, then knitted his brows and roared 'Silence!' and silent we became. we remained silent for a while until his voice came to us another time commanding that we open our booklets at the first page and chant with him in full voice: A B..."[2], Naimy's reward after this first chanting of the Arabic alphabet was a 'Well done' from the teacher[3]. At the age of seven ended the first stage of his schooling, which was the complete reading with the teacher of the so-called *Booklet of Blessedness* (كرّاس طوبى), a pamphlet containing a selection of the Psalms of David, beginning with Psalm I "Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly", together with the French ABC.

The *Booklet of Blessedness* would have been for Naimy and his brothers and sister as it used to be with most children in Baskinta before them, the end as well as the beginning of a school career, had not the international competition to intervene in Syria driven Russia in 1899 to open a school in Baskinta[4] as part of her large programme to safeguard the Greek Orthodox

1. *Sab'ūn* I., p. 55.
2. *Sab'ūn*, pp. 55—56.
3. Ibid.
4. The same two-storey school building, containing eight classrooms and a big hall, still exists in Baskinta and has since 1950 been run by the Lebanese Ministry of Education. Before it was taken over by the Ministry and since World War I, when the Russians withdrew, it was managed by a local Greek Orthodox Board of Trustees, subsidised by Greek Orthodox emigrants from Baskinta in Brazil, the major contributor being a certain Michel As'ad al-Tībsharāni.

in the Ottoman Empire, as France had claimed patronage over the Catholics and Britain over the Protestants and Druzes. Russian schools were opened free for the Greek Orthodox in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

"For the first time in its history Baskinta knew what might be called an ideal school. ... the school included five men teachers and three women. At the head was a Principal who was a graduate of the Russian Teachers' Institute in Nazareth, Palestine, and had studied education, teaching and school administration. For the first time we felt that we were in a school which had a particular system and a programme. The programme for Arabic reading adopted a book by the late Girjis Hammān entitled *Madārij al-Qirā'ah* (Reading Stages). It is a book of four volumes starting with the Arabic ABC and rising in stages to advanced selections of prose and poetry, both classical and modern, all illustrated with pictures... This programme of reading was also accompanied by a similar one for language and grammar so that a graduate of the school mastered linguistic analysis to a considerable degree. Special care was given to the language and similarly to arithmetic. Language and arithmetic came in the first place. Geography, History and the Natural Sciences came second, and the primary rules of the Russian language third"[1].

Apart from Wednesday and Saturday, when the study hours ended at noon, and Sunday, which was a holiday, working hours of fifty minutes continued from eight in the morning until twelve noon and from two until four in the afternoon. Breaks of ten minutes divided the hours, and programmes of entertainment were occasionally arranged for holidays and weekends. Attending Mass in a Greek Orthodox church on Sunday was obligatory and was, together with a short prayer chanted in unison in the morning before classes began and in the evening when they ended, the only religious feature of the school life.

Everything was provided for young Mikhail to grow in body and mind. In winter the Russian school introduced his virgin mind to the world

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 75.

of letters; and in summer the mystifying beauty of al-Shakhroob in its remote seclusion introduced him to the virgin world of nature. "Beneath those towering rocks passed a ditch carrying the waters of fount Sannin. Many a time in my childhood have I sat at the edge of that ditch, cooling my hands, face and feet in its icy waters, and counting the nests of the swallows in the projection overhead, and observing those beautiful and peaceful birds building their nests or feeding their fledglings. How often have I pulled off my clothes in summer when it was exceedingly hot and stretched my body in that ditch and was entranced as the water of Sannin murmured beneath me, above me and to my sides, enfolding me with exceeding joy while I was more than sure that I was all alone in that mystifying world with no eyes watching me other than those of the swallows and the herbs on both sides of the ditch, and no voices knocking at my ears save those of the birds, of the gentle breeze and of the gurgling waters in the channel"[1].

Young Mikhail's instinctive love of learning in general, and of the Arabic language in particular, drove him to absord eagerly all that his teachers in the Russian School offered. Had not his illiterate but extremely ambitious and domineering mother said before him many times that her dearest wish was to see in her house books, notebooks and pens, and have people ask her children for help in writing letters to their relatives overseas, instead of herself going to people in spiritual humiliation asking them to help in writing her own letters[2]? Here, therefore, was Mikhail's chance to become the pride of his mother and family; the learned man of the village, to whom people would come for help and point with admiration. Not only did he avail himself of the chance but also came first in class throughout the three years of study, 1899 — 1902, which enabled him to finish the whole programme offered by the Russian School, almost equivalent to a first secondary in a modern English school.

1. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 45—46.
2. *Sab'ūn*, p. 53.

The selections from Arabic literature past and present which were assigned to him at school led him to do furter reading in Arabic on his own. To become the learned man of his community, as was his deep intention, he had to meet the recognised qualifications of learnedness held by the society of that day. Learnedness depended very much on how far one mastered the secrets of the classical Arabic language and its rhetoric, and on the extent to which one's writing revealed a wide vocabulary of strange and far-fetched words and expressions, and a skilful use of the different forms of rhetoric. Al-Harīri, of course, was the deeply admired example of learnedness, but naturally failing to come across the writings of al-Harīri in such a remote village as Baskinta, twelve-year-old Mikhail fell in his private readings upon *Majma' al-Bahrain* by Nāssīf al-Yāziji[1], which, for all practical purposes, was al-Hārīri in miniature. As though falling upon a treasure, he soon set himself to study that book with great intensity, drawing on its wide vocabulary of unusual and far-fetched classical words, memorising the different forms of rhetoric which it exploits to the full, and learning the stylistic method of rhymed prose which it adopts. Judging by the literary standards of the age, young Mikhail felt himself an accomplished man of letters. He only wanted an opportunity to prove it. The opportunity was not late in coming. "It so happened that one of our relatives died in Brazil, and they held a funeral for him in our church. I found it a good opportunity, of which I availed myself, to reveal my linguistic skill, and I delivered a commemorative speech which I loaded with many words stolen from Majma' al-Bahrain... the speech had an astounding effect on the people while my pride in my rhetoric was beyond all limits"[2].

During the summer of that year, 1902, Naimy was informed by his school that in recognition of his excellent record he had been selected for further study at the Russian Teacher's Institute of Nazareth. The Russian Royal Palestine Society (الجمعية الأمبراطورية الروسية الفلسطينية) which opened

1. See above p.p. 42—44.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 83.

schools for the Greek Orthodox in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, had also established free institutes for the preparation of teachers and administrators for those schools. One of these was the Institute at Nazareth, with its student body of about forty promising young men, selected from the different Russian schools all over the area[1].

In December 1902 Naimy emerged from his nest perched at the foot of Mount Sannīn for the first time in his life. He descended with the muleteers down the Valley of the Skulls to distant Beirut, where he was to take a small boat to Haifa, and then a donkey to Nazareth. Twelve years old, alone, and with barely six shillings in his pocket, Naimy set off on his journey[2].

II

The Russian Institute had three classes, each of which required of a student two years' work. The curriculum, as can be concluded from Naimy's report on his Nazareth days[3], included an intensive study of the Russian language, together with other courses carried on in Russian, chief among which were mathematics, geography and the history of Russia. Like the Russian School at Baskinta, Nazareth gave special emphasis to the Arabic language and its literature. Students were made to study and memorise the *Alfiyyah* of Ibn Mālik as commented upon by Ibn 'Aqīl. This was supplemented, on the literary level, by a study of Arabic rhetoric and the rules of poetic composition, and by a course of intensive reading in the history of Arabic

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 121.
2. He had only one Turkish pound (ريال مجيدي) in his pocket, all his family could afford to give him as pocket money for the whole year; all other expenses being paid by the Russian Society; *Sab'ūn* I, p. 108.
3. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 121—167.

literature from pre-Islamic times until the age of decadence[1].

Apart from the history of Arabic literature, the Arabic course at Nazareth included a thorough reading with the teacher in class of certain great prose classics of the Arabic language, chief among which are *Kalīla wa Dimnah* of Ibn al-Muqaffa' and *The Introduction* of Ibn khaldūn[2]. The library of the Institute made available to students further readings in both classical and modern Arabic literature and put in their hands a selection of the best Arabic papers and magazines of the time. "Of the Arabic magazines received by the school, I remember *al-Hilāl*, *al-Muqtataf* and *al-Diyā'* of Ibrāhīm al-Yāziji. This latter used to attract us in a special way because in every issue it had a story of Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, translated by the pen of Najīb al-Haddād, nephew of al-Yāziji, and a criticism of the Language of Papers from the pen of al-Shaikh Ibrāhīm (Ibrāhīm al-Yāziji)*. Language free from all error was, in our reckoning, a great blessing that ought to be sought by itself and for its own sake. The detective stories of Sherlock Holmes were always exciting. Of the reading books in our library I remember *al-Aghāni 'al-'Iqd al-Farīd*, *al-Kashkūl* and *al-Mu'allaqāt*. As to modern writers, I remember Waliyy al-Dīn Yakan (1873 — 1921), Adīb Ishāq in his *Durar* (The Pearls) and even Jurji Niqūla Bāz in *Āfāt al-Madaniyyah al-Hadīthah* (Evils of Modern Society)... The evils of which he treats, in a childish and superficial manner, are gambling, drunkenness, corsets (for women) and the like. You may laugh as you please to learn that no sooner had your uncle read that book

1. In a private letter to the present writer in February 1961, Naimy points out that the history of Arabic literature taught at Nazareth followed an Arabic translation of a Russian book under the same title by a Russian orientalist whose name he does not remember. In spite of serious sttempts, it has not been possible for us to trace that book.
2. In a letter from Naimy to the present writer dated February 23, 1961.

* These articles in al-Diyā' in which al-Yāziji depicted the linguistic flaws in the journalistic writings of the day, in defence of the pure classical Arabic language, were later published in a separate volume under the title *The Language of Journals* (لغة الجرائد), Cairo 1901.

than he began to entertain the wish that a day might arrive when he would have the literary glory of Jurji Niqûla Bāz"[1].

with this generous opportunity to imbibe at the founts of Arabic literature past and present, and with an instinctive yearning for language in general and for literary glory in particular, young Mikhail devoted these formative years of his life in Nazareth to serious reading and study. Not only did he avail himself of what Arabic books were at his disposal, but also ventured during his fourth year in Nazareth to read in Russian, even when he could only partially understand what he read. "The more my knowledge of the Russian language increased, the greater became my enthusiasm to read in it. While still in Nazareth, I read some of the novels of Jules Verne translated into Russian. I also read some stories of Chekhov and Tolstoy, and read through Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* in spite of the fact that I did not understand even half of what I read"[2].

In Nazareth, as in Baskinta earlier, Naimy proved himself before his teachers a boy of exceptional ability. Once more, he remained first throughout the four years he spent at the Institute. At the end of the fourth year, we are told,[3] he was the only one among his classmates to be exempted by school regulations from the final examination, his daily records being of such a high standard.

Behind this distinguished academic achievement, Naimy entertained a serious, ambitious and enquiring type of character. His seriousness had shown itselfe as early as his childhood in Baskinta, when, unlike most children of his age, he was aloof, quiet and contemplative — so much so that he was nicknamed in the family "the silent lady"[4] (الست ساكتة). His ambition, inflamed by the insistence of his domineering mother to have a learned man with pens and papers in the house, who could help her raise her head high among people of the village, pushed Mikhail to the head of

1. From the same Letter of February 23, 1961.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 141—142.
3. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 152—153.
4. *Sab'ūn* I. p. 80.

his class both in Baskinta and in Nazareth. Added to this were the family's economic difficulties that called on Mikhail to prepare himself for a distinguished career that would lighten the burden of his extremely good-hearted, pious and unusually humane father, whose hard labour in al-Shakhroob was hardly capable of providing the family with its daily bread. The difficulties were so keen that they even persuaded the ever-proud mother to arrange for the emigration to the state of Washington in America in 1900, of her eldest son, Adīb, aged sixteen, in the hope that he would help from there in straightening out the family's economic problems[1]. Haikal, the next of age, followed for the same purpose in 1906.

One of the Baskinta snobs, learning of Mikhail's academic successes, had even tried to check the family's mounting hopes by rudely remaking to the father that he had better bring his son back from Nazareth to assist him in ploughing the soil, for nothing good would come out of his learning and that it would be easier for hawthorn to produce a straight stick than for the Naimys to produce a celebrity[2]. All this added to young Mikhail's innate yearning and love for some sort of singular distinction and some kind of uncommon supremacy. In his inner self, he felt that he was called upon to achieve a distinction that would carry both salvation to his own people and amazement and awe to the world, and especially to those who still liked to belittle his family and think of him as a nobody. In his formative adolescent years at Nazareth, Naimy, the serious, quiet, ambitious and contemplative, seems to have been haunted with a yearning for a striking distinction that could both save and amaze. Tha he was first among the twenty students in his class was certainly a distinction, but apparently not of the sort which was vaguely hovering in his secret self. Addressing himself at the conclusion of his fourth year at Nazareth, 1906, after his first shave, he says: "... after this day, you are no more a child. You are a young man. If you only knew of what value is youth, you would have made a feast in its honour. But whence would you give a feast in

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 95.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 140.

honour of youth while you are still a child with repecr to hnowledge, with respect to the capacity for stuggle for the sake of your family and the sake of the high importance which you long to have in the world. Broad, broad and turbulent, Mikhail, is the sea which is the world. You are but a drop in that sea: an exceedingly negligible drop. Would that the drop become a wave ? would that the wave become a sea ? How unlikely''[1]

Twisting and re-twisting such big aspirations in his mind as his thought gradually developed in Nazareth, young Mikhail would occasionally see as in a flash that what he aspired to might not, after all, be as unlikely as he thought. If a drop, no matter how insignificant, utilises all the inner powers that it has, it can set a whole sea in motion. An example of that in history is not far to seek. what about Christ to whom his mother had taught him to pray when still a child at home ? Did not Christ belong to parents who were as poor, as simple-hearted and yet as pious and humane as his own ? Joseph, the carpenter, could not possibly have been clearer in heart and mind, more serene and devoted to his work and family and to his God than Youssof, the father of Mikhail. Yet soon that Child, born in a remote and humble manger, developed his great inner powers to such an extent that he was able to shake the whole world. Christ was both a saviour and a mystery. He was exactly what young Mikhail was looking for. Would not Christ, therefore, help him to purify himself, to develop his inner powers, and then to surprise the whole world with a similar message ? Yes, now that he was in Palestine and his school had taught him a great deal about the life of Christ and the history of the Church, he should follow Christ closely and seek his help in cleansing himself from all impurities and in achieving the uniqeness that was Christ's.

''You are here — and in the rest of Palestine — in a world of charm and goodness. Wherever you walk and to whichever side you look, there emerge before you from the distant past faces and occurrences that are

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 154.

innumerable, all of which have penetrated deeply into your inner self. But most beloved among these to you is the face of the Master and the story of His life. How short that life was, yet how incapable has time been of folding that life and shrouding it with oblivion ! Beware, Mikhail, of forgetting that you are here in the presence of Christ".

"with words like these, I used to address myself whenever I was alone with my thoughts. The deep religious feeling which I bore with me from the foot of Mount Sannin had started in Nazareth to go deeper still. How often had I found myself when on a short promenade or a long excursion suddenly cut from myself and from my companions as I imagined Christ and His disciples walking in the same road which we had taken, or as I imagined Him sitting all alone in a state of spiritual elevation under this tree or to the side of that rock..."[1]

The character of Christ and the ideals He stood for and preached took hold on Mikhail more and more as he read the Bible and participated in the excursions which were arranged by the Institute at Nazareth to the different Biblical parts of Palestine. Places of special significance were the River Jordan, where Jesus was baptised, the Lake of Galilee, where He chose His disciples and where He walked on the waters, the Mount where He is said to have delivered His famous Sermon, and Mount Tabor, where He is reported to have been transfigured in a cloud of light with Moses and Elijah standing by[2]. The attire, movements and utterings of Christ were transformed in the adolescent and dreamy mind of young Mikhail into living images. Sometimes during those excursions the images would become so alive that he would be entirely carried away with them, feeling that he was so near, so intimate with Christ, or that he was genuinely and actually hearing him outlining to his listeners and to the generations to come the way to salvation. "I went among my comrades as one who did not belong to them, nor was in their midst. More than once did I withdraw

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 125.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, pp.125—30.

from them and go all alone penetrating deeper into that Mountain, feeling as though that distant span of time that separates me from the age of Christ has been bridged, whence He is no more far away from me nor I a stranger to Him..."[1]

Even in some of Mikhail's ways of behaviour, signs of the impact of Christ on his life and ways of thinking began to show themselves. once, disappointed by a close friend of his who, believing some dirty gossip, unjustly accused Mikhail of it and talked to him rudely, he decided to pass ten days in absolute contemplation and silence. He talked only when asked by the teacher in class, but in vain his comrades tried to make him break his silence[2]. This move for silence, in complete conformity with Naimy's character, may be taken to indicate the first delineation of what had so far been hazily fermenting in his mind. It seems to betray Mikhail's arrival in thought at a distinction between two existing worlds that are often incompatible: a world in which we find ourselves living, and another which lives in us, having ourselves created it for ourselves. The two are not infrequently at odds. It is when we clash with the unyielding world in which we live, and which runs irrespective of what we deem true and appropriate, that we withdraw to our private selves and from there open a stuggle in an attempt to transform what is into what we believe should be.

"The period of silence had ended. I lifted the reins from my tongue, and returned to my former practices with my schoolmates. But it was as though I was coming back from a long, long journey. For I was myself and yet other than myself. It was as if I were born anew ... after that I started feeling that though I was in apparent conformity with an environment in which I lived, something in me was ever making me a stranger to it. This feeling of estrangement continued to increase and wax stronger as years passed by, to the extent that I started living in two worlds: a world I created from myself to myself, and a world created by men for men. The

1. *Sab'ûn* I, p. 128.
2. *Sab'ûn* I, pp. 146—147.

two worlds, while living side by side in my life, never intermarried"[1]. When the two worlds clashed in Christ's mind and he returned victorious from the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan, He embarked on a life career aimed at transforming the world of Satan, the what already exists into what He inwardly believed ought to be. Christ was a sweeping revolution against the existing world of human relations established by man. Would Mikhail be able, like Christ, to revolt against such existing social evils as had forced him to embark upon his ten days of silence ? Would he be able to stand one day, like Christ, like the prophets of the Bible whom he often saw in his mind's eye in the different parts of Palestine, and deliver unto a bewildered generation the key words to truth and salvation ? Naimy had always been carried away by the Sermon on the Mount, believing it to be of the noblest ever uttered by a tongue[2]. But in order to deliver the word of truth after the manner of Christ unto a misguided world, it was still very necessary for seventeen-year-old Mikhail to know a great deal more about truth as well as about the world.

It was nearly the end of 1906, Naimy's fourth year at Nazareth. One of the practices of the Institute was to choose every two years the best among the students of the fourth year and send him to continue his studies in Russia at the expense of the Imperial Russian Palestine Society[3]. Inspecting his educational equipment towards the end of that year, Naimy found it still alarmingly insufficient. "What do you know, Mikhail ? You know something of the history of peoples, and of your Church; something about the earth on which you live and about the people who inhabit it; something of arithmetic and plane geometry. You know the *Alfiyyah* of Ibn Mālik, and the prosodical science of al-Khalil[4], and have memorised a few poems by some Arab and Russian poets. You know the musical scales and how to

1. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 147—148.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 129.
3. *Sab'ūn* I. p. 141.
4. Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad, also known as al-Farāhīdi (781 A. D.), discoverer of the Arabic system of poetic metres.

adjust the strings of a violin and draw the bow thereon. You know the rules of the Russian language and a good part of its vocabulary. You, in fact, know titbits from here and there which, even if brought together, would not light a safety match, would not bake a loaf of bread, nor buy a needle, nor quench any man's thirst for knowledge''[1].

The final examination of 1906 being over, the Principal of the Institute called all the students to the big hall. Beckoning to seventeen-year-old Mikhail to come and stand before him, he put his hand on his shoulder and solemnly announced before all the school that he was the chosen one for a further course of study in Russia[2].

The scholarship of the Imperial Russian Palestine Society, offered every two years in Nazareth to the best qaulified student of the fourth year class, entitled the scholar to ten years of study in Russia, including clothing, food, lodging and travelling expenses, together with a monthly allowance of six roubles for personal expenses[3]. The first six of the ten years were to be spent in one of the theological seminaries found all over Russia, supervised and subsidised by the local Greek Orthodex churches represented in the Synod. The other four years were to be spent in one of the four purely theological academies in Russia devoted to the training of men for the higher church orders. The seminaries, perhaps slightly more advanced than an ordinary English secondary school, devoted the first four of the six years' programme to the usual subjects taught in any ordinary high school together with some religious study. The last two years, they wholly devoted to theology and church dogma[4].

It was apparently the aim of the Imperial Russian Palestine Society to establish for the Greek Orthodox in the Arab world an educational system similar to that in Russia. Its Teacher's Institutes in Palestine were to prepare

1. *Sab'ûn* I, pp. 154—155.
2. Ibid.
3. See *Sab'ûn* I, p. 171; also Naimy's *Ab'ad Min Moscow Wa Min Washington* (Beyond Moscow and Washington), Beirut 1957, p. 66.
4. *Sab'ûn* I, p. 171.

administratores for the different elementary schools it founded in the different parts of Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, while the scholars it sent to Russia were to be trained for administering the Teacher's Institutes and probably also for occupying key positions in their own Greek Orthodox churches at home. This society must have achieved remarkable success before World War I put a final end to its activities. An idea of this suceess can be had from a private letter by Naimy to the present writer dated February 23, 1961.

"The Imperial Russian Palestine Society", he says, "was founded in 1883. The first credit for founding it goes to a Russian called Vasili Khitrovo. In 1900 the Society claimed forty-three schools in Syria and Lebanon. In 1913 the number rose to eighty-three, with 12,000 students of both sexes. In addition to that, the Society had twenty-five schools in Palestine, including one Teacher's Institute for boys in Nazareth and another for girls in Beit Jāla, near Jerusalem".

III

In September 1906 seventeen-year-old Mikhail changed his Turkish fez for a straw hat, his flowing local gown for a thin European gray suit, the first of its kind he had ever worn, and descended the Valley of the Skulls to make, this time, a two weeks' sea voyage to distant Odessa on the Black Sea and from there a two days' and two nights' journey by train to Poltava in the Ukraine, where he was to join the theological seminary[1] to which he was assigned.

Soon, in Poltava, the straw hat and the thin suit gave place to the seminary uniform of a black, woollen military shaped hat and a thick, black woolen suit, with two rows of glittering golden buttons on the front

1. *Ab'ad Min Moscow*, pp. 67—68.

of the jacket bearing the Imperial emblem of the two headed eagle. Mikhail instantly felt himself at home with the 600 students of the Seminary among whom he found himself[1] The uniform supplied by the Seminary was the same for all students, irrespective of their social and economic backgrounds. So far as accommodation and clothing went, Mikhail therefore was on an equal footing with the rest of the group and was saved the spiritual humiliation of appearing poor and inferior, a state which his ambitious nature deeply detested. The struggle for supremacy and personal distinction to wihch he was inclined by nature was to be carried, threfore, on the ground that was closest to his heart.

He bitterly detested being considered one of the crowd, and it was through the mysterious worlds of the understanding that he was determined to distinguish himself. The first opportunity to attract the attention of his teachers and prove himself different in their eyes and the eyes of his forty classmates was not long in coming. Nearly a month and a half after his arrival in Poltava, the teacher of Russian literature and rhetoric happened to ask a student in class to define "literary style". Failing to receive a satisfactory answer, he addressed the same question to other students but with no better result. Finally, when all were unsuccessful, he reluctantly turned to Naimy, the only one left, whom he had never addressed before for fear of embarrassing a new student who, in his consideration, was a foreigner to Russian. The result was startling to both teacher and students. "I gave him an answer that received his acceptance, even his admiration. So much so that he proceeded to scold the Russian students, saying that it was a disgrace to them that a student foreign to Russian should surpass them in the study of their own language"[2] This certainly was an excellent introduction for literary-minded Mikhail by a Russian of authority to the Russian language and its literary treasures. He won the first battle for distinction in the field closest to his heart. This increased his ambition for more. "Some

1. *Ab'ad Min Moscow*, p. 70; In *Sab'ūn* I, p. 172 the number of students is estimated at around 500.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 173—174.

of my comrades know by heart much of what the great Russian and Ukrainian poets have composed and recite it excellently. And I want to memorise even more than they do and recite better than they recite. I even want to compose poetry myself, and want to write short stories. I want to write drama and to master the dramatic art, having visited the theatre for the first time in my life in Poltava and seen and heard how plays really are and how acting ought to be"[1].

To a man like Mikhail, coming from a poverty-stricken, backward, even mediaeval, Arab world that was still suffering from the sterility of five centuries of Ottoman isolation from the rest of the world, Russia proved a whole world of new experience, exceedingly rich and manifold. Not in the sense that the Russia of that time was specially advanced, but that it was a huge melting pot in which various types of ideas, trends and activities, whether social, political, economic, literary, religious or otherwise, were energetically fermenting among the intelligentsia in an attempt to shape Russia's future. Russia, so to speak, fully convinced of having a particular Self of her own that she vaguely glimpsed through the turmoil of her existing state, was busy trying to grasp it and give it clear identity for the future. For young Mikhail, who was equally busy trying to crystallise a vaguely conceived special Self of his own, bearing a distinguished message, the Russia of that day was a most favourable place. In it no particular idea or set of teachings was so firmly and generally established as to stamp themselves on a young, enquiring mind prejudicially, and practically no idea or practice in circulation, on the other hand, lacked the energy and vigour of support as to be able to pass unnoticed. Highly sensitive and attentive Mikhail, therefore, had only to plunge into the vast sea of Russian life to observe its workings and intricacies and to apply himself to its rich literary stores. This, we are told in *Sab'ūn*, he fulfilled to a large extent. Soon he learned the different Russian songs and dances, participated in their social gatherings and could count numerous friends among them

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 175.

of both sexes. During the vacation, he spent weeks and sometimes months in the country among families of his friends where, like one of their members, he was genuinely introduced to the working of everyday Russian life[1].

His eager reading in Russian literature, on the other hand, was carried to such an extent that it occasionally threatened to become a menace to his health. His eyes sometimes became so red and tired that he had to abide by the doctor's orders to rest. "My thirst for reading", says he in his diary in Russia, 1908 — 1909, "knows no limits. But my eyes object, and occasionally go on strike. They are threatened with blindness if I go on reading and reading and reading"[2].

The passion, however, with which Naimy applied himself to this world of new experience in Russia was not that of a young man who, feeling an emptiness in himself, attempts thereby to fill it. It was not carried on without a guiding principle in himself, a digestive system through which it was sifted and consciously integrated into an already formed nucleus. Coming from that part of the Lebanese mountains, an area of almost mystical seclusion, quiet, simplicity of life and unmolested natural beauty, and from the historic Biblical land of Palestine, Naimy seems from the start to have the naturally beautiful, simple and unspoiled, and the religious combined in his character. To this, his veneration, as early as his Nazareth days, for the character, life and message of Christ had given the finishing touch. By the time he arrived in Russia, therefore, the broad outlines of his character and bent of mind had already taken shape. He was more attracted to the world of God than to the world of man, more to nature than to society, more to the intelligible, inward, visionary, ideal and eternal than to the material, external, scientific, sensuous and temporary.

No sooner had his second year at Poltava elapsed than he started to betray the clear contours of the future man he was yearning to become,

1. See *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 171—283.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 211.

and of the message he was eagerly preparing to carry for the rest of his life. Casting a general look at Naimy's career and achievements, now that he is seventy, one is amazed to note how stubbornly and persistently he followed up, throughout, those lines in his character and thought that had first made their clear appearance during his Poltava days. It would seem as though Naimy's change and development since then have been only in magnitude and intensity but not in kind.

"What is that for which you are filled with thirst and longing, my soul", he asks himself in his 1908 — 1909 diary[1]. "You thirst for the poet's lot and for the writer's glory ... and who of men does not long to have a pen that would sway people's minds or that would play with their hearts once it is able to flow with tender poetry?"[2]. In his quest for the possession of such a pen Naimy turned to the great poets and writers in Russian literature, and to other Western writers translated into Russian. The books he read during this period of his life are innumerable. Quite a good selection of the authors he read are mentioned in his diary and in the first volume of *Sab'ūn*. Some of them exercised on him a lasting effect. Of these, for instance, is the poet Mikhail Lermontov, 1814—41. Lermontov's love, almost deification, of virgin nature still unsoiled by the foot of civilised man, so dearly and sweetly sung in his poetry, took complete hold of Naimy and excited in him memories of his beloved Lebanon with its mystically secluded summits reaching high towards the silent sky. Lermontov sang of the Caucasus: why shouldn't Mikhail attempt in a similar way to sing of Lebanon? This is how Naimy's first poem in Russian, still preserved in his diary, appeared on March 23, 1908. Addressing Lebanon in that poem he goes on to say:

1. Naimy kept his diary in Russian from March 23, 1908 until May 21, 1909. This diary in Naimy's handwriting, filling about 750 pages of medium size, is still kept at his home in Baskinta, Lebanon. Excerpts from it, translated by him are scattered in *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 179—243.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 179.

"If I were a poet, most beloved,
I would sing your white towering cliffs,
And your deep, mystifying valleys
Where I have a home and a family,
Where the cedars tell of what has been of old
And the brooks run with flowing silver,
Where life is sweet in its simplicity
And beauty still undefiled by the hand of man"[1]

Mikhail, barely nineteen, seems to have arrived at a happy combination in this poem of the Bible, especially the Psalms and the Song of Solomon, which had taken hold of him since his Nazareth days, and of the distilled ethereal music of Lermontov's lyrical poetry where nature in all its virgin simplicity is made vivid and alive. It is possible to detect from this small fragment of Mikhail's poem the direction in which his thoughts, feelings and poetic genius were moving. The white towering cliffs, the mystifying valleys, the cedar trees, the brooks of flowing silver, are all associated, even put on an equal footing with the home, the family and the simple life. They are all equally alive, simple, pure and beautiful, even heavenly, as contrasted with the hand of civilised man, the symbol of society and civilisation, of worldliness. The Bible and Lermontov must have presented Mikhail with no conflict. On the contrary, his soul, fully saturated with Biblical literature, must have felt even further elevated and carried heavenward as he read Lermontov's "The Angel", perhaps one of the greatest and sweetest lyrical poems of its kind.

In this poem, which vividly recalls to mind Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality", the poet's infant soul is described as having first been carried down to earth in the arms of an angel. The ethereal songs of that angel, "wordless but alive", stay in the young soul as it languishes in its earthbound existence. In vain does that soul try to recapture on earth that heavenly melody which keeps ringing in its inner depths. Only when the

1. *Sab'ún* I, pp. 179—180.

poet catches glimpses of the heavenly beauty through its different manifestations in nature is his agony lulled and his homesickness for his original heavenly homeland abated. It is in nature that he is able to comprehend happiness on earth and to see God in heaven[1]. It is said of "The Angel" that "never has the unconquerable homesickness of the earthbound soul for its heavenly fatherland been expressed with purer musical truth than in the sixteen lines of this poem by a boy of seventeen"[2]. It seems that the more Naimy read Lermontov, the more he discovered himself in his poetry. It was as though the feelings, thoughts and passions lying vague and dormant in Naimy's heart and mind were crystallised and brought to full consciousness by Lermontov, and especially by such of his poems as "The Angel", "The Demon" and "The New Year's Eve". Naimy exclaims in his 1908 diary: "I am reading these days *The Demon and Other Poems* composed by Lermontov. Oh! what poetry! What an elevated soul"[3]. Indeed, Lermontov's poery, permeated with the Platonic concept of the soul, ever yearning in its earthbound existence for its ethereal homeland, his visions of a removed world of truth and eternity ever shimmering through the material world of time and place, and his feeling of a private spiritual and visionary world of his own withdrawn from the turmoil of the human crowd, which inspires him with boredom and disgust, must have left on Naimy's soul a lasting impact which is now clearly detectable in his poetry and prose writings. Sufficient to note at present, for example, the great similarity in the setting, theme and diction between Lermontov's "New Year's Eve"[4] and Naimy's "If But Thorns Realised" (لو تدرك الأشواك)[5].

1. See an English translation of "The Angel", together with its Russian original, in *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse*, London, 1962, pp. 154—155.
2. Mirsky, D.S., *A History of Russian Literature*, comprising *A History of Russian Literature* and *Contemporary Russian Literature*, ed. and abridged by Whitfield, F. J., London (U.S.A. pr.), 1949, p. 134.
3. *Sab'ún* I, p. 179.
4. The poem is given in *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse* urder the title of "The First of January", pp. 159—160.
5. Composed in 1920 and included in *Eyelid Whisperings* (همس الجفون) Beirut, 1945.

Now that he had succeeded in writing his first poem in Russian, under the influence of Lermontov, Mikhail felt himself wholly devoted to poetry and to writing in general. On March 27, 1908, he wrote in his diary, "Two days ago I returned Lermontov to the library[1]. O God ! How many feelings did this poet stir within me ! How many thoughts and dreams! And because I was not able to find another work by him, I preferred to return without taking out any other book at all. I then went back, however, and took out a book by another artist of the great men of the pen, *War and Peace* by Tolstoy. I have not started reading it because of the annoying infection in my eyes... Ever since I read Lermontov I have been seized by an unvanquished desire to write poetry ... I shall go where my soul directs me ... I shall follow the course which has not ceased to lure me since my early boyhood. That is the course of literature. I am all for it"[2].

Having settled within himself the future career which he was to follow, as well as the general spirit which it would embody, Mikhail devoted himself to it with a persistence and a stubbornness that inspire awe and admiration. His diary, which was first intended to give him a good opportunity for self expression and literary fluency, swelled in less than fourteen months to over 750 pages, containing one of the most detailed and beautiful records of the passionate struggle within a young man's ambitious soul aspiring to literary greatness, spiritual beauty and human perfection. In it he brings himself to strictest account for deeds he did, for ideas, emotions and passions, black or white, that swelled within him, for books he read, and for things achieved and others that were yet to be done. The impact on him of the environment in which he lived and his special reactions to it on particular occasions are also given ample space. His reading and writing, which he pursued passionately, his preoccupation with the grand dreams crystallising within him, together with his diary, constituted a private spiritual and peaceful home of his own within which he fortified himself, and sank once more into that

1. It can be understood from the diary that the volume he returned was *The Demon and Other Poems* by Lermontov.
2. *Sab'ún* I, p. 181.

mood of self-imposed silence and contemplation which started with him early in Nazareth.

The many evils of Russian society at the time, including class distinction, feudalism, enormous prosperity for a corrupt, idle aristocracy and biting poverty for a labour-crushed working class and peasantry, a religious despotism that allied itself with the ruling authorities to crush in the name of God any liberal movement and to silence any voice calling for social justice — all these and similar evils intensified Mikhail's disgust, already encouraged in him by Lermontov, with the so-called civilised strata of society, with all its sophisticated practices, worshipped idols and corrupt morality. They drove him more and more to seek refuge in an ideal world of incorruptible simplicity, truth and beauty. God is truth, Naimy reasons out in his diary, and nature, God's handiwork, is simple, beautiful and incorrupt. It is only man in society, driven by the animal and inhuman in him to satisfy and flatter his different vanities, who is responsible for all the complexity, ugliness and corruption in society. The animal in man must be curbed. Only the contented, simple life of nature, divorced of all the artificial multiplication of needs in modern society, can rid man of his present evils and bring him nearer to the world of peace and truth which is God.

It is not difficult to trace the parentage of such ideas working in Mikhail's mind which one reads between the lines in his diary. But it is specially significant to note how independent he was in deciding to single them out and choose them. He makes very relevant critical observations on Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which he had read[1], before he exclaims: "Pardon me, Lev Nikolayevich. I am indebted to you for many ideas that lit what was obscure in my spiritual world. In many of your later publications which I read last year (1908), I fell upon a light that would guide me in every step I take ... Yes, for in this respect, and without your knowing it, you have become my guide and teacher"[2].

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 187.
2. Ibid.

The duality of the world in which he found himself living, and which he only vaguely conceived as early as his Nazareth days[1], had now become clear and vivid in his mind. There is the world of the present society, drowned in its greed and lust for the material, and highly entangled with what it has itself artificially created for itself, and there is the simple world of nature, free from all entanglements, in which man, undistracted by the multiplicity of the needs and luxuries which present society and civilisation demand, is closer to nature, and consequently to God... One is the world of man, the other is the world of God. Mikhail felt himself a stranger in the world of man. It was too narrow, too hypocritical and too materially preoccupied. This world to him "in spite of its vastness, is a narrow world, a world which is suffocating with the dust and smoke sent up by its evils. Its dust hurts me and its smoke blinds me. In it I am a stranger, a stranger"[2].

Of people, the closest to his heart were the simple men of the country because, being closest to holy nature and its healthy spontaneity, they were not spoilt by the hypocrisy of modern civilisation and its corrupt morality[3]. In this Mikhail was not simply being swept away with Russian Naturalism and Rousseauism, to which he was introduced in his readings. This trend of thought must have specially appealed to him because it was most in conformity with his nature, his upbringing and family background. Personally, he was the son of nature. He had spent the early, impressionable years of his childhood in the fields and among the rocks, valleys and cliffs of one of the most beautiful and secluded parts of Lebanon and perhaps of the world. His family were among the simple, poor and warmly religious country people. His father had of his own accord, and in a sage-like manner, renounced the world in California, preferring the hard and laborious life of the soil in the craggy little family farm at al-Shakhroob. Moreover, the Christ which Mikhail had brought with him from Nazareth was perhaps the greatest lover of the simple, the poor and the oppressed, just as he was in

1. See above pp. 82—83.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 220.
3. *Sab'ūn*, p. 235.

unyielding revolt against the hypocrisy of the civilised society of his day. Naimy's Naturalism, therefore, his contempt for modern civilisation, and especially for bourgeois society, his deep spiritualism, verging on the mystical, were not on the whole created by his readings in Russian, but were actually supplemented by what he found in these respects in such masters as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Lermontov and in many other lesser writers. "The more I associate with the world", he says in his diary, "the more my contempt for it increases. A day will come when I shall cut myself off from the world and go back to my 'shell' as Nadson puts it. For the time being, it is necessary that I should stay"[1].

To revolt against the world and its morality, as Christ had done, or to renounce it, as Tolstoy had decided in his later life—to mention only two figures that Naimy specially admired at this period of his life—is to have, as was the case with Christ and Tolstoy, an alternative message to deliver, an alternative positive truth to hold in place of the one rejected. It also requires a strict discipline of one's character that would cleance it of all the impurities and evils with which men of the supposedly corrupt modern society are infected. Naimy proved to have been genuinely aware of both those requirements. On the personal moral level, he subjected himself during his third year at Poltava to the strictest discipline, reducing his social appearances and activities as a member of the group at the Seminary to the barest minimum possible. He no more appeared in the dancing parties where he had succeeded during his first year in becoming a most distinguished and enthusiastic participant. The boisterous gatherings with friends in the city cafés and public bars were avoided. So were all the different attractions eagerly cherished by his companions. He even neglected his outward appearance, and indulged from time to time in periods of utter silence, contemplation and seclusion.

The bitter struggle to curb his physical desires, especially sexual ones, which at this age and in his case were significantly powerful, is remarkable. On

1. *Sab'ûn* I, p. 236. (Nadson, 1862—87, a Russian lyrical poet, whose main theme was to sing of the melancholy of youth disillusioned by the hard facts of life).

one occasion described in detail in his diary, he managed by self control to emerge victorious from a temptation comparable in its intensity to that of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar in the Bible[1]. On another occasion, a Russian married woman, Varia, passionately in love with him, attempted suicide because he was rigidly unwilling to indulge in what his ideals of right and wrong prohibited[2]. Naimy's independent character and his stubborn pursuit of his uncommon ideals, which had removed him into a private world of his own, must have become so conspicuous that they could no longer escape the attention and curiosity of his fellow students. His attention was once drawn to a caricature which some of his comrades must have mischievously hung on the general bulletins board of the Institute. It represented him standing before a well-known prostitute in town, instructing her on the way to redemption and chastity. Written below was the legend, "We only lost a comrade but have found a prophet"[3]. This early concept of love by Naimy where the body is considered to be an unwelcome participant, a diverting factor that would handicap the soul's reaching out for the purer realms of spiritual gratification and fulfilment, gained more and more hold on him as years passed by. In this he had, of course, derived his early moral support from the lives of Christ and Tolstoy, and from much of what Christianity, and especially St. Paul, had to say against the evils of the flesh.

The idea of a young man depriving himself by his own sheer will of the woman he passionately loves, and throwing himself into a selfimposed seclusion in quest of some sort of a universal mystical truth, a greater Platonic love over which the flesh has no power, had gradually become a major theme discernible in Naimy's life and in some of his major works, such as *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul* (Mudhakkarāt al-Arqash), "Till we Meet" (*Liqā'*), *Gibrān Khalīl Gibrān* and *The Book of Mirdad*[4].

1. For details see *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 191—194.
2. For details see *Sab'ūn* pp. 199—201; 213—217; 225—228; 264—267.
3. *Sab'ūn*, p. 220.
4. All four works are also published in English, and are examined in detail in subsequent chapters.

In his spiritual unrest and discontent with the common everyday practices of life, and in his state of persistent yearning after a vaguely shimmering higher truth, so characteristic of his sojourn in Russia which ended in March, 1911, Naimy turned to poetry in which he attempted to pour out himself. The many unpublished poems which he then composed in Russian attracted the attention of his fellow students and of the Faculty. So much so that the teacher of Russian, Aphramenko, felt confident in recommending one of Naimy's poems to the committee preparing in 1909 to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Gogol, who was born in the province of Poltava[1]. The close friendship which developed between Naimy and Aphramenko, and the great encouragement and guidance which he received from his teacher, were of much consequence in reassuring young Mikhail and in strengthening his confidene in his poetical and literary quest[2]. Even from the titles of some of Naimy's poems at this age, such as "The Solitary One" and "Love's Burial", one may discern that sort of romantic sadness arising from the dissatisfaction with the given state of things and the yearning for a better world to come. Typical of Naimy's state of mind at this age is a poem entitled "The Frozen River", which he composed during a winter evening in 1910 after having walked during the day on the frozen face of the small river Sola in Ukraine[3].

The poem opens by addressing the frozen river in a most solemn and penetrating tone. It reminds it of its summer days when it was full of movement, life and joy, and laments its present condition enveloped in silence, stillness and death. The crows hovering with their ominous voices over the frozen waters, and the rows of naked poplars and weeping willows, are seen in the poem as mourners weeping over the coffin of a dead body. Gone are the happy days of the river, when it used to chant sweetly as it glided vividly amid the flowers of the meadows, with hosts of birds singing in the tender

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 239—240.
2. Naimy speaks very highly in his memoirs of Aphramenko, and of the helping hand he gave him in his first attempts in Russian. See *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 229—243.
3. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 257—258.

branches overhead. Winter, however, the poet goes on to say, will soon be over. Spring will gradually break the coffin so thoroughly woven by the hands of cold, and the river will once more emerge as alive, youthful and vigorous as before. But will Russia, mother Russia, similarly emerge from the present icy coffin in which it is embedded? When will its day of resurrection come?[1] The poem is simple, beautiful and straightforward, but it is also highly symbolic of the direction in which Naimy's mind at that age in Russia was moving. If one is prepared to take the risk of reading into the poem what may perhaps be more than Naimy had consciously intended to put in it at that time, one may come out with an interesting parallel between the condition of the river and that of man. The river, crippled by the winter cold, lies motionless and dead, awaiting the warmth of the coming spring in which to resurrect. Similarly, man, sterilised by the corrupting elements in modern society, awaits the coming of a virgin truth that will rid him of his fetters and introduce him to a new world of beauty, life and freedom. Russia in this context would also stand for more than its literal meaning and would symbolise modern man and society with which the poet at that time was in everyday contact. That the poet a few years later addresses his own heart instead of Russia in the Arabic version of the poem certainly gives greater weight to this interpretation.

Naimy, saturated with his readings in Russian literature, was naturally falling in line with the intelligentsia, a term that in Russia towards the end of the 19th century almost signified all those who were radically inclined. Modern man, and especially Russian society, was frozen, and writers, whether as individuals or in groups, were seeking in their own way to break the ice of Naimy's river and effect a social resurrection through newly elaborated truths. The so-called new generation of writers, for instance, headed by Gorky and Andreyev, were trying to break the ice by bringing to the surface in their literature "the lower depths" of society, and consequently pave the way for social revolution. Tolstoy was pre-occupied with

1. In the Arabic version, as can be seen, Russia is left out and the poet addresses his heart instead.

his bitter anti-clericalism, and with revolutionising Christianity by preaching the universality and mechanistic nature of the moral law, as contained in the Buddhistic concept of Karma. Dostoyevsky in his novels sought the revivification of the Christian God and the resurrection of Christianity through intensifying the value of human love, of sympathy for the downtrodden, pity and charity. Chekhov was moving left towards the end of the century as he more and more stressed in his stories and plays the helplessness and loneliness of the human individual, cut off from others by an unbridgeable abyss of irredeemable misunderstanding. Further back loomed Gogol's *Dead Souls*, caricaturing existing human practices and satirizing the sterility of Russian society in preparation for a spiritual message that would bring about a state of regeneration. Behind all this great literature, the legacy of Belinsky, the father of Russian critics, was working its way, trying to release literature from the intimidating bonds of form and technique and stressing the inseparable unity of literature and life, and consequently of literature and social purposefulness. Belinsky was all for the literature that reflects life, and which in so doing reveals its intelligibility, its significance and its noble purpose.

Just as this literary force with its rich and many-sided aspects in 19th century Russian literature helped Naimy to understand clearly the freezing factors in Russia, or, more broadly, in modern man, so also did much in that literature help him as a would-be writer to develop on similar lines his own ways and means of breaking through the ice. Perhaps with Gorky's *Lower Depths* in mind, for instance, he started in the summer of 1909 a story in verse entitled "The Fishermen"[1]. "In this story", he says in his diary, "I intend to portray the life of the deprived and tormented on earth, as compared to that of the prosperous and to reveal the evils of present society"[2].

The great interest which 19th century Russian literature took as a whole in the lives of poor common people, and the great enthusiasm for

1. The story is among his early and unpublished literary attempts in Russian.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 240.

Rousseau's socialism, propagated in the writings of such movements as the Papulists, led by Nekrasov and Mikhailovsky, found their echo in Naimy's thoughts regarding the conditions of his own country, where his family were among the suffering. "My country", he says in his diary, "is passing through one of the most delicate stages in its life. It is in the greatest need of educated men who would direct her steps and clear away the darkness from her eyes. I want to be one of those men. I want to spread in my country a spirit that would appreciate the high human values and that would follow a socialist course in life[1].

The impact of Belinsky's ideas on Naimy regarding the very function of literature is betrayed in such statements in his diary as: "I do not recognise poetry as art for art's sake, and believe it to be an art associated directly with life and serving its purposes. It is a beautiful and rewarding art if it cares to portray the agonies of men, their sufferings and their problems, with the purpose of awakening what is dormant in their inner selves and of creating in them the longing for a life in which such words as freedom, equality, fraternity are not out of place"[2]. In the light of that close association between literature and life so characteristic of Russian literature as a whole, Naimy was enabled to see the alarming emptiness and superficiality of what was passing under the name of literature in the contemporary Arab world. Arabic papers and magazines, among which was *al-Hilāl*, the chief Arabic literary monthly of the time, were reaching him constantly from home. Now and again he would compare what he read in Arabic with what he was reading in Russian and would always come out with the conclusion that "Literature in the true meaning of the word is still lacking with us [the Arabs]. Nothing in what we are producing can be considered independent literature"[3]. On another occasion, he declares in his diary: "I could not help comparing our literature and the Russian. God! how great is the abyss separating us from the West. How thick is the darkness

1. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 229—230.
2. *Sab'ūn*, p. 236.
3. *Sab'ūn*, p. 190.

in which we live, and how strongly attached to the crust of life are we to the exclusion of its very heart! ... How exceedingly poor you are, my country! Even universal torches of Tolstoy's stature have not yet succeeded in piercing the denseness of your darkness''[1]. In this enthusiasm to do for his country what Russian writers had done for theirs, he started in the winter of 1909 to write a play in Arabic based on everyday Lebanese life. That he was well aware as early as that time what drama means and what the dramatic art requires, is revealed in what he then wrote in his diary describing the handicaps facing the would-be Arab dramatist. Among the obstacles he mentions[2] is that the Arabs are bi-lingual. Not only does their spoken language differ from the written, but dialects also differ drastically even from town to town. So also do customs, beliefs and traditions, to the extent that each town is almost independent of the others in these respects. Actors, and especially actresses, he writes, are not available, and the standard of education is exceedingly low. As to stagecraft, it is still non-existent. This play, like many other literary projects in Arabic contemplated and started by the author in Russia, was not finished. It was apparently destined to wait in Naimy's mind until 1916 when it appeared under the title of *Fathers and Sons* (الآباء والبنون). The self-same observation on the handicaps confronting the Arabic stage were then developed into a long and balanced article and published as an introduction to the play.

It remains to be said, however, that of all the manifold aspects of Russian literature, the one that exercised the deepest and most lasting influence on Naimy's life and future career as a writer was undoubtedly the spiritual. And in this, to be more precise, Tolstoy remained Naimy's undisputed guide and master. To start with, there was much in common between the old recluse of Yasnaya Polyana and the young Lebanese coming from the Holy Lands. Sufficient to say that both entertained a deep reverence and a passionate love for Christ and the Gospels. Both believed

1. *Sabʿūn* I, p. 231.
2. *Sabʿūn*, p. 223.

that Christ was the symbol of the perfect man, and that the Gospels are the key word to the true and ideal way and meaning of life. But while Tolstoy, the old and experienced, was straining himself to recapture in his life and thought the essence of Christianity, which his life-long enquiry and contemplation had convinced him to be true, young Naimy, on the other hand, was holding to Christ and the Gospels by virtue of his nature and the nature of his background and upbringing, and was therefore desperate to arrive at a rational justification of his beliefs. Tolstoy, therefore, after his spiritual crisis of 1876, provided Naimy with the most vivid and rational justification of those beliefs.

"I was aware", Naimy says, "that his [Tolstoy's] strong hand, without his knowing it, was supporting me ... I was following his bitter struggle with himself and with the world, with the utmost eagerness. If he won a battle, I felt as though I had won it myself, and if he lost one, I felt as though I were the loser ... The only torch by whose light I was being guided was the self same one whose light guided Tolstoy. I mean the Gospels..."[1]. This early reassuring influence of Tolstoy shows itself in Naimy's growing persistence in his contempt for the world, in his disgust with modern civilisation and its multiplication of needs, and in his disposition to overcome the world and its civilisation by rejecting it and withdrawing into a private world of the understanding. Tolstoy's preoccupation with the mystery of life and death, so predominant in his *Confessions*, and his stubborn attempt to find a rational meaning to life, are reflected in such big questions as "Whence?", "Where to?" and "What for?", with which Naimy had presented his young mind in Russia as early as 1908 and pressed it for an answer[2]. The spirit of Tolstoy's short story "How Much land Does a Man Need" can easily be detected in such a passage of Naimy's 1909 diary: "How short is our life, and how numerous are its sorrows and agonies, its problems and worries! Is it worthy of our thought and care and

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 269.
2. See *Sab'ūn* I, p. 234.

of our competition for wealth, fame and glory? Such things are bewitching in appearance but have neither truth nor permanence. For at a certain time and place we shall be contained in a narrow ditch, dark and cold, where there is no glory and no riches, no poetry and no prose. Then we shall be released from all our wordly concerns ... Ah ditch, destined for the reception of my remains, where can you be?"[1]

It may be claimed, however, that the greatest impression left by Tolstoy on Naimy's young mind came through his anti-clericalism, and through his uncompromising distinction between Christ and the Church. The Church, whether in the Arab world where Naimy came from, or in Russia, where he was studying, was at the root of the prevailing social order, which Naimy found unbearable. It was part and parcel of the existing world which his diary describes as "a world suffocating with the very dust and smoke sent up by its evils"[2]. Naimy's predicament therefore was how to hold together the Christ he loved and the Church which was at the root of the existing social order he despised. Would there be a way of keeping Christ and leaving out the Church? The answer was not far to seek; it was Tolstoy. When Christ came, reasoned Naimy, the existing Church of His time crucified Him. Now that Tolstoy has come to recapture the life of Christ in his thoughts and deeds, the Russian Church excommunicates him. "What a shame", says Naimy's diary "that there should be in Russia people who would attempt to put out the torch whose light today is shining throughout the whole world"[3]. The divorce between the Church and Christ in Naimy's mind was final. Gradually, and in the steps of his master, he compares in his diary the teachings of Christ in the Gospels and the conduct of the Church[4], only to come out with one conclusion: that the present Church is absolutely anti-Christian. In answer to Christ's teachings regarding forgiveness, love, equality before God, forbearance, the futility of

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 209.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 220.
3. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 212.
4. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 269—270.

riches, humility, and the like, the Church and its men, Naimy discovers, "are blessing wars, allying themselves with authority and riches, and erecting thrones in their hearts and pulpits in their places of worship for hatred and enmity"[1]. Naimy's anticlericalism, so highly enlightened and consequently encouraged by Tolstoy, had now laid open before his eyes for reconsideration and revision, the whole world of truths which the Church had been teaching him, whether in his home country and Palestine, where he came from, or in the Theological Seminary at Poltava, where he was staying at the time. The Church had supplied him with definite answers to every question regarding the here and the hereafter. In the light of his new Tolstoyan awakening, such answers were no longer adequate. The origin of man, his explusion from Paradise, original sin, Heaven and Hell, the Day of Judgement, the divine origin of Christ, redemption, the creation of the world in six days, its ultimate destruction, and other such issues on which the Church had given its fixed and final interpretation, were now liable in Naimy's eyes to be seen in a different, broader and more convincing light[2]. Says he, "of all that the Church had given me, nothing remained save that divine light that had so dazzled me in the character of the Nazarene, and save that spiritual excellence which I constanthy discerned through his teachings, wishing that I had the power to follow its guidance"[3].

The impact of Naimy's newly developed anti-clericalism on his immediate life as a student of a theological seminary was no less significant. In the academic year 1909-10, he was finishing his fourth year in Russia. His scholarschip entitled him to six more years of study, two at the seminary in Poltava, where he was staying, and four at one of the higher theological academies, all of which were devoted to the study of theology and church dogma[4]. Now that he had already had enough of dogma, and that he was convinced that the "dazzling spiritualism of the Nazarene" was without

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 270.
2. On these and other issues on which Naimy began to depart from the Church in Russia, see *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 274—279.
3. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 278.
4. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 171.

the Church rather than within, those six more years were no longer of any value. "Vague and gloomy are you, my future", he writes in his diary. "... the Seminary? and what after the Seminary? The Academy? and what is there in the Academy? Theology and theological disputes... but I wish to be a writer of importance among men..."[1]. In addition to becoming a writer of importance, he started in 1910 to think of moving to the Sorbonne to study Law. The urge being that, as a lawyer, he would be able to defend the poor and the oppressed and get a closer look at the roots of crime in the human heart, and consequently be in a better position to deal his blows to a world that had lost its sense of justice[2]. Naimy, however, served his first blow for the cause of justice in the winter of 1910, while still a student in his fourth year in Russia and more than two years before he studied any Law. But that blow, far from serving justice, came back to him and just missed causing him disaster.

Upon entering the school building one morning, he found the students on strike, in objection to some measures by the school authorities limiting their privileges and free activities. In spite of his reluctance, Naimy was carried by his comrades to the platform to address the angry crowd. At the end of his speech, he said, alluding to the school authorities, who must certainlly have symbolised in his eyes distorted Christianity: "We ask for bread and they give us a stone; we ask for fish and they give us a snake". The Holy Synod decreed that the Seminary be closed for a few days and that the agitators, including Mikhail, be expelled. Naimy's brilliant academic record, however, and the high esteem in which he was held by many of his teachers, compelled the administration to revise their decision concerning him and to accept a petition he presented in February 1911 in which he asked to be allowed to sit for his finals in April, by which time he thought he would have prepared for them on his own. The disaster was averted. Naimy passed his examinations successfully, and towards the beginning of April 1911 he was on his way to Lebanon[3].

1. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 209 10.
2. *Sab'ūn* I, P. 264; 278—80; and *Sab'ūn* II p. 52.
3. The story of the part Naimy played in the strike and the resulting difficulties which faced him during the last few months of his stay in Russia in 1911 are told in more detail in *Ab'ad Min Moscow*, pp. 80—84.

CHAPTER II

IN THE UNITED STATES

To Naimy, the summer of 1911 in Lebanon was a period of rest and recapitulation. In the autumn of 1902 he had left his home at Baskinta as a child, seeking to know more about a vast and mysterious world, to which he felt himself a total stranger. After nearly eight and a half years of study in Palestine and Russia he is now back from that world at the age of 21 with a feeling of revolt against much that he found in it. Tolstoy had started him on a spiritual and philosophic revolt which basically implied a renunciation of the Church, a disregard for accepted opinion, and an earnest search for a certain conception of God that would give a thoroughly rational meaning and justification to life and existence. Russian literature as a whole, on the other hand, had introduced him to the literary arts in their true and most perfect forms and had consequently prepared him for a revolt against the alarming sterility and emptiness of Arabic literature at home, against those Arab writers who, in his own words, "still compete in screening their intellectual and spiritual barrenness with polished sentences and resonant rhymes ... as if there existed between them and truth an enmity similar to that of cats and mice, and as though their pens and the ordinary life they live are as widely separated as Saturn and Earth"[1].

Feudalism in Russia, class distinction, the corrupt and allied bureaucracy of State and Church, together with the ensuing pitiable state of poverty, oppression and destitution in which the working classes lived, had in part also turned Naimy into a social rebel. Not only did the works of such

1. *Sab'ūn* I, p. 273.

revolutionaries as Gorky, Bakunin, Kotsubinsky, Cretsin and others focus before his eyes the different social evils in Russian society and the revolutionary means through which they can be tackled, but also indirectly opened his mind to the similar and even greater injustices suffered by his own people at home and prompted him to do his part in the struggle for human justice.

As he stayed at the quiet family farm at al-Shakhroob during the summer of 1911, reviewing in his mind the things he had already achieved and the steps to be taken next, Naimy must have felt himself called upon to mobilise his future efforts on three distinct but interdependent fronts, namely, the spiritual, the literary and the social. The first required of him a spiritual message that would take the place of the rejected teachings of the Church in explaining to man the mysteries of life and death and the way to final happiness and salvation. The second urged an unsympathetic attack on the existing literary practices in the Arab world and an attempt to write for the Arabs the genuine literature that was true to their own life and also as artistically and morally inspiring as the great literature of the West. The third demanded a thorough understanding of the civil laws that govern human relations in the hope of helping the weak, the poor and the oppressed to the rights of which they had been unlawfully deprived, and of assisting in establishing social justice, through law, in a world where justice had always seemed anti-social.

Mikhail's training in Palestine and Russia seemed at this stage to have reasonably equipped him to continue with preparation on his own for the struggle on the first two fronts. The third was still in need of more organised and supervised study. He therefore decided towardes the end of that summer to leave for the Sorbonne in Paris to study Law[1]. The French consul in Beirut, having already arranged that he should have free tuition in Paris, Mikhail thought that his elder brother, Adīb, who had in 1900 emigrated to the State of Washington in the United States, would easily assist in providing for other necessary expenses.

1. *Sab'ūn* p. 279.

Mikhail's decision to study Law was carried through, but instead of the Sorbonne, Washington State University in Seattle was the institution he was destined to enter. His brother unexpectedly arrived in Baskinta from America that summer to pay a visit to his family and to find himself a bride among the girls of his home town. He easily persuaded Mikhail to accompany the couple back to Washington State, where he could pursue his studies in its University[1]. In November 1911 Naimy arrived with his brother and his wife at Walla Walla, Washington, on the west coast of America. after a few months' training, mostly private, in the English language, to which he was a total stranger, he applied for admission to the University of Seattle, Washington. The University accepted his Poltava education as equivalent to two years of university training in the School of Arts and Sciences. Two more years of study would make him a Bachelor of Arts, and three others in the Department of Law a Bachelor of Law. If he decided, however, to do both in a group major programme, he would be able, according to the University schedule, to take both degrees in four years instead of five[2]. Naimy decided on the group major, and entered the University in the autumn of 1912. The subjects he chose for his first year, we are told, were Philosophy, English Literature, History of the United States, Political Economy and Biology[3].

Once in the University and in possession of a new tongue, Mikhail found himself face to face with the vast treasures of world literature contained in the English language. He, of course, had no difficulty in steering his own way through these riches. He had already become a connoisseur in literature, but had up till now mainly held the lines from their Russian end. All he had to do now was to roll on with them across the Russian frontier and see how they developed into a network in whose making not only the Russian peoples but all the rest of the world, past and present, have participated. In his quest to elaborate further the particular type of spiritual and philosophic

1. *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 279—283.
2. See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 21—22.
3. *Sab'ūn*, p. 22.

line on which he chose to embark in Russia, he could now move not only within the sphere of Tolstoy, Gordiev and other similar Russian spiritualists and thinkers, but also in much broader spheres in which Tolstoy was only one of innumerable satellites. Moving back from Tolstoy, for instance, the line of reading which Naimy followed swung from Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and other theosophies of the East, to Plato, St. Augustine, Savonarola, Spinoza and innumerable similar devotees of the universal and divinely established Truth in the West, not failing, of course, to bring him back home again to al-Hallāj, Ibn 'Arabi and various other similarly-minded figures in the Moslem Arab heritage. Moving from Tolstoy to other contemporaneous spheres in foreign lands, even to such as the American where he was studying, Naimy could see from his reading how the same line was continued and kept alive through such figures as Emerson and Thoreau, and through the transcendental philosophies and theosophies flourishing in 19th century America, not to mention the spiritual mystical implications of 19th century German Idealism and of the English Romantic movement[1].

The general setting, therefore, for the type of spiritual quest and philosophic conviction which Naimy had felt himself vaguely but persistently trying to capture throughout his past years, whether in Baskinta as a child or in Nazareth or in Russia, lay now open before his eyes in its most varied manifestation in world literature. What he most needed at the time was a unifying principle, a pattern through which those varied but also homogeneous spiritual teachings, Eastern and Western, could be woven into a uniform sequence; an integrated system of thought, according to which all the first questions regarding man, God and the universe are neatly and systematically answered. In his quest for such a unifying principle, he entered Freemasonry in 1916 upon reading some of its literature. A few months later, he had to give up after discovering that the Order,

1. Much of this and future estimated readings of Naimy in this work are based on private interviews and on an inspection of his library at home in Baskinta.

like all dogmatised institutions, fell far short of the profound original principles on which it claims to rest[1].

Where Freemasonry failed, Theosophy succeeded. Through a Scottish student in the University, a friend of Mikhail and a member of the American Theosophical Society, he was introduced in 1914 to the literature and teachings of Theosophy as a system. This teaching, stressing the doctrine of Karma, the eternity of the soul, the eternal cosmic cycle of life and reincarnation, was destined to exercise an ever growing impact on his life and to provide him with the main pattern on which all his philosophic thinking regarding every aspect of life was woven[2].

The Theosophical approach proved especially fascinating to Naimy because, on top of appealing to his type of spiritual make-up, it claims for itself a deep rooting in most of the well-known spiritual teachings in the world, past and present. With a little reinterpretation and insight, as is given in Theosophy's modern Gospel, *The Secret Doctrine* by H. P. Blavatsky, such Western trends of thought as Platonism, Pythagoreanism and Stoicism, are as easily incorporated in it as Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity, together with the old religions and mysteries of Egypt and Mesopotamia, not to mention its possible claim to such fairly recent figures as Gordiev, Tolstoy, Emerson, Thoreau, Blake, Wordsworth and many other similarly minded writers in both East and West. This is not to suggest that Naimy became from the start an outright Theosophist in thought, but to point out the line of philosophic doctrine which, though hardly detectable in his early writings in the United States, gradually gained momentum after his return to Lebanon in 1932 and almost dominated his whole thinking and literary activity, reaching its climax in *The Book of Mirdad*, considered by the author as his intellectual chef d'oeuvre[3].

1. See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 64 66.
2. For his first contact with Theosophy, see *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 43—50.
3. See *Sab'un* III, p. 213. *The Book of Mirdad*, written 1946—47 in English, was first published in 1948 by Sader Rihani, Beirut, Lebanon. It was later translated into Arabic by Naimy himself and published in Beirut, 1952.

In literature proper, Mikhail could naturally feel no estrangement in shifting from the Russian school of literary criticism, headed by Belinsky, to its English counterpart, where loomed the names of Matthew Arnold, Hazlitt, Shelley and Coleridge; from Lermontov and the Russian Romantic poets, to keats and the rest of the British Romanticists; from Pushkin, the Shakespeare of the Russian language, to Shakespeare himself; from Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Gogol and Gorky, to the perhaps lesser but equally inviting Hardy, Austen, Carlyle and Dickens. It is hardly possible to estimate the scope of Naimy's readings at this period, whether in literature originally written in English or in translations into that language. "I used to find my greatest consolation", he says, "in reading books and in using my pen. I resorted to the masterpieces of English literature with the same eagerness with which I had read Russian literature[1].

The more Naimy read, the more and more he became vividly aware of the alarming abyss that separated the living Western literature which he admired and the sterile, almost dead, literature of his people at home. The abyss had to be bridged, and he felt himself sufficiently equipped to start the work and to be the literary critic, the dramatist, the story writer, the poet and the intellectual leader of the Arab world on Western lines. The only conceivable obstacle was not what to think and write but where to publish his thoughts and writings. Not only was he far from, and totally unknown to, all the literary circles and magazines existing in the Arab countries, but was also convinced that those very circles and magazines were part of the decadent literary atmosphere of the Arab world against which he had decided to revolt[2]. Even worse, in his opinion, were those existing among the approximately one-quarter million Arab immigrants, mainly Lebanese and Syrian, in the United States[3]. As for Seattle, where he was studying,

1. *Sab'ūn* II, p. 25.
2. See his attack on journalists at home in his article "Poetry and Poets", (الشعر و الشعراء) published in *al-Funoon*, Vol. I, No. 9, December, 1913.
3. See, for instance, his bitter attack on the literary superficiality of such magazines in his article under the title of "The Arab Magazine" (المجلة العربية), published in *al- Funoon*, Vol. II, No. 6, November 1916.

Naimy found himself the only Arab-speaking student in the whole University and consequently incapable of starting there any literary movement on his own.

II

While suffering under the strain of his feverish literary enthusiasm during his second year at Seattle, 1913, Naimy unexpectedly received by post one April morning the first issue of an Arabic literary monthly published in New York under the name of *al-Funoon*[1] (The Arts). The editor was none other than the poet Nasseeb Arīda, a former friend and classmate of Naimy in the Teacher's Institute at Nazareth.

What was specially significant about this first issue of *al-Funoon*, April 1913, was that all the material it offered breathed of a clear awareness on the part of those responsible for it, of the then existing mediaeval condition of Arabic literature and of an earnest attempt to bring that literature up to date and on a parallel and equal footing with that of the West. Apart from relevant and extremely well-chosen poems, articles and short stories, translated from great modern writers of the West, such as Gorky, Andreyev, Altenburg, Turgenev, Oscar Wilde, Hugo, Belmont, Mergekofski and others, the first issue of *al-Funoon* contained items by Gibran Kahlil Gibran, Amīn al-Rīhāni and "Alif", a pen name of Nasseeb Arīda, the only Arab contributors. Sufficient indication of the revolutionary nature of the Arabic contributions in this first issue is that both Gibran and Rīhāni expressed themselves in free verse, a drastic break from anything that the Arabic language had ever witnessed. 'Arīda's poem "Hopes" (أماني), on the other hand, though sticking to the traditional metric schemes, not only

1. A complete edition of *al-Fonnon*, which ceased in 1918 after five years interrupted appearance, including 29 issues in all, is found in the New York Public Library. A photostat copy of this edition is found in the Cambridge University Library.

avoids the use of one rhyming scheme throughout, but also adopts the most simple language to portray a vivid and most genuinely felt psychological struggle in a poet's soul, torn between the things that are and those that ought to be.

Though the contributions of 'Arīda, Gibran and Rīhāni were a great departure in both form and content from anything that was being written in Arabic at the time, they yet were not a departure from the spirit of the time. These writers expressed themselves as Arabs, but in a manner that was more appropriate to the literary spirit of the modern world in which they lived. With the poems translated into free verse in that issue of *al-Funoon* from Hugo, Belmont and Mergekofski, the contributions of Rīhāni, 'Arīda and Gibran stand a fair comparison. But, at the same time, they in no way, like them, seem non-Arabic in basic conception, diction and background,

The joy of Naimy with this first issue of *al-Funoon* was beyond any measure. Those young Arab writers in New York seemed as though they were reading his thoughts concerning the type of new Arabic literature that still had to be created. They were putting into action what he had only been holding in theory. The hour therefore had struck for him to embark on his long contemplated literary career. The challenge of *al-Funoon* and its group of promising young writers was too strong to be left unanswered, especially when his literary enthusiasm dwarfed every other interest he had, even the interest in Law which he was studying. "To hell with you, 'contracts', 'testimonies', 'breaches', 'crimes' and all that is related to courts and decrees" Naimy reports having addressed himself as a student of Law, as he finished reading the first issue of a*l-Funoon*, "You are an endless chain of problems, totally divorced from justice. You are but soapsuds and foam, while here is a new conquest and a new world. Here are letters bubbling with life. Surprisingly enough, they are Arabic letters, at a time when my experience of Arabic letters is that they have been shrouded with the cobwebs of tradition, hypocrisy, and of intellectual and spiritual poverty, and that the dust of five centuries has accumulated over those shrouds. Blessed

be He who breathes life into decayed bones"[1]. It was in this enthusiastic mood that Naimy wrote his first article "The Dawn of Hope after the Night of Despair" (فجر الأمل بعد ليل اليأس)[2], which constituted his debut in the world of Arabic literature and marked the opening of what turned out to be a notably fruitful literary career that is still at work and which lays claim to twenty three works in Arabic and four in English touching upon practically every field of creative writing. The article, a sharp attack on the existing literary sterility (Night of Despair) in the Arab world, on the one hand, and a careful outline of the basic characteristics of the new, living literature (Dawn of Hope) expected of the new generation, was warmly welcomed and published by *al-Funoon* in a subsequent issue[3]. 'Arida, the editor, instantly opened a correspondence with his old schoolmate eulogising his exquisite style and brilliant critical literary talent, and asking him for continuous co-operation with *al-Funoon*[4].

The result was a generous flow of works from the pen of Naimy in the form of essays in literary criticism, of short stories, poems, a play and a novel, all breathing of a new and revolutionary spirit in Arabic literature. Already three more essays in literary criticism, in the spirit of "The Dawn of Hope", appeared in *al-Funoon* before it stopped because of financial difficulties after producing its ninth issue in December 1913[5]. In the meanwhile, and before *al-Funoon* made a desperate recovery and reappeared in June 1916, Naimy's work was published without interruption in a semi-weekly called *al-Sāyih* (السايح) established in New York in 1912 by 'Abd al-Masih Haddād[6], another of Mikhail's old friends and schoolmates at Nazareth. To this period belong such critical essays in the spirit of "The

1. *Sab'ūn* II, p. 28.
2. See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 28—30.
3. See *al-Funoon*, Vol. I, No. 4, July 1913.
4. See a representative part of this correspondence in *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 30—34; 51—60.
5. The articles are "The Firefly" (الحباحب) in No.5, August 1913; and the first two of a long essay of four sections entitled "Poetry and Poets", (الشعر و الشعراء) Nos. 8 and 9, November and december 1913.
6. The first issue of *al-Sāyih* is dated January 23, 1912.

Dawn of Hope'' as ''Sixes and Sevens'' (أخماس وأسداس), written October 1915 and ''At The Crossroads'' (على مفرق الطرق), February 1916, one short story ''His Holiness The Reverend Father'' (قدس الأب المحترم), November 1915, and a one-act play ''The Society of the Dead'' (جمعية الموتى), August 1916. All but the last, which was published only in the first edition of *Once Upon A Time* (كان ما كان), Naimy's first collection of short stories, are omitted in his collected works.

al-Funoon reappeared in June 1916 with even greater revolutionary vigour than before. To the circle of previous contributors like Rīhāni, Gibran, ʿArīda and Naimy, it added other minor but no less enthusiastic immigrant writers and poets such as Rashīd Ayyoub, Īliyya abu Mādi, Amīn Mushriq, William Katsiflīs and ʿAbd al-Masīh Haddād. By this time Naimy had already distinguished himself among this group as the literary critic intent on laying the foundations and giving the definitions for the new Arabic literature that was to be created. In a preface introducing the writers of *al-Funoon* to its readers in 1916[1] Naimy is described as one ''seeking to establish a golden age for Arabic literature, and whose critical power, art and skill is scarcely equalled by anyone''. ''Writers'', *al-Funoon* goes on to say, ''see in him a bold critic working to direct Arabic literature on progressive lines, and intent on weeding petty writers and poets out of the literary garden''.

Naimy's role in this new movement of *al-Funoon*, as compared to that of his fellow contributors, seems to have been two-fold. As a critic, he would examine and sift current literature, discarding, rejecting, even satirising what he deemed traditional, superficial and artistically deficient, and would lay down the literary principles wich, in his belief, the new movement ought to follow. As a creative writer, on the other hand, he would attempt to supply living instances of what, as a critic, he stated as theory. Taking his publications in *al-Funoon*, for example, it would appear that his story ''The Festival of Death''[2] (مهرجان الموت) is an illustrative instance of what

1. See *al-Funoon* Vol. II, No. 4, September 1916.
2. *al-Funoon* Vol. II, No. 5, 1916.

he lamented in Gibran's novelette "The Broken Wings"[1]; that his poems "The Frozen River" (النهر المتجمد)[2], "Comrade" (أخي) and "Who are you, my self?" (من أنت يا نفسي؟)[3] are instances of the new poetry he asked for in his series of articles on "Poetry and Poets"[4]; and that his play *Fathers and Sons* (الآباء والبنون) and his novel *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul* (مذكرات الأرقش) both first published piecemeal[5] are demonstrative attempts in answer to the call for such literature in his two critical essays "The Arabic Drama" (الرواية التمثيلية العربية)[6] and "The Firefly"[7].

In the summer of 1916, 'Arīda insisted that Naimy should join him in New York, as a guarantee that the new literary movement started in *al-Funoon* should continue to prosper[8]. To a man intent on devoting himself to literature, this invitation was irresistible. On June 14, 1916 Naimy graduated with a B.L. and a B.A. from the University of Seattle, and in October of that year he was on his way to New York. In his case he carried the manuscript of his four-act play *Fathers and Sons*, which he had prepared for *al-Funoon* that summer while staying for the vacation with his brothers at Walla Walla, Washington[9]. As a result of his devotion to literature and to the literary movement growing around *al-Funoon*, he gave up any idea of practising Law. He came to New York not even knowing how he would be able to secure a living. "I came to it [New York]", he says, "with no consideration but one: I wished to straighten out the literary principles for my language and people ... New York did not give me the reception due to conquerors. But the warm reception I received in the office

1. *al-Funoon* Vol. I, No. 4, 1913.
2. See above, pp. 97—98.
3. *al-Funoon* Vol. II, Nos. 9, 10 and 11, 1917.
4. *al-Funoon* Vol. I, No. 8 and 9, 1913 and Vol. II, Nos. 1 and 2, 1916.
5. *al-Funoon* Vol. II and III, 1916—1918.
6. *al-Funoon* Vol. II, No. 9, 1917.
7. *al-Funoon* Vol. No. 5, 1913.
8. See the correspondence in this respect between 'Arida and Naimy in *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 53—60.
9. See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 61—62.

of *al-Funoon* was more charming and more exquisite to my ears, eyes and heart than the clapping of thousands of hands, the waving of thousands of flags and the roaring of hundreds of cannons: Nasseeb 'Arīda, 'Abd al-Masīh Haddād, Mikhail Iskandar and, after a while, Gibran Kahlil Gibran — these are faces I enjoy looking at, and this is an atmosphere in which I can breathe with all my lungs''[1].

Soon Mikhail found himself a temporary and humble job that would provide for his living, and devoted the rest of his time and energy to writing for *al-Funoon*, which itself was financially fighting a battle of life and death. After producing the twelfth issue of its second volume in May 1917, *al-Funoon* had to stop for two months before it could embark on its third year in August 1917. In November of that year it again had to stop after producing the fourth issue. Naimy had to come to the rescue. On top of his literary contributions that were flowing regularly, he had to become the director and assistant editor of the magazine, and to contribute part of his meagre earnings from his job[2]. To him, the important thing was that *al-Funoon* should live and that his literary dreams, for which he had sacrificed every other prospect and come to New York, should be realised. As a result of all these efforts, *al-Funoon* reappeared in April 1918 after a hiatus of five months, bearing the names of 'Arīda as editor, and of Naimy as director and assistant editor. Unfortunately, Naimy saw only two issues of it come out under his directorship before he was called up by the United States Army on May 25, 1918, and sent to the front in France. *Al-Funoon* survived for another two months in his absence and finally disappeared in August 1918, after issuing the eighth number of its third year and the twenty-ninth in the whole series.

Apart from *Fathers and Sons*, which appeared in a series of five parts in *al- Funoon*, and which was published in book form by the same magazine in the spring of 1918, and apart from an incomplete novel, *Memoirs*

1. *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 67—68.
2. See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 78—79, also *al-Funoon* Vol. III, No. 5, April 1918.

of a Vagrant Soul, only four parts of which had time to appear piecemeal in *al-Funoon*, Naimy left behind well over a score of short stories, poems, and critical essays of various lengths, scattered between *al-Funoon* and *al-Sāyih* and clearly betraying the basic outlines of the main principles he held for the new literary movement he was labouring to champion.

Of the thirteen months Naimy spent as a private soldier in the American Army, extending from June 1918 to July 1919, only the few weeks before the Armistice was signed in November 1918 were spent in actual service on the front lines in northern France. The vivid experience he received of the horrors of war left a deep impression on him for the rest of his life and strengthened his already formulated conviction concerning the futility of modern society and civilisation[1]. The diary he kept in France from Friday, December 6, 1918 to Monday, May 19, 1919, when writing facilities became available in the Army, witnesses to a troubled soul, tortured between his love for the spiritual, the ideal and the Godly in man, and his hatred of the animal aspects of modern society, reaching their clearest manifestation on the front line[2]. Describing his feelings one October night, seeing the trail of wounded passing by as he was stationed on a hill to observe the movement of the battle and report to his Headquarters, Naimy says, "O night, O stars, bear witness with me. Man is baser than animal. He who takes pride in his reason becomes, in war, without reason. He disfigures the sound and whole and then attempts to repair what he has disfigured. He kills the living and then mourns over them, and he demolishes what he builds, only to restore what he has demolished. Here, of what value is love? — None. Of what value is righteousness? — None. Of what value is justice? — None. of what value is goodness? — None. Of what value is the soul? — None. Of what value is God? — None. Why? Why? Why? And how long is this madness to continue?[3]"

1. Naimy's life and experiences in the American Army are described in datail in *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 80—140.
2. The diary, written in English, is among many papers of Naimy's unpuplished material kept by the present writer.
3. *Sab'ūn* II, p. 119.

War over, the American headquarters in France saw fit, as their army was staying in France for some time, to send some of the promising and educated soldiers in their forces to French universities. According to his French diary, Naimy was informed on March 2, 1919 that he was among the chosen for the University of Rennes. On March 5, he was in the University, attending lectures in French on the history of French literature and the history of France. July 1919 found him back again in Walla Walla, Washington, with his two elder brothers, contemplating the next step to be taken for the resumption of his own war on the literary front which World War I had interrupted. A letter he received at this time from Gibran Kahlil Gibran in New York helped him to make his final decision to leave again for that city. "We are met with many things, Mikhail", Gibran goes on to say, "that begin as well as end with you whenever we open the subject of *al-Funoon*. If you, therefore, wish that magazine to come back to life, you have to come back to New York and be the motive force behind every move. For Nasseeb at present can do nothing ... In short, the success of the project is dependent upon your presence in New York. Should your return to New York entail a sacrifice, the sacrifice in these circumstances is the precious object that must be sacrificed to the more precious ... and the more precious in your life, I know, is the realisation of your dreams[1].

In the autumn of 1919, Naimy returned to New York, to find that the financial condition of 'Arīda and the *al-Funoon* group was no better than his own. The idea of bringing *al-Funoon* back to life was finally dismissed. Instead, the decision was made to organise all the progressive literary minded family of *al-Funoon* into a unified, effective Bond that would function as the avant-garde of the new literary movement in its struggle to lift the existing Arabic literature from its mediaeval state to modern standards. After two consecutive meetings, on April 20 and 21, 1920, one in the house of 'Abd al-Masīh Haddād and the other in Gibran's, the so-called 'Pen Bond' (الرابطة القلمية), in English 'Arrabitah'[2], came successfully into existence,

1. *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 141—142.
2. See Naimy: *Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān*, 4th edition, Beirut 1960, p. 159.

including ten members, most of whom belonged previously to the group of *al-Funoon*[1]. The minutes of both meetings were recorded by Naimy[2]. In *Sab'ūn* he gives us in addition to the names of the members a pen portrait of each[3]. Classified according to age they are: Rashīd Ayyoub, the eldest, (b. 1871), Nadrah Haddād, Gibran Kahlil Gibran, William Katsiflīs, Wadī' Bāhūt Īlyās 'Atallah, Nasseeb 'Arīda, Mikhail Naimy, Īliyya Abu Mādī and 'Abd al-Masīh Haddād, the youngest (b. 1890). It was unanimously decided to appoint Katsiflīs as treasurer of the society, Naimy as secretary and Gibran as president. *Al-Sāyih* of 'Abd al-Masīh, a semi-weekly, was to take the place of *al-Funoon* as the main organ through which the voice of the Bond was to be communicated to the world. The name of each contributor, it was agreed, should always be followed by the sub-title: "A member of the Pen Bond" (عضو في الرابطة القلمية). At the beginning of each calendar year, *al-Sāyih* would produce a special issue dedicated exclusively to the Bond, to which each member was required to contribute. In addition to this, the Bond would come out each year with one collection of works by its members entitled "The Collection of the Pen Bond" (مجموعة الرابطة القلمية) followed by the particular year in question[4].

1. The first-hand source on the rise and development of Arabic literature in the United States, and especially of the Pen Bond and its members, on which all students of that literature, including the present writer, admittedly draw, is Mikhail Naimy in his book *Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān*, and especially the chapter entitled "The Pen Bond", pp. 157—162. Another more recent and first-hand source by the same author is *Sab'ūn* II, particularly the chapter on Arrabitah (The Bond), pp. 170—182. For other important secondary sources, see: al-Ashtar, 'Abd al-Karīm, *The Emigrant Prose*: (النثر المهجري), 2 vols., Cairo 1961; Saidah, George: *Our Literature and Our Writers in the Americas* (أدبنا وأدباؤنا في المهاجر الأميركية) Beirut 1957; 'Abbās Ihsān and Najm Muhammad: *Arabic Poetry in North Ameriac*: (الشعر العربي في المهجر أميركا الشمالية) Beirut, 1957; Sarrāj, Nādirah: *Poets of The Pen Bond* (شعراء الرابطة القلمية) Cairo, 1957; and Na'ūri, 'Issa: *Immigrant Literature* (أدب المهجر) Cairo, 1959.
2. See *Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān*, pp. 158—159.
3. *Sab'un* II, pp. 174—181,
4. Only one such collection appeared in New York, 1921. This last practice, along with other intended ones by Arrabitah, such as the publication in book form of the works of its members, the translation into Arabic of important Western books, and the distribution of prizes for successful works by Arab authors, was given up on financial grounds: See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 171—172.

It is evident that Naimy had proved to be, as Gibran had anticipated in his letter, the main trigger behind this organised literary movement, intent, as it claimed for itself, on emancipating Arabic literature "from the state of sterility and imitation to the state of beautiful originality in both meaning and style"[1]. He wrote the constitution for Arrabitah, as well as the introduction to that constitution, expounding the aims, ideals and main literary principles to which Arrabitah should devote itself[2]. He also wrote the introduction to the first and only annual collection of Arrabitah, produced in 1921, to which he also contributed eight other items, and in which he gives his own definition in the name of Arrabitah of the new literature they stand for, as well as of the one they are set on supplanting[3]. That Arrabitah, in a previous attempt to form and function as a group in 1916, had failed, when Naimy was still in Seattle and not included among its membership, gives special credit to his indefatigable efforts in the support and success of this literary project in 1920[4].

Not only was Naimy the most industrious among his colleagues in creating the standard literature of the new movement in its varied aspects,

1. From the introduction to the constitution of Arrabitah; See *Gubrān, Khalil Gubrān*, p. 160.
2. Ibid. p. 159.
3. This same introduction was later entered in Naimy's *al-Ghirbāl* (The Sieve) under the title of "Mihwar al-Adab", 6th edition, Beirut, 1960. pp. 23—28.
4. All students of immigrant Arabic literature in the United States, without exception speak of 'The Pen Bond' as having come into existence in April 1920. No one seems to note that a previous attempt had apparently been made in 1916 to group some of the contributors to *al-Funoon* in a society called The Pen Bond الرابطة القلمية. That this is so is evident from the first few issues of *al-Funoon*, beginning in June 1916, when the names of Kahlil Gibrān, Amin al-Rihāni, Rashid Ayyoub, William Katsiflis, Amin Mushriq and 'Abd al-Masih Haddād are all occasionally followed by the title "A member of the Pen Bond" عضو في الرابطة القلمية. Gradually, that same year, the title was dropped and no mention is made of it until April 1920 when the Pen Bond proper was formed by Naimy and his friends, including some new faces and leaving out Rihāni who, as Naimy tells us (*Sab'ūn* II, p. 171) was then absent from New York and also on extremely bad terms with Gibrān.

whether in poetry or prose[1], but he was also the only one among them who wrote extensively on literary criticism and literary theory. In this respect he acted as the theoritician and literary expert of the Arrabitah, through whose articles on literary criticism, contemporary writings — including those of his colleagues — were examined and filtered, singling out those characteristics that, in his judgement, were in line with the true nature of the new literature he defined for Arrabitah[2], and launching a bitter attack on all that he considered elements of literary sterility and backwardness in Arabic culture.

Soon Arrabitah, a united front with well-defined literary aims and objectives, struck the Arab world as an independent literary school. "The formation of the Pen Bond and the adoption of *al-Sāyih* as their magazine", says Mārūn 'Abbūd in an article on Gibran, "is in itself the appearance of an accomplished school in action"[3]. Papers and magazines in the Arab world, and especially *al-Hilāl* in Egypt, struck by the novelty and revolutionary spirit of Arrabitah literature, began to reproduce it at home from *al-Sāyih* on a large scale[4]. To them, Arrabitah seemed to symbolise a new literary era for an Arab world already on the move. Discussing the Pen Bond and its men, Qustantīn Zurayq says, "It had unified their strength in their literary and spiritual endeavour and made of them one of the sources of illumination to an Arab life beginning to awake"[5].

1. Abū-Mādi, 'Arida, Ayyoub and Nadra Haddād are mainly known as poets, 'Abd al-Masīh Haddād as a journalist and essayist; Bāhūt, 'Atallah and Katsiflis, on the other hand, had scarcely contributed anything worth mentioning to Arrabitah in the form of writing. Gibrān, who is comparable with Naimy in output, though not in range, had by 1920 adopted English as his main medium of expression. His only new book to be published in Arabic after the rise of Arrabitah is *al-'Awāsif* (The Tempests) a collection of poetic pieces in story form, most of which had previously appeared in *al-Sāyih*.
2. See his introduction to *Majmū'at al-Rābitah al-Qalamiyyah*, New York, 1921, and also the excerpts from his introduction to the constitution of Arrabitah in *Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān*, p. 160.
3. *al-Makshūf*, No. III, Beirut, 1937.
4. See Adham, Ismā'il: "Mikhail Naimy" (ميخائيل نعيمه), *al-Hadīth* Magazine, Aleppo, 1940, p. 312.
5. *al-Adīb*, No. 8, p. 77, Beirut, 1946.

Muhammad Najm even goes further, to say that this new literary school in America "characterised by power, modernity and revolt against all that is traditional and rotten, is the strongest school that modern Arabic literature has known until the present day"[1]. Naimy, who shared with his comrades the privilege of writing the poetry of the new literature, the essay, the novel, the short story and the drama, and who even surpassed them in some of these fields[2], also distinguished himsef as being the only active literary critic among them. To those of the Arabs struck by the new movement started in New York, he was of special interest. In his articles on literary criticism, they would grasp the literary theory and the different concepts behind the new movement, and in his creative writings they would see that theory and those concepts put into practice. Moreover, Naimy's realistic, cut-to-shape and most lucid language and style, readily commended itself to the Arab reader who perhaps had found himself unable to keep level with the high-flown, super-ornamented and poetically symbolic language of Gibran, an older and already better-known central figure in Arrabitah. Gradually, and as the works of Arrabitah became available to the public in increasing numbers, "People in the 'Mahjar' and in the Arab world", as Adham says, "began to enjoy the writings of Naimy, which carried something new to Arabic literature and life. In them they found depth, fertility and a spirit which people had not previously known ... From that day, Naimy began to occupy his position among the distinguished writers of Arabic and started to be known in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon as the deepest in thought among the emigrant writers, the most lucid in language and the most precise of expression"[3].

1. *al-Qissah Fī al-Adab al-'Arabi al-Hadīth*, p. 87.
2. Najm is of the opinion that Naimy is the first Arab writer to have written the short story in its modern artistic from which has not yet been surpassed; see Ibid p. 271, also p. 273—74. Ismā'īl Adham, on the other hand, also considers Naimy's *Fathers and Sons* the pioneering attempt in Arabic drama in its modern artistic form; see his book *Tawfīq al-Hakīm*, Cairo, 1945 p. 31.
3. Adham, "Mikhail Naimy", *al-Hadīth*, pp. 312—313.

Consequently, in June 1922 Naimy received a letter from a certain Egyptian publisher by the name of Muhyi al-Dīn Rida, saying that, in view of Naimy's increasing fame in Egypt, he would seek permission to publish a collection of his essays in book form so that it might serve as a model for those who wished to follow the new style[1]. Naimy selected a good number of his essays in literary criticism and literary theory which had already appeared individually since 1913 in *al-Funoon* and *al-Sāyih* before 1922. al-'Aqqād, already an admirer of the 'Mahjar' (Emigrant) school in general and of Naimy in particular, was asked to write the introduction, and the book appeared in the summer of 1923 in Cairo, under the title of *al-Ghirbāl*, The Sieve.

What is specially significant about *al-Ghirbāl* is not only the fact that it was, as it has been justly described, "an innovation in the literary Arab world and a pioneering attempt to found Arabic literary criticism on well-defined literary laws and artistic bases, at a time when literary criticism with the Arabs was still divorced from any artistic or scientific principles and dictated by personal bias and greedy interest"[2], but that it can also be taken as providing explicit literary doctrines in the light of which not only the whole body of Naimy's creative literary works and life achievements gain their significance, but also the very essence of Arrabitah as a movement.

1. See an excerpt of this letter in *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 194—195.
2. See Adham in *al-Hadīth*, p. 313.

CHAPTER III

THE SIEVE

The main objective of *al-Ghirbāl* (The Sieve), as is instantly implied from the title, is literary sieving. It is the application of well-defined literary principles to literary works whereby, as Naimy says, "distinction is made between the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, and between the wholesome and the corrupt"[1].

The twenty-two essays found in the book fall roughly, as can generally be seen, into two groups. The first nine essays are primarily concerned with stating and elaborating upon the different principles constituting the author's literary theory. It is attempted through them to construct the sieve, so to speak, by means of which the sieving is to take place. The remaining thirteen articles deal with specific works, by different authors, including members of Arrabitah, where the author's literary theory is meticulously applied and the sieving is carefully and often ruthlessly carried out.

Taking Naimy's literary theory first, we find him compelled at the outset, and in his article "al-Gharbalah" (Sieving)[2] to embark on a few truisms concerning the function of the critic and his relation to his subject matter. The critic, or better, the literary siever, we are told, is to apply himself to that which is written and not to the writer in person. The writer's feelings, thoughts and aspirations when written and published become the property of all, whence the critic's right to examine them, but not so the

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, 6th edition, Beirut, 1960, p. 15.
2. Ibid. p. 13.

writer's private and indiviual self. Nor are the writers, on the other hand, to take personal offence when critics apply their literary sieves to their works.

The critic's duty is carefully to study and examine the particular work in question in an attempt to detect, as is within his power, its value, and to assign to it the particular literary importance which he believes is its due.

These early remarks by Naimy, though truisms to a Western ear, were, at the time, still new to an Arab world, where criticism was taken to mean either eulogising or satirising and when the writer as a person more than his work was made the subject of both.

From simple commonsense facts, the article gradually rises to higher levels where criticism (or sieving) is described as being a basic law of nature ever on the move, accepting and rejecting, forming and transforming, all for the sake of preserving life and of preparing the proper means for its propagation. Part of Nature's message therefore is a critic's. Not only is he to accept and reject but in accepting and rejecting he is to prepare the way for the living literature. It is in this respect that he can also be called a forerunner and a creator. For to discover the greatness of a literary work or to pave the way for one by exposing and discarding what goes into the making of bad literature is to be in possession of an already-formulated concept concerning literary originality and greatness. This concept is the critic's sieve; it is the body of his literary principles through which he both judges and is judged. A critic is as great as his principles reveal him to be, just as a writer is as great as he can satisfy the standards of great critics.

Having stated his understanding of a critic and of the function of criticism, which presumably is the light in which he wishes himself as a critic to be understood, Naimy moves on in the second and subsequent articles to expound his own principles, or better, to draw the network of his sieve.

The central principle he holds, from which all others branch, is given in "Mihwar al-Adab" (The literary pivot or the pivot around which literature turns)[1].

1. *al-Ghirbāl* p. 23. Originally written as an introduction to the first and only collection of Arrabitah (مجموعة الرابطة القلمية) New York, 1921.

Man's ultimate aim in the world, Naimy claims, irrespective of whether he is conscious of it or unconscious, is the realisation of himself. Man's perpetual movement and restlessness from the begining of history, his persistent fight and stubborn resistance is ultimately traced back to a deep spiritual urge in him to overcome his different limitations that stand between what he is and what he longs to be. Man, therefore, is evidently seeking his true self, "and all that man does, turns in fact around one pivot which is man"[1]. "If we seek God it is simply to find ourselves in God, and if we cherish beauty, it is only that we are cherishing ourselves in beauty, and when we desire virtue we desire but ourselves in virtue..."[2] From this thesis, reminiscent of Socrates on love in Plato's Symposium, Naimy moves on to claim that "of all stages upon which the different scenes of life are manifested, nothing like literature is a stage upon which man in all his conditions physical and spiritual is displayed"[3]. True literature, therefore, we are made to underetand, is a mirror in which man, in his perpetual struggle for the realisation of his real self, of life, is reflected. It is, as Naimy puts it, "the expression in articulate form of all the workings of life as it crystallises in us in thoughts and passions"[4]. Since life absolute, for which we all long and on which we all draw, is one[5] and since it is awake in us in different degrees, depending on the extent to which we are aware of it[6], then the criterion of literature would be the range to which a writer can envisage life complete in his work and hence enable us to see not only the workings of our everyday life, but also their eternal principles. "Our thuoghts and emotions", says Naimy, "are that portion of life that has already awakened in us"[7]. The wider the awakening on life in terms of thoughts and emotions that we get through literature, the more we are

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 25.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. p. 26.
4. Ibid. p. 105.
5. Ibid. p. 113.
6. Ibid. pp. 113—114.
7. Ibid. p. 124.

said to live, and the greater that literature is. A really great writer, we are to conclude, is both the son of his age and a forerunner. While carefully reflecting the temporary, the individual, the turbulent in everyday life, he ever moves on to bind it up with the universal, the permanent and the eternal. Herein, Naimy feels, lies the greatness of such as Homer, al-Ma'arri, Dante and Shakespeare[1]. In an attempt to define a poet, Naimy describes him as being a prophet, a philosopher, a photographer, a musician and a priest all in one[2]. To the shrewdness of vision he adds the soberness of thought, and to his truthful depiction of life he adds the beauty of form and sound, while trailing throughout a stream of uplifting moral and social purposefulness. A creative writer is in another place defined almost on the same lines: "A good writer", Naimy says, "whether he is a novelist, an essayist [journalist] or a poet, is the writer who sees through his heart's eye what everyone cannot see; who derives for us from every scene that life offers, a rewarding lesson, and who, more than others, nature has endowed with a gift of detecting truth"[3].

True literature, we are to conclude, as it is basically conceived by Naimy, is a message of life carried by people who are distinguished from the common herd by a wider grasp on life, and by a powere of giving it live expression both in its individual and temporary manifestations as well as in its more removed and universal principles.

It is not difficult to trace the parentage of these highly idealistic concepts by Naimy regarding creative writing and writers. In characterising the poet and his work, Wordsworth says in the introduction to his *Lyrical Ballads*: "He is a man speaking to men, a man ... endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind"[4].

1. Ibid. pp. 67—69.
2. Ibid. p. 84.
3. Ibid. pp. 49—50.
4. Grossart, Rev. Alexander B., *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, Vol. II, London 1876, pp. 87—88.

That literature is the reflection and expression of life, that it is endowed with a moral message, which is primarily to awake the living truth in the heart of man and bring him nearer to his real self, and that the poet or creative writer is a greater seer than the common herd and more initiated into the deep secrets of life — all and such other concepts held by Naimy indicate the degree to which he was fully saturated with the romantic literary principles and moral idealism of the West, be it through Belinsky in Russia or through the transcendentalists in the United States, or through Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Carlyle in Britain. Of this, however, he makes no secret. Speaking of the chief literary lesson which modern Arabic literature ought to learn from the West in order to live he says: "That lesson is that literature and life are two inseparable twins, that literature hinges on life and life on literature, that literature is as broad as life, as deep as its secrets and that it is reflected in it just as it reflects it"[1].

The significance of these literary ideals of Naimy, however, is not so much in their conception as it is in their implications on Arabic literature which he systematically derives.

The first important implication perhaps is that regarding the Arabic language. If literature is the reflection of life and must consequently be true to it, so must also be the language. In an article entitled "Naqīq al-Dafādi' " (Frogs Croaking)[2], originally published in the special issue of *al-Sāyih*, in 1923, Naimy carries perhaps the most bitter attack against Arab conservatism regarding the Arabic language. He satirises the then generally accepted belief in the Arab East that the Arabic language in itself is a sacred heritage from the past; that it had arrived at the hands of the blessed ancestors during the glorious ages of Islam at the greatest possible perfection and, therefore, not only admits of no change, no modification and no reform, but is, as it is, good for every age. If modern writers are confronted with any uneasiness in their literary expression due to the great difference in

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 30.
2. Ibid. p. 90.

time between the age in which they live and the classical language in which they express themselves, the uneasiness is referred to their lack of linguistic mastery rather than to the ignorantly professed, outdated classical rigidity of the Arabic language. Indeed, the chief criterion of literary excellence was not primarily what a writer said, but how far in saying it he was able to display his resourceful knowledge and command of the classical Arabic language with all the classical arts and sciences related to it.

Naimy, in his article, calls the holders of such beliefs "the frogs of literature". In love with stagnation, they never tire of raising their ominous voices, 'quak, quak', at every attempt at channelling fresh streams into the language, in the from of new words, new expressions, or at rendering it more malleable and flexible to meet the requirements of the present age.

One of these so-called frogs, who apparently must have incited Naimy's article, is an Egyptian critic who had criticisad Gibran's long poem *al-Mawākib* (The Processions)[1], concentrating mainly on the linguistic aspect and condemning Gibran for using the current and popular, but classically unorthodox, word تحمّم (bathed) instead of the orthodox استحم in one of his couplets[2].

"I ask you, Sirs", says Naimy, "in the name of understanding and justice and in the name of the dictionary, why is it allowed that a certian bedouin, unknown to either you or me, should invite into your language the word استحم, while it is denied that a poet, known to you and me, should make it تحمّم at a time when you understand what he means, even more, understand تحمّم much before you understand استحم ? What indeed is the eternal wisdom that binds your tongues to that of a bedouin, having preceeded you by thousands of years, and estranges them from that of a poet who is your contemporary?"[3]

Drawing on his main concept of the inseparability of literature and life for the support of his call for linguistic liberalism, Naimy

1. First published in New York, 1918.
2. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 97.
3. Ibid. pp. 97—98.

claims that "language, which is a phenomenon of life is subject exclusively to the laws of life"[1]. Life evolves from one generation to another and so must the language. Man is the creator of the language and not language the creator of man. It is therefore more becoming that man, who gives life to the language, should mould it at his own will in order that it may fit his needs and the needs of his age for self expression, and not mould himself in order to fit a stereotyped language, cut to suit an age which is no more his own[2]. Language, no matter how highly esteemed, is no more than a vehicle for thought, a body of symbols made to convey what our living selves feel and think[3]. It is absurd that the symbol should be made more important than the symbolised, and that the language of thought should become more sanctified than thought[4].

Though it is easy to follow the implications of Naimy's call for linguistic liberalism in *al-Ghirbāl*, it does not seem as easy to estimate how far he wished to see them carried. If language is to be made true to life, and subject exclusively to its laws, then the writer's only choice in the Arab world is to adopt the language of life itself in that area which is the colloquial; the classical Arabic being used by none save on formal occasions and in writing. That Naimy was aware of this fact is evident in his article "The Arabic Drama", originally written as an introduction to his four-act play *Fathers and Sons*[5]. "If we are to follow this law", he says, "we should be writing all our plays in the colloquial. For no-one among us speaks the Arabic of al-Jāhiliyyah, or the early ages of Islam. This would mean the extinction of our classical language, a national calamity that I am far from desiring"[6].

1. *al-Ghirbāl* p. 96.
2. Ibid. p. 23.
3. Ibid. p. 105.
4. Ibid. p. 101.
5. Ibid. p. 29; see a translation of this article into English with a commentary on Naimy under the title of "Michael Naimy and the Syrian Americans in Modern Arabic Literature", by Martin Sprengling, *The Open Court*, Vol. 46, No. 915, August 1932, pp. 551—563.
6. *al-Ghirbāl*, pp. 34—35.

The fact that Naimy, however, made three characters, the supposedly uneducated, out of the eight in *Fathers and Sons* talk in colloquial Arabic, that much of what appeared in *al-Funoon* of his novel *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul* was also colloquial[1], and that he was the only one among his comrades during the early days of Arrabitah who had paid serious attention to the spoken language, show that he had already taken active steps towards that "national calamity". That Naimy should have absolutely discontinued these early steps after *Fathers and Sons* and those parts of the *Memoirs* published in *al-Funoon*, though it may have definitely contributed to the wide circulation of his works in the Arab world, is undoubtedly not to the full credit of his literary and linguistic principles expounded in *al-Ghirbāl*.

The second major implication of Naimy's central theme concerning the inseparability of literature and life touches on the very nature, whether in form or in content, of the then existing Arabic literature.

In "al-Hubāhib" (The Firefly) he speaks of the Arab writers of the day, intent on imitating the literature of the past, as people who, living in the modern age, work on clothing us and themselves with the raiments of Hārūn al Rashīd and the Abbasids[2]. At a time when people of the stature of Shakespeare, Milton, Hugo, Goethe and Tolstoy in the West have plunged deep into the human heart and lifted it up to the higher strata of truth and dazzling light, Arab writers still live and die to sing the praise of glittering swords, of desert camels and deers and of "traces of departed lovers". Indeed, some of them still spend their lives consulting dictionaries and straining their minds composing rhymes in praise of a Patriarch or a Pasha, or in congratulating a friend on a medal, elegising a dead notable or eulogising a newly-appointed one[3]. The West has literary suns and moons, the Arab East has only fireflies. Literature is a message of life. What contribution,

1. The colloquial parts in the *Memoirs*, as can be verified, were rewritten in classical form when they first appeared in book form in Beirut, 1949.
2. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 50.
3. Ibid. pp. 48—49.

Naimy asks, have the Arabs added to the world treasure during the last five conturies of their history? None, the answer comes with great shame[1]. While civilisation develops and spreads around us, and science kindles the human mind and sends it on the course of progress, our Arab life, like a rock in the face of winds, Naimy says, remains unaffected and unmoved. Instead, we have for ages been beating our breasts and knocking our foreheads against the door-sills of our places of worship, expecting happiness to descend to us from heaven[2]. Looking at the past, our writers find it encircled with a halo of greatness and glory, and consequently they never tire of repeating: ours is the country of revelation, the cradle of civilisation and the mother of prophets[3]. Deeply absorbed in the past, they are oblivious of the present, thinking in their oblivion that the ever moving life, like, them, has not moved at all, whence comes their feeling that it is their duty to keep the past intact and to live in it[4]. Consequantly, like the Bedouin in pre-Islamic days, they address the "Diman" (vestiges of tents) and the "Atlāl" (الأطلال)[5] and apostrophise the passing caravans at a time when we have no caravans, no "atlāl" and no "diman"[6].

In his attack on the traditional outlook of contemporary Arab writers which has impoveriched them, whether in the topics they deal with or in the literary form of expression they adopt, Naimy calls on them to heed the call of life and be true to themselves and to the people among whom they live. This would mean, as he puts it in "The Arabic Drama"[7], "that our writers should first and foremost turn their eyes towards life which flows

1. *al-Ghirbāl* p. 47.
2. Ibid. p. 52.
3. Ibid. p. 50.
4. Ibid. p. 94.
5. It was the usual practice of a pre-Islamic poet to begin his poem by addressing the remaining traces (الأطلال) of a departed tribe as he laments the departure, with that tribe, of his beloved.
6. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 121.
7. Ibid. p. 33.

around them every day; to our life in its pros and cons (عجره وبجره), its joys and sorrows, its beauty and ugliness, its good and evil, and find therein material for their pens — our life is rich with material if they but knew how to look for it''[1]. Once this is done, Naimy believes, once literature and life are brought together, Arab writers would realise ''that poetry can be composed on other than 'ghazal' and 'naseeb' (love and eroticism), 'madh' and 'hijā' '(panegyrics and satire), 'wasf' and 'rithā' '(description and elegy), 'fakhr' and hamāsah' (boasting and heroics)''[2] to the rest of the classical categories which monopolised poetry in the past, and consequently in the present as well, and would discover that ''prose is not confined to the stringing together of rhyming phrases, the drawing in abundance on far-fetched words buried deep in dictionaries and the writing of articles on hackneyed topics''[3].

Naimy feels that the time has come when it has to be decided whether Arabic literature is to be an organ of life or a museum for antiquities. Today, he says, two ideas concerning Arabic literature are brought to clash. The one believes that language is the literary end; the other, that languge is subservient to literature. Clearly the point at stake is literature itself and its purpose. Holders of the first idea understand literature to be an exhibition where they are to display their profound knowledge of the Arabic language, with its varied and rich body of vocabulary, its different rhetorical sciences, its innumerable laws and rules of grammar, and its store of sayings and aphorisms. Holders of the second idea understand literature to be an exhibition of thoughts and emotions, of sensitive souls expressing their interaction with the universe, and of living hearts rendering in prose and poetry what they embody of the pulse of life.

Holding to the first idea, Naimy believes, is tantamout to declaring openly our spiritual bankruptcy, and to admitting that our early Arab forefathers ages back, who are responsible for the final shape in which the language and its literature have descended to us, were literary prophets,

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 33.
2. Ibid. p. 30.
3. Ibid. p. 30.

even literary gods, whose perfect work our supposedly inferior natures and poverty-stricken hearts and minds are not possibly allowed to subject to the slightest addition, subtraction or modification. If this be our conviction, Naimy says, our only logical step would be to break our pens, crush our ink pots and stop writing, closing our eyes to all that is going on in other languages around us, in absolute contentment with what Arabic language and lirerature it was our lot to inherit[1].

Far from breaking his pen, Naimy proceeded in "al-Zihāfāt wa al-'Ilal"[2] or "Poetry and the Poetic Metres", as the sub-title suggests, to launch what is perhaps the most bitter attack ever dared in the Arab world of his day against one of the most popular, most revered and sanctified inherited literary sciences in the Arabic language, namely the celebrated prosody of al-Khalīl Ibn Ahmad (100 — 175 A.H.)

The target of Naimy's attack in his essay is not the Prosody of al-Khalīl as such, for to al-Khalīl, and his ingeniously organised science, he expresses great admiration. The main point around which the article is woven is that while the Prosody of al-Khalīl itself came about through a detailed and careful study by the man of the independently existing poetry in the Arabic language that went before him, that same Prosody, with all its laws and definitions was gradually held by subsequent generations after al-Khalīl and up to Naimy's days as the sole legal and orthodox means through which poetry can be conceived and formulated.

Prosody, Naimy feels, originally a derivative science, aiming at defining and listing the different forms in which Arab poets of the past happened to have expressed themselves, has now come to be treated as an original science in accordance with the rules and definitions of which alone poetry can be composed, and also classified as true or false. This is how, Naimy says, poetry, basically the spontaneous language of the self and originally prior to metre and rhyme, became antecedent and subservient to prosody,

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, pp. 104—105.
2. Ibid. pp. 107—152.

and asccessible to whoever studies the science of al-Khalīl and masters the art of poetic composition and craftsmanship. Little do we realise, says Naimy, "that in our earnest quest for the mastery of prosody we have lost our grasp on the mastery of poetry itself, and that in our zeal for the distinction between the sound and the corrupt in the peotic metres we have forgotten the difference between what is poetry and what is not"[1].

Back to his main theme, that true literature is the expression of the living man, Naimy moves on to make his most revolutionary remark in the essay, that "neither metres nor rhymes are poetic necessities"[2], just as ritual is not an essential constituent of prayer. Just as a man can possibly go through all the relevant rituals and yet not necessarily pray, so also a poet may abide by all the different laws and rules of prosody in his work and yet not come out with poetry. It is the life element astir in the poet's heart, the religious devotion at work in the praying individual that make all the difference. Not only do they give significance and beauty to the sort of prosody or rituals adopted, but can also choose to be without ritual or prosody.

Arab poets, Naimy concludes, are taking the accidental for the essential in poetry and the transient for the permanent in literature. The essential and the permanent is the living breath in man, the sort of feelings, thoughts and emotions with which his soul is impregnated and which he tries to give utterance. These alone have the right to dictate to the author the particular literary from which best answers to their nature. Traditional Arab prosody may be one form, but it by no means is all and final. Life is open and man is dynamically alive and more holy, more varied and more profound than all hitherto existing systems. Poetry, which is a literary manifestation of man, can in no way therefore be singularly governed by pre-established traditional laws and patterns, as those set by al-Khalīl, nor be confined to a limited number of recognised poetical concerns, as those traditionally tackled in past Arabic literature. Each single genuine human

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 109.
2. Ibid. p. 116.

emotion, or idea or passion, Naimy feels, is a manifold literary possibility and consequently the most beautiful and orthodox literary from it can possibly take is that which best enables it to be carried alive into the world, whether that form is in conformity with the recognised pre-established norms and standards inherited from the past, or whether it is a departure from those standards. The only understandable conformity is that which a writer creates between the particular literary form he adopts and the nature of the literary content he wishes to convey.

To sum up, the main principles on which the whole body of Naimy's literary theory in *al-Ghirbāl* is based can be stated as follows:

1. Literature is the expression of life as it is made conscious in man.

2. Life is one and absolute, and man's share of it can only be that to which his consciousness, his emotional, spiritual and intellectual awakening, extends.

3. True literature, therefore, is a message of life, carried by men whose consciousness, awakening and sensitivity are broader and more sharp than those of the common herd, and who necessarily, in reflecting the individual, the everyday and the transient in people's lives, ever lead them on to wind up with the universal, the underlying pattern and the permanent.

4. Since life in all its workings and manifestations is subject to no laws other than its own, literature, which is the true expression of life, should be subject to no other than the laws of life.

5. As life is dynamic, ever forming and transforming in a process of manifesting itself in forms appropriate to its nature and purpose, forsaking every existing form that is no longer appropriate, to death and extinction, so also must a writer feel it his duty to form, transform and mould whatever means of expression he has at hand, in order to provide the literary form best suited to the living word within him. But never must a writer attempt to curb the living word in order that it fits pre-established

literary forms whose claim to life in the present only rests in their having traditionally lived in the past.

6. Classical Arabic literature, therefore, in all its ways and means of expression, the fields it covered and the world in which it breathed, and in short, all in all, is the expression of a life that differs in many ways from the present that Arabs live. Consequently much of it should no more be binding, much less exemplary. Present Arab writers, therefore, should rid themselves of their confinement within the precincts of classical Arabic literature. They should go ahead to produce the literature of their own age, their own life, independently of the literary norms, practices and limitations of the past, just as past ancestors had proceeded to create theirs in their own independent way.

7. What is true of classical Arabic literature should be true of the classical Arabic language as well. Not that the classical Arabic language should be abandoned but that it should be freely reshuffled and moulded by living writers to fit the needs of the present age. Language is a means to be used and not a end to be sought for itself. As a means, it should continuously be modified and readjusted, througl having old words, rules, expresions, usages etc. that have lost their classical significance, dropped and allowing new ones to take their place.

Each point of the above, of course, lends itself to debate. Of the first to take one of Naimy's principles to account in *al-Ghirbāl* is no other than al-'Aqqād, the writer of the introduction to the book. His objection, after expressing enthusiastic support for all else in *al-Ghirbāl*, is that Naimy has allowed the Arab writer unrestricted freedom to dispose of the language as his need for self-expression requires. The Arabic language, al-'Aqqād argues, has not been founded today so that we may be able to formulate its laws and principles as we go. al-'Aqqād's opinion is that there should be a limit to linguistic liberalism whereby a middle course between absolute liberality and thoroughgoing conservatism may be followed[1].

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, pp. 10—11.

Another commentator on Naimy's *al-Ghirbāl*, Dr Muhammad Mandūr[1], though expressive of great admiration for the book and the literary principles it propagates, contributes to al-'Aqqād's thesis concerning linguistic liberalism and goes further to place Naimy in the school of subjective literary criticism. By this he seems to mean, one would conclude, that Naimy's principles are not self limiting but depend, concerning the scope to which they are to apply to literature, on the particular person applying them. What is life, and what are the means of detecting it in particular literary works? To what extent is literary and linguistic liberalism to be allowed, and where should the line be drawn between liberalism and conservatism? The answers to such questions are not found in Naimy's principles but can be given only by the particular person applying them.

Another student of *al-Ghirbāl*, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ashtar[2], picks up the line from Mandūr and goes further to say that the subjective nature of Naimy's principles makes any critic using them liable to come out with unscientific and partial judgements[3].

These and many other similar arguments regarding the literary principles in *al-Ghirbāl* may very well seem sound and convincing. Had it ever been safe to judge principles as such, and outside their field of application, Naimy's critics would certainly be right in what they observed. But theories, and especially literary theories, can only be fully appreciated through their consequences, through the new world which they bring about. Naimy in *al-Ghirbāl* was calling for the founding of the new literature. Consequently it is only through the new literature created by him or his comrades in Arrabitah that his literary principles can best be evaluated. The proof of *al-Ghirbāl* lies outside *al-Ghirbāl* and should be sought in the rest of Naimy's creative works. It is then that the weakness and strength of the principles he held are best revealed. Sufficient to say at this stage regarding *al-Ghirbāl* as it alone stands that the judgements Naimy passed on particular

1. See *al-Majallah* (Monthly), Cairo, April 1959, pp. 14—23.
2. See *al-Nathr al-Mahjari*, Vol. II, Cairo, 1961, pp. 175—216.
3. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 187.

contemporary Arabic works in the latter half of the book, though seemingly bold at the time, have so far proved themselves true.

The signs of literary originality and genuineness he pointed out in the poetry of the then relatively unknown Nasseeb 'Arīda, in Gibran[1] and in al-'Aqqād as a critic[2] are the very things for which these people are being increasingly admired in the Arab world, while the things he condemned, for example, in the then highly celebrated poet Ahmad Shawqi[3], as pretentious literary formalism and disguised imitation of the past devoid of personal genuineness, have become the very things for which Shawqi has since then been criticised and divorced from his position as "Prince of Poets" in modern Arabic literature. Other works he condemned, such as Khalīl Mutrān's translation of Shakespeare[4], Mayy Ziade's translation from German of Max Muller's *Tears and Smiles*[5], Muhammad al-Shurayqi's poetry in his *Aghāni al-Siba*[6] and Labīb al-Riyāshi's book *al-Nubūgh*[7], have gradually crept into oblivion, and scarcely anyone in the Arab world today, other than literary historians, knows of the existence of such books by their authors.

Naimy's judgement of al-Rihāni has also proved right. His study of al-Rīhāni as a poet[8] indicated that though presently known for his poetry, al-Rīhāni's proper field for which he will be remembered in the future, is prose, and in prose the social essay. Long has al-Rihāni been forgotten as a poet in the Arab world, but he is still always referred to as the social thinker and philosopher of al-Furaikah (his home town in Lebanon).

From *al-Ghirbāl*, as laying down the main literary principles of the new literature for the creation of which Naimy had dedicated himself, we move to other creative works by the author where those principles can be seen in their most natural literary setting.

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 170 and p. 218.
2. Ibid. p. 207 and p. 244.
3. Ibid. p. 145.
4. Ibid. p. 196.
5. Ibid. p. 178.
6. Ibid. p. 189.
7. Ibid. p. 192.
8. Ibid. p. 163.

CHAPTER IV

FATHERS AND SONS

> " This world requires that our writers should first and foremost turn their eyes towards life which flows around them every day, towards our own life in its pros and cons, its joys and sorrows, its beauty and ugliness, its good and evil, and find therein material for their pens — our life is rich with material if they but knew how to look for it"
>
> From the Introduction to the first edition of *Fathers and Sons*, 3rd edition, p. 15; also *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 33.

Though *Fathers and Sons* (al-Ābā' wa al-Banūn), written in the summer of 1916 and published piecemeal in *al-Funoon*[1], was the first work by the author to appear in book form, New York, 1917, yet it by no means is the first in time and cenception. Naimy opened his literary career as a critic, and a good part of the critical essays in the first half of *al-Ghirbāl*, as is evident from *al-Funoon*, were written between June 1913 and July 1916, when no other writing by him had yet made its appearance whether in prose or poetry. That Naimy's subsequent works should be considered in one way or another as answers to the literary principles and requirements stated in *al-Ghirbāl* seems to be justified.

As a full complement to the literary conflict laid out in *al-Ghirbāl*, between an imitative, rigid and outdated literature that ought to give way,

1. See *al-Funoon*, Vol. 2, 1916—17, Nos. 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

and a genuine, vivid and up-to-date new literature to take its place, *Fathers and Sons*, a four-act play, portrays the same conflict on the social level between two generations. Between the fathers on the one hand, holding fast to their traditional convictions, customs and ways of life and fanatically insisting throughout that these are the only true and appropriate patterns into which their sons should fittingly grow, and the new generation of sons and daughters on the other, ever dynamically compelled under the impact of their new life and different age to break loose from imposed patterns that can no longer fit them and try their hand at forming their own.

In fulfilment of *al-Ghirbāl's* call that literature should reflect life, and that Arab writers therefore should draw on life in its everyday manifestations around them, *Fathers and Sons* takes its subject matter from everyday life in Mount Lebanon. Its setting is a Lebanese town towards the opening of the twentieth century[1].

The first act opens in the sitting room of Beit Samāhah, a well-to-do middle class family. Imm Ilyās (mother of Ilyās), a widow and mother of two sons and one daughter, back with her twenty-year-old daughter Zainah from their regular Sunday service, interrupts by her arrival a serious conversation that had been going on for some time between her eldest son, thirty-year-old Ilyas, and his thirty-year-old friend, Dāūd, a newly arrived teacher at the local boarding school. Ilyās, whose education and readings have introduced him to the modern truths in life, is confronted with the rigidity and outdated customs and conventions symbolised by his domineering mother. His conviction that the old is too deep rooted in the hearts and minds of his society has driven him to extreme pessimism. With a feeling of utter helplessness, he was explaining to his friend, before his mother's arrival, how she understands religion to consist of going regularly to church, being obedient to the clergy and entertaining hatred and contempt for people of other sects, and how she is preparing to force a marriage on his sister Zainah to a forty-year-old

1. See *al-Ābā' wa al-Banūn*, 3rd edition, Beirut, 1959, p. 21.

lunatic and would-be poet, Nāssīf Bey, son of a govarnment clerk, the seventy-five-year-old Mūssa Bey. All this becase, in her judgement, they come from a traditionally high descent — they belong to high society and carry the title of « Bey ». That they are both rogues and possess no human merit whatsoever underneath that title, and that Zainah bears no love for her fiancé, makes no difference to the mother, covetous of linking herself with the traditionally and outwardly esteemed, yet inwardly corrupt and empty nobility.

The row that Imm Ilyās raises over her son as she enters, for his not having gone to church and the proud account she gives the visitor, in contrast, of her late husband, who had killed in his lifetime many Drūzes, Moslems and suchlike « infidels » of other sects, was highly revered by the local Ottoman Pasha and had never missed his Sunday service, confirms what Ilyās had been telling his friend of her solid conviction of the ideal virtue and unblemished excellence of her own generation's code of values and her firm belief that it should be propagated by her children.

As Imm Ilyās leaves the stage in disgust, Dāūd resumes his argument before Zainah, who listens with amazement to the visitor, that pessimism in these circumstances is a blasphemy against life and against God. Life has only created obstacles in the face of man so that man may labour to overcome them and thereby realise himself and the full meaning of his existence. It was said, Dāūd concludes, "be good to your father and mother" and not, "succumb to your father and mother even if they are misguided". We should fight for what we deem true and just. "Isn't our life as a whole a struggle? Had not our life been a perpetual struggle against ignorance, injustice, poverty, weakness and humility, it would not have been worthy of being lived. We, in fact, love life not as it is but as we wish it to be ... our struggle with it shall not end until our wish is realised"[1].

As the play unfolds itself, Zainah, to the maddened fury of her mother, falls in love with Dāūd, while Dāūd's sister, twenty-two-year-old Shahīdah,

1. *al-Ābā' wa al-Banūn*, p. 34.

a school teacher, falls in love with Ilyās. The four, motivated by love and by their conviction of the truths for which the new educated generation should stand, try to effect a united front against the unyielding stubournness of Imm Ilyās, played upon by the diabolical cunning of Mūssa Bey.

Mūssa Bey, a social drone, like most government officials and bureaucrats in Ottoman Lebanon, retains, of all the distinctions belonging to his class, only the title. He is in debt and threatened by imprisonment and sees his only way out of the impending scandal in cunningly concealing his real situation from the rich but misguided Imm Ilyās and in urging her to rescue her daughter by forcing her to marry his son, a lunatic, a drunkard and a gambler. He has no difficulty in flattering Imm Ilyās's vanity by arguing that she surely has mors sense than to allow her daughter to marry Dāūd, a stranger to the town, of no social significance, no high birth, who consequently works for a living, and who, moreover, belongs to an inferior, different Christian sect.

To escape the forced marriage, Zainah attempts suicide. Shahīdah insists on tending her friend and on staying night and day by her bedside, impressing the already half-disillusioned mother with her humane character, kindness and excellent upbringing. In the meanwhile, twenty-four-year- old Khalīl, Imm Ilyās's youngest son and associate of Mūssa Bey, comes back from town to tell humorously and ironically of the Bey's arrest for long-standing debts and of his estate being put on sale by brokers.

Imm Ilyās's disillusioment is complete. As the young couples lovingly rally around her, partly to relieve her of the shock and partly to welcome her back to their side, she submissively, but affectionately, raises her hands and blesses them. Life has naturally unfolded itself for the new generation to emerge victorious.

As compared with the attempts at dramatic art that went before it in the Arab world, at the hands of such writers as al-Naqqāsh, Al-Yāziji, Haddād, Antūn and the rest[1], *Fathers and Sons* enjoys the first distinction

1. See above, p. 55 et seq.

of being neither a translation, an adaptation, an imitation, nor a dramatised attempt at dealing with abstract values or with topics foreign to the age and society for which it was written. It simply uses the dramatic art as it was perfected by the West to deal realistically with a subject from everyday life in Lebanon towards the opening of the twentieth century.

Each character in the play manifests on the whole one or more phenomena of Lebanese society. In Imm Ilyās we see the sectarianism and the religious fanaticism which was tearing Lebanese society apart. Her late husband was great because he killed Moslems and Druzes, terrified the Ottoman gevernor and was highly loyal to his particular church. People, to her, are graded according to their inherited titles, their ancestry and the social class to which they belong, but not according to what they really are or make themselves to be. Zainah is not allowed to marry Dāūd because he is a Protestant and not a Maronite, because he is not of high descent and, moreover, because he works for a living. That he is a good, honest and educated man, that he loves Zainah and Zainah loves him, makes no difference. That Nassif is a Bay is enough to make him a better man, though he is a gambler, a drunkard and a lunatic.

Mūssa Bey and his son represent, on the other hand, disintegrated specimens of the sluggish Lebanese nobility, allied with the corrupt Ottoman bureaucracy, which lived at the expense of the Lebanese working classes in the name of noble descent, inherited authority and delegated power. It is enough for Mūssa Bey to have worked as an insignificant government clerk that he should call himself a government official, (ابن حكومة) , a title with which he could both terrify simple people of his local town and charm others. Imm Ilyās was both terrified and charmed. She was both attracted by Mūssa Bey's title and position and also terrified of acting in any way contrary to his wishes. His being a Bey meant that both he and his son should feel it below their dignity to work for their living, should be able to practise all sorts of social vices under the screen of respectability and should discharge their debts by swindling, as by taking advantage of Imm Ilyās's simplemindedness and cheating her of her money, throgh getting her daughter married to Nāssif.

Dāūd, Ilyās and the girls represent that segment of the Lebanese new generation during the early twenties, whose education had brought them into contact with Western culture and with the ideals of nineteenth century Western romanticism. To Dāūd, the value of life lies in that it is a struggle for what we believe to be true, just and beautiful. Religion is outside dogma, whence he declares that he is neither a Christian, a Druze nor a Moslem but a beliver in God. Love is holy and prior to any other value.

Ilyās is the Lebanese pessimist who, torn between the traditional Eastern society in which he was brought up and modern thinking to which his education has introduced him, is driven into inactivity. Khalīl, his younger brother, takes the other, equally logical, attitude of carelessness and licentiousness.

The characters in *Fathers and Sons*, though representative of particular problems and truths in Lebanese society, are by no means lifeless patterns and types. As the play moves and the characters interact, each is seen to develop distinctive features and personal individuality. Though both Imm Ilyās and Mūssa Bey, for instance, belong to the same generation and the same category in the play, yet she is seen to be basically good, while he is basically evil; she is artless and he is cunning; she is sincere, impulsive and hot-tempered, and he is wicked, controlled and sober. She inspires affection and compassion, even love, for all she does and says, while he inspires scorn, contempt and hatred.

Moreover, Naimy tries to make each character talk the language that best suits his standard of education. While Imm Ilyās and her youngest, Khalīl, speak throughout in the colloquial Lebanese Arabic, Mūssa Bey speaks half colloquial and half classical depending on whom he is talking to. The rest talk the classical Arabic, ranging from the well-polished, philosophic language of Dāūd to the simple, artless Arabic of Zainah and Shahīdah.

All in all, Naimy can be said to have succeeded in writing the first *really Arabic* drama in the Arabic language and to have given demonstrative instance of what he meant in saying in *al-Ghirbāl* that literature ought to be true to life and must serve a social purpose.

That *Fathers and Sons* can be regarded as a pioneering attempt[1], would perhaps account for the defects that it fails to avoid. One of these serious defects is the tendency of the characters at times to reveal in words what ought to be expressed in action, with the result that some scenes strike us as good literature but bad drama. Of these are the dialogues between Ilyās and Dāūd in the first act, when both seem to be reciting philosophy but not acting philosophers. Indeed, Dāūd as a whole, who acts the intellectual progressive modernist in the play, is more revealed through what he is made to say than through what he does. It would seem that Naimy, then at grips with certain philosophic and literary problems, such as the meaning of life, life after death, the divorce of religion from dogma, the impact of traditional Arab prosody on poetry, etc., tended to impose his attitude on some of his characters to the detriment of their distinctive individualities and at the risk of departing at times from the relevant basic theme of the play. Ilyās, who starts complaining to his friend of the unbearable traditionalism and outdated mentality of the old generation symbolised in his mother, shifts to the totally different subject of expressing his disgust and pessimism concerning a "life that begins in the darkness of the womb and ends in the darkness of the grave" and of asking Dāūd whether he really believes in life after death[2].

One would wonder whether Ilyās's pessimism is a result of his inability to dislocate the traditionally rigid, as his part in the play suggests, or of his conviction that life as such is meaningless irrespective of to whichever generation one belongs. Similarly, Dāūd's optimism and convictions oscillate with regard to the intended theme of the play. At times he plays the philosopher speaking of eternal and universal truths independent of time and place, and with respect to which both Fathers and Sons may equally be erroneous and misguided, such as in his theosophic stand with regard to the universality and immanence of God, who discloses Himself to whoever thoroughly attempts to study life and understand it[3].

1. See Adham, Ismā'īl, *Tawfīq al-Hakīm*, Cairo, 1945 p. 31.
2. *al-Ābā' wa al-Banūn*, pp. 28—29.
3. Ibid. p. 29.

Moreover, there is no significant reason, so far as the general theme of the play is concerned, why Nāssīf Bey should be a would-be traditional poet, and should be ridiculed for being so[1]. The only explanation is that Naimy, preoccupied with his struggle in *al-Ghirbāl* against the superimposed classical Arabic prosody, allows himself to satirise his opponents in the person of Nāssīf Bey at the expense of the play.

It is also noticed that Naimy himself, at grips with the problems, truths and ideologies of the new generation, could not maintain throughout the play an objective attitude in relation to the young characters. While he has succeeded in letting Imm Ilyās, Mūssa Bey and Nāssīf Bey of the old generation reveal their distinctive characteristics and private individualities within the general framework, Dāūd, Ilyās, Zainah and Shahīdah breathe almost of one spirit, one attitude and one ideology, which is Naimy's own at that stage of his life. This is why when the play is presented on the stage the roles of the young group seem to overlap and be in need of more living individuality while it is Imm Ilyās and Mussa Bey who make up for this lack[2].

It is to be regretted that Naimy has so far made no other real attempt at writing the drama whereby one would be able to see how far he was capable of overcoming the defects found in *Fathers and Sons*. What he has actually written after *Fathers and Sons* in dranatic form are one-act plays either intended for the radio, at special requests from Arab broadcasting stations, such as "The Last Page" (الورقة الأخيرة) included in *Abu Battah*[3], or intended only for reading, as is apparent in "The Society of the Dead" (جمعية الموتى) included in the first edition of *Once Upon a Time* and left out in subsequent editions.

Once Upon a Time (Kāna Mā Kān), a volume containing seven short stories, "The Society of the Dead" included, first published in Beirut,

1. See Act 1, scene 6.
2. This was observed when the present writer had the opportunity of producing this play in 'West Hall' at the American University of Beirut, May 1960.
3. Beirut, 1959, p. 182.

1937, belongs in many ways, though not written in the dramatic form, to the same family as *Fathers and Sons* and ought to be considered as a continuation of it.

The stories, though published in a separate volume as late as 1937, were originally writen, as the dates attached to each indicate[1], between 1914 and 1919 and published separately during that period, like *Fathers and Sons*, in *al-Funoon* and the special issues of *al-Sāyih*.

like *Fathers and Sons*, they also concentrate on depicting different problems and beliefs in the Lebanese society of that time that had precipitated from the past and had continued to exercise their frustrating impact on the present. From this aspect they belong to that phase of Naimy's thought extending roughly up to the end of World War I and characterised by revolt against rugged and outdated customs and beliefs, whether on the literary level, as in *al-Ghirbāl*, or on the social and religious as in *Fathers and Sons*.

Befor judging *Once Upon a Time* as belonging to this particular phase fo Naimy's thought, an exception regarding two stories in the collection ought to be made. The first is "Sā'at al-Cuckoo" (the Cuckoo Clock) which, dated 1915 in the collection, is discovered to have actually been written in 1925, as can be conclude from *Sab'ūn* II[2], and first published in the special issue of *al-Sāyih* of that year. Moreover, the general tone and spirit in that story are typical of the shift of emphasis in Naimy's attitude and thought, becoming more and more conspicuous after his return from the war. By this new emphasis is meant his revolt, not against traditional systems and beliefs that can no more be tenable, but against civilised man as a whole, ensnared in the complicated needs of a modern civilisation whose utter preoccupation with the apparent, the accidental and the material in life has hopelessly estranged him from the eternal, immanent and fundamental truths both in himself and in the world in which he lives.

1. See *Kāna Mā Kān*, first edition, Beirut, 1937.
2. See *Sab'un* II, pp. 241—248.

The second story to be excepted is "Shorty", with the subtitle "From the Memoirs of an Unknown Soldier". Written in the form of memoirs, and in 1919, shortly after Naimy's return from the war, "Shorty" is inspired by the author's reminiscences of Army days and belongs as well to a different atmosphere than that which the rest of its sisters in *Once Upon a Time* breathe.

Back to the remaining five stories in *Once Upon a Time*, we find that each, in the spirit of *Fathers and Sons*, revolves around one particular problem in Eastern societies, and particularly the Lebanese. Fairly representative is "Sa'ādat al-Bayk" (His Excellency the Bey). The author and a friend of his enter rather late a Syrian restaurant in New York. When they apologise to the owner, he comforts them by saying that they are alright since he does not usually close before the Bayk arrives and takes his dinner at half past nine. The owner is taken aback and feels deeply insulted when his two customers ask him who the Bayk is. Soon the door opens and there enters "a man tall and erect, with narrow shoulders and a pot belly. He had long hands and fingers. With his right hand he carried a stick, crooked as a dog's tail, and in his left he held and Arabic newspaper. He wore a suit grey below and brown above, all frayed at the edges with dangling threads of various lengths ... what specially drew my attention was the shape of his head, like a pine cone, the size of his flat ears, stuck to his skull like two pieces of dough, and his short hair, starting two fingers above his eyebrows"[1]. It is the Bayk. With great dignity he walks slowly but confidently to his table and orders a rich dinner, not taking his eyes away from the paper. When finished, he puts on his hat and walks out with the same dignity, solemnly ordering the extremely awe-struck and infinitely obedient Abu 'Assāf to add the cost to his standing bill.

The story of the Bayk, as the restaurant-keeper comes back to tell it, is that he once was the Shaikh of Abu 'Assāf's own village back in Lebanon. Being a descendant of the great Dā'ūq family, he was by inheritance

1. *Kāna Mā Kān*, p. 109.

the unchallenged master. One of his tenants, back rich from the United States, bought for himself the title of Bayk. This was beyond the endurance of the Dā'ūq. He absented himself for a time and came back to the village to spread the rumour that he had become by Government decree "His Excellency the Bayk". His rival, knowing him to be in debt, with nothing left of his past glory save the outward show, and consequently incapable of buying such a title, discovers the lie. From that time, the Bayk disappears from Lebanon, only to reappear among the emigrants of his own village in New York. Poor and destitute as he is, he still feels it below his dignity to work, and lives up to his Baykdom, at the expense of such Bayk-worshippers as Abu 'Assāf. For some years he had been eating in the restaurant of Abu 'Assāf, paying him with the words: "Add it to my standing bill", and yet Abu 'Assāf is happy that he is feeding the Bayk.

The story ends with Abu 'Assāf telling his customers with great distress of the tragic and undeseved state to which the Bayk has come. "It is enough that he is of the house of Dā'ūq. Many times have I offered him money but he refused to accept even a farthing. Poor fellow!" And then the writer adds, "and he [Abu 'Assāf] gave vent to a deep sigh which emerged from the very depth of his heart"[1].

Unlike *Fathers and Sons*, though dealing with a fairly similar problem, "His Excellency the Bayk" as it is written does not philosophise or preach, nor does it at any stage reveal any trace of the author's own hand forcing the natural flow of the dialogue, the sequence of the incidents or artificially chiseling the characters to fit an obviously preconceived purpose. Naimy has here become the master of his art. He himself comes to the characters in their own natural setting instead of drawing them up to him, as was the case with Dāūd and Ilyās. The Bayk and Abu 'Assāf are allowed to present themselves as they really are in their everyday life, without the slightest pretence, or uneasiness resulting from any feeling on their part that they are being watched or judged by the author. Abu 'Assāf is neither criticised

1. *Kāna mā Kān*, p. 117.

nor made to offer any apologies for being what he is, a Bayk — and consequently an ancestor-worshipper, a stupid simple-minded coward, feeling proud and happy that the parasite sucking his blood is of noble and glorious descent. The Bayk, on the other hand, is neither attacked nor ridiculed, but is allowed to walk into the restaurant with his own sincere hypocrisy and farcical outdatedness. Any stupidity, cowardice or sincere hypocrisy which the reader sees in the Bayk or Abu 'Assāf is the character's own responsibility. Naimy's acoomplished realism has made him as much an onlooker as the reader himself, with the only difference that he had actually prepared for the scene being watched and had chosen the appropriate setting and coincidences which tempted Abu 'Assāf and the Bayk to reveal themselves. Both are seen in the story to be at once stupidly ridiculous and touchingly pitiable. Indeed, pity and ridicule are the two main elements that stamp Naimy as a short story writer in *Once Upon a Time*. By pity he makes us love the human beings in his stories and feel for them, as we are really made to feel for Abu 'Assāf and the Bayk, hopelessly ridiculous as they are, and by ridicule he makes us genuinely realise their folly. When Abu 'Assāf at the end of the story gives vent to a deep sigh that emerges from the very depth of his heart, his situation is both pitiable in itself and ludicrous for being so. So is the Bayk's respectability suppoted with "a stick as crooked as a dog's tail".

It is in such respects that Naimy comes most close to the nineteenth century Russian short story, and particularly that famous Gogolian quality of drawing out tears through smiles.

Reminiscent of Gogol also is Naimy's "Society of the Dead"[1], where the Syrian dead during the famine period of World war I, all of the simple and innocent people, hold a meeting in their graveyard under the presidency of Satan, to look into the applications of newly-arrived Syrians wishing to join their celebrated society. As the applicants are interviewed one by one and asked for their recommending qualifications, those who had falsly

1. *Kāna mā Kān*, pp. 81—96.

pretended in life to be serving the cause of Syria during her crisis are put in the most pitiably ridiculous situations and finally rejected. An instance is a poet who recites to Lucifer (عزرائيل) a sample of his rhetorical poetry in which he had called upon the Syrians to rise and fight for their lost glory. Upon being reminded that the question at stake is what he had done for Syria, not what he had composed, and that since he had been urging resistance he should himself have enlisted, the poet explains in confusion that he was too considerate for Syria's welfare to allow such a gifted poet as himself to be killed in battle[1].

Naimy's masterpiece in *Once Upon a Time* is undoubtedly "Her New Year" (سنتها الجديدة)[2], written in 1914. As in *Fathers and Sons*, the setting is the beginning of twentieth century Lebanon.

The Lebanese village of 'Ayrūn, the story begins, is famous for many things. Before we are tempted to interpret for ourselves these famous things in terms of old temples, castles or glorious annals of the past, Naimy hastens in a few lines to redirect our thoughts, but without disappointing our high expectations, to simple and ordinary facts in the everyday life of 'Ayrūn and of its people, which are in their particular context great and famous.

The village, we are told, is famous for its 'araq (local Lebanese spirit) which does credit to King David's verse "wine that maketh glad the heart of man", for its wariety of silk worms and cocoons, for its cows generous of milk, and for its beautiful maidens recommended for every bride-seeker among the young men of the vicinity. Last but not least, 'Ayrūn is famous for its Shaikh (feudal lord), Abu Nāssīf.

To assure us that 'Ayrūn is justified in being famous for her Shaikh, Naimy draws a comparison of many points between Abu Nāssīf and his father from whom he inherited his shaikhdom. First, Abu Nāssīf is literate, while his father could only sign by stamping his thumb or ring on the sheet

1. *Kāna mā Kān*, pp. 85—87.
2. Ibid. pp. 37—50.

of paper. Secondly, Abu Nāssīf, though privately still prefers to eat, sit and sleep on the floor, as his father used to do, he is able to prove before his guests that he has a dining table, some spoons and forks, a few chairs, a high bed and a mosquito net. Thirdly, unlike his simply-dressed late father, Abu Nāssīf on great occasions such as receiving the district governor, the Qa'immaqām, or the Archbishop, wears his new-fashioned boots and fez, his silken belt and his gold pocket watch. We are told, however, between brackets, that once at a village reception the Qa'immaqām had asked Abu Nāssīf the time and that Abu Nāssīf had answered with embarrassment that his gold watch was out of order.

These and many other things justify the great power, esteem and unquestioned authority enjoyed by Abu Nāssīf in 'Ayrūn. That some malicious and gossiping women choose to propagate sly rumours about the Shaikh, that he secretly beats his wife the Shaikhah and that he was once discovered unawares at home on the point of twisting her neck in a wave of anger, is of little consequence and hard to prove. What is no secret, Naimy goes on to tell us, is that Abu Nāssīf is a father to seven girls and is desperate, now that the Shikhah is in her ninth month that she should give him an heir to his title, position and highly accomplished greatness.

It is New Year's Eve. 'Ayrūn is enveloped in darkness and snow, and drowned in the howling of an ominous snow blizzard. Only the Shaikhah, alone with the midwife in her room, joins the orchestra of the wind outside with her heartrending shrieks. Abu Nāssīf, in great anxiety, walks back and forth in the neighbouring room decorated with a crucifix and the picture of the Virgin. It is the hour when the whole fate of Abu Nāssīf is to be decided. It is when "to be or not to be" literally means to become either the glorious father of a boy or the hopelessly doomed begetter of an eighth girl.

In what is reminiscent of those highly morbid states of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Naimy unfolds before our eyes the whole world of the Shaikh as it is metamorphosed in his psyche under the

strain of the moment of anxiety that seethes in his soul. On thinking of the possibility that his future baby may turn out to be a girl, the Shaikh would feel a rope around his neck, a mountain on his chest; his eyes would gloom and he would collapse on his knees before the crucifix, calling upon Jesus fon help. Slowly he would feel relieved, the Crucified begins to live, to breathe, to move; the colours begin to transform, interpenetrate, mix and then melt in the widening drop of blood on the side of Jesus. Suddenly from that pool of blood a small head emerges, then two hands and then two feet. It is a boy, beckoning to Abu Nāssīf to approach. Then a shriek from the Shaikhah in the other room distorts the vision. Abu Nāssīf Jumps up from his place to kneel again before the Virgin Mary, but only to see her metamorphose in his eyes into a girl.

Next morning the midwife spreads the news in the village that the Shaikhah had given birth on New Year's Eve to a dead boy and that poor Abu Nāssīf had to bury with his own hands during the night the son he had so long waited for. The mischievous Barbara, however, insists on whispering a secret which, she claims, the midwife had confided to her alone that what Abu Nāssīf buried on New Year's Eve was not a dead son but a living daughter.

"Yes", the story ends, "the Lebanese village of 'Ayrūn is famous for many things".

It is always dangerous to summarise a story. This is particularly true of "Her New Year". The story as a whole does not simply tell about characters and things; it attempts to bring them alive for the reader. Any real attempt to summarise it therefore cannot stop short of rewriting it. Abu Nāssīf is not characterised in terms of what he says or does but in terms of how he acrually lives, his social position, his world and particularly his crisis. He is characterised from the inside. So is the midwife, greatly perturbed as to how to face Abu Nāssīf with the evil news. Even 'Ayrūn is not defined in terms of exterior physical dimensions, but through what it psychologically means to living people in terms of delicious wine, beautiful maidens, generous cows and awe-inspiring Shaikh.

In "Her New year", as in the rest of his short stories in *Once Upon a Time*, Naimy can be described as a realist: but a realist in the nineteenth century Russian sense. He is not only interested in reflecting what people actually do or say but mainly in bringing alive the psychological shades and implications beneath people's deeds and utterances. This is how in Naimy's stories, as in those of his Russian teachers, particularly Chekov, Dostoyevsky and Gogol, we are so introduced to the character's intimate inner self that we are no longer capable, though horrified by the deeds, of hating the doers. It is always when we judge the doer by the deed that we are made to hate him, but once the deed is seen in its primordial stirring in the inner selves of people who are as basically human as we are, we are instantly disarmed of hatred and left in a position where we are either to pity or to laugh, or even to "smile through tears".

This type of realism accounts much for the success of *Once Upon a Time* in general and of "Her New Year" in particular. Through it, as can be seen, Naimy is enabled, like any successful artist, to instruct without teaching, to moralise without preaching, and to be infinitely human without sentimentalism.

We cannot hate Abu Nāssīf for beating the Shaikhah and making her responsible for not giving him an heir to immortalise him, nor even for strangling his new-born daughter and burying her the hour she was born. We have entered his inner self and seen his intimate human helplessness, his psychological tangle through which the world in which he lives takes shape. As human beings, we can only pity him for all he is, just as we pity the Shaikhah and the midwife. In our pity, however, we cannot love the Shaikh, even less accept him or his deeds, since we have only pitied him because all his make-up seemed to us hopelessly ridiculous,

Typically Russian in Naimy's short story also is the suggestive muffled ending. It avoids bringing the reader to a standstill and gives him a sense of continuity, and the impression that what he has just seen or heard is not all, but simply a continuation of what has gone on before and an introduction to what goes on after in the rich and manifold stretch of life. "Yes", ends

the story after having unfolded itself, "the Lebanese village of 'Ayrūn is famous for many things".

Professor Kratchkovsky was right when, upon reading these early works by Naimy and even before knowing the author's background, he felt that they "contained echoes of Russian critical thought which was little known to the Arabic literature of the time"[1]. Just as *al-Ghirbāl* echoes Belinsky, so do *Fathers and Sons* and *Once Upon a Time* contain echoes of Dostoyevsky, Chekhov and Gogol. Naimy's great credit, however, is that having genuinely grasped the spirit and technique of these literary arts in their most perfect Western form, he has succeeded in Arabising them. He has succeeded in remaining the Easterner writing the literature of his own people, his own society, in the up-to-date artistic manner which he learned in the West. Herein lies the value of *al-Ghirbāl*, of *Fathers and Sons* and of *Once Upon a Time*. They are wholly devoted to the living conditions and problems of Arab scociety and people. The stories of *Once Upon a Time*, in moulding the language and giving it that simplicity and malleability that the short story demands, and in dealing artistically and realistically with the living Arab life in its everyday manifestations, represent, as some have rightly indicated, the first mature attempt in the Arab world to create the really Arabic short story in its up-to-date artistic form[2].

1. Krathkowstky, I.Y. *Among Arabic Manuscripts*, Leiden, 1953, p. 57.
2. See Najm, M. *al-Qissah Fi al-Adab al-'Arabi al-Hadith*, Cairo, 1952, p. 274.

CHAPTER V

THE VAGRANT SOUL

> "I came to America with everything in me speaking loud against American materialism, or what seemed to me sordid American materialism. Continuous hustle and bustle and rush for money — and for what ? It seemed to me the whole thing was false and empty...
>
> Is it hard for you now to picture some of the feelings that have been mine all this time ? The hardest of them is the feeling of being misplaced, of being out of my element, a misfit, so to speak, and in not being able to extricate myself gracefully and definitely".
>
> (From a letter by Naimy in New York to his two brothers in Walla Walla, dated June 9,1925)

When Naimy declared in *al-Ghirbāl* that literature is the expression of life as it is made concious in man, his main concern at first was less to define life and man through literature than to expose and ridicule the then existing Arabic literature that was divorced from life. In *al-Ghirbāl*, *Fathers and Sons* and *Once Upon a Time*, therefore, Naimy was mainly preoccupied with discarding, ridiculing and deriding, whether directly, as in the first book, or in an indirect artistic dramatic manner, as in the other two, what he considered dead in Arabic literature, customs, tradition and life. In this phase of Naimy's career, however, one is also able to detect a faint, but nevertheless growing, tendency to meet the deeper and more intricate implication of the basic literary principle that literature is the expression of life as it is made conscious in man, which he himself had laid out.

Glimpses of the sort of concept of man and life that had gradually been building up in his consciousness, starting in his youthful days in Nazareth and Poltava, and coming to relative maturity in the United States, are faintly but nonetheless unmistakably detectable in those early works. In "Mihwar al-Adab" (The Pivot around which literature turns)[1], for instance, man is said to be called upon to understand the purpose of life ever urging him to overcome his animalistic limitations and rise to that stage of understanding where he becomes one with life absolute. In another place[2] poetry is described as the expression of that eternal longing in man to transcend himself and merge with the all-pervading self of the universe. Dāūd, on the other hand, impatient with Ilyās's pessimism in *Fathers and Sons*[3] goes out of his way to say that human life, though limited with darkness at both ends, is illumined at times with floodlights of understanding and insight that pierce through both darknesses and reveal to man that he is of an immortal nature.

Such and other isolated flashes of contemplation regarding the destiny of man and the nature of life, interspersed in Naimy's early works, indicate the continuity in his heart and mind of an intellectual process in which the Christ of Nazareth, the Tolstoism of Poltava and the Theosophy of Seattle were in ferment.

This contemplative theme, after being subsidiary and intermittent at first, had by the end of 1917 — after most of the stories of *Once Upon a Time* had already been written — pushed itself to the fore and became in itself the main theme in Naimy's later works.

The change, it seems, must have been hastened by the impact on Naimy's life of New York City, to which he had moved towards the end of 1916 attracted by the prospect of realising his literary dreams in *al-Funoon*.

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, pp. 23—28.
2. Ibid. p. 76—77.
3. See pp. 28—29

If it is true that a thesis gains its most vivid distinction when it is made to clash with its own antithesis, then the antithesis which was New York must have vividly awakened in Naimy's mind the hitherto relatively dormant spiritualism of Christ and Tolstoy, with which he was wholly carried away in Nazareth and Poltava, the naturalism and Platonic Idealism of Lermontov in particular, and nineteenth century Western Romanticism in general, and also the highly mystical implications of transcendentalism and theosophy to which he was introduced in Seattle. In New York, Naimy was forced to go outside himself, so to speak, and live in a world totally different from the one he had been constructing for himself. He had come to pursue his dreams as a writer, but he was penniless and far from being able to expect any income from his pen or from the equally bankrupt *al-Funoon*. News from home, where his aged parents and his two younger brothers and sister still lived, spoke of famine sweeping over the country as a consequence of Turkey's entry into the war. His parents needed financial assistance just as much as he himself needed a source of income. Finally, to tip the balance, the New York military authorities notified him that he would be asked to enlist in the American Army in preparation for service in Europe. Soon the writer with high aspirations and ideals, foreigner and stranger as he was, felt himself standing face to face with the huge metropolis: he, expecting New York to support him in return for the realisation of his literary ideals and aspirations, and New York, absolutely uninterested in his particular aspirations and dreams, offering him nothing more than a living. Ultimately New York was victorious, and Naimy found himself working as a simple accountant in a commercial enterprise for a monthly salary of eighty dollars[1]. The "monster-city", as he calls New York in a letter to his brother in Walla Walla, dated June 26, 1917, has by its own standards, Naimy feels, put a price on his worth as a human being. As a writer intent on creating for his people the living literature expressive of

1. See on Naimy's bitter experience as a job-seeker in New York the chapters in *Sab'ūn* II entitled "Fī al-Durdūr al-Rahīb" (In the terrible whirlpool), p. 67, and "Jabahāt Jadīdah" (New Fronts), p. 141.

their life, and as a thinker at grips with the deeper and more basic spiritual significance of man and life, New York had found him of no value and had even stifled the very magazine for which he had come to work; but as a user of a machine, a typewriter, in a certain "Bethlehem Steel Co.", busy producing bombs for the Russian front, New York had fixed his price at eighty dollars, and later at a hundred and fifty[1].

Being the idealist and the spiritualist that Naimy was, coming to New York as a stranger and a foreigner, the huge city did not so much strike him as the home of millions of individuals who perhaps, like him, were in one way or another wretched, frustrated and misplaced but yet pressed to make a living, as it did represent a single, unified, complicated mechanism, symbolising modern civilisation in its greedy devotion to the material; an ominous monster greedily devouring the millions of the materially illusioned people who have created it and transforming them in its hellish, mechanistic inside into part and parcel of its own life substance. New York cares nothing for the individual as a human being; what matters is his material function in the whole complicated mechanism which is the city. People do not live in New York, New York lives on them. In one place Naimy calls New York a land and sea monster breathing fire and transforming the millions perpetually moving within it from people created after the image of God, into entities unmindful of the divine in man and functioning in the service and under the dictates of the penny[2].

In another highly allegorical passage, Naimy reports on an imaginary speech delivered by the penny in 1626, the year Manhattan Island was bought by the whites[3]. The enthroned Penny-God claims to his counsellors that in his person people have at last found the true unified path to their

1. *Sab'ûn* II, p. 70.
2. See Naimy's article "New York — the Land and Sea Monster" in his book *al-Marâhil*, Beirut, 1932.
3. See the passage entitled "The Mouse Laboured and Brought Forth a Mountain" (تمخضت الفأرة فولدت جبلا) in his book *Gubrân Khalîl Gubrân*, 4th edition, Beirut, 1960, pp. 117—123.

long-cherished happiness. In his name they have come to enjoy one nationality instead of many, one standard of values, one language, one driving passion, one concern, one God. In short, all people who live in his name are one. Yet, the penny ironically concludes, inspite of all he does to provide people with happiness, their voices still deep in misery and pain knock incessantly at his ears asking him for more happiness. Consequently, though he had built for men many wonderful cities in the past, he now proposes to build them a city that shall surpass in wonder and grandeur all cities built heretofore. This city is New York.

New York, therefore, which had failed to see in Naimy, so he felt, more than a man suitable for pounding the keys of a typewriter in a bomb-producing factory in return for a few dollars, stood for more than a simple city. It stood in Naimy's eyes for modern civilisation lost, as Tolstoy had ceaselessly proclaimed, in the artificiality of its complicated needs, and for modern man, who, reminiscent of Christ's warning, has laboured to possess the world but has, as a result, lost himself.

Discontented with the world without, Naimy was driven under the impact of New York to seek shelter in the world within. As he went deeper and deeper into the recesses of his soul all those types of teachings in the world which emphasised the human self as the alpha and omega of life and as containing the key to man's emancipation from the temporary, the transient and the corrupt to the eternal, the permanent and the absolute, struck him with increasing vividness. Christ, Tolstoy, Platonism and the Eastern theosophies with which Naimy's youth had been saturated, re-emerged in his mind and heart with stronger force, and he felt himself more than ever before ruthlessly divided between two worlds: the world symbolised by New York, which he despised but in which he was forced to live, and the ideal world he conceived in thought and imagination but was unable to realise. Between the two he felt himself a vagrant soul, a strange wanderer at home with neither the world he conceived nor the one he inhabited. When earlier in his formative years he was confronted either in Nazareth or in Poltava with a similar state of spiritual torment, he used to withdraw

from the outside world and resort to periods of utter silence, confiding only to his pen and diary[1]. In his present situation, committed to his everyday work and to public life, though actual silence was no more possible, the pen and the diary were still available. Why not then, Naimy must have thought, attempt to write the diary of an imaginary man who can be supposed to be facing the same spiritual crisis and, consequently, to have committed himself to silence. The only difference this time would be that the diary so written, unlike the one written in Poltava, should be intended for publication.

"As a result of my contemplation", says Naimy of his spiritual crisis in the autumn of 1917, "I felt, and for the first time in my life, that God is a power within me, and not a person to whom I am related as creature to a creator, as worshipper to a worshipped and as one judged to a judge. This feeling flooded me with a wave of peace ... and without giving myself an account of what I was doing, I found myself one evening when it was pouring with rain writing the preface to a book, the full outlines of which were not yet crystallised in my imagination"[2]. The book came out to be *The Memoirs of Pitted Face*, (مذكرات الأرقش) or, as it was better named in the English edition, *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul*[3].

It must be noted before giving a brief account of the book which, as has already been hinted, marks the beginning of a relatively new phase in Naimy's career, that only the first half of it had time to appear between the autumn of 1917 and the spring of 1918 when Naimy had to join the American Army in France. This half[4] was published in four parts and in four consecutive issues of *al-Funoon*[5]. It was only in 1948, after thirty years had elapsed and in Lebanon, where Naimy had finally settled, that he decided to put in writing the other half of the book, which had remained alive

1. See above pp. 82—3; 92—3.
2. *Sab'ūn* II, p. 76.
3. The book, translated into English in 1952 by Naimy, was published in the same year by the Philosophical Library, New York.
4. Ending on p. 67 of the 2nd edition, Beirut, 1959.
5. See *al-Funoon*, Vol 3, Nos. 3,4,5, and 6.

in his mind[1]. *The Memoirs of Pitted Face* appeared for the first time in book form in Beirut, 1949.

Neither the second half of the book, however, written thirty years later, nor the few modifications introduced into the first[2], seem to constitute any such basic change or departure from the basic theme, spirit and original conception manifested in the first half published in *al-Funoon*, as would prejudice the justifiability of considering the *Memoirs* as typical of Naimy's state of mind during his New York days.

II

The Memoirs of Pitted Face is a book that is hard to classify. It is a work of many angles in which the mystery novel, the philosophical dissertation, the allegory and the autobiography are gracefully mixed and merged in a sequence of poetical symbolism that winds up with the mystical.

In a brief introduction, the author tells us that he was driven with a friend of his on a rainy October afternoon in 1916 to seek shelter in a Syrian restaurant in lower Manhattan. Upon serving them with Turkish coffee, the rheumaticky proprietor laments the sudden disappearance of Pitted Face. In answer to the enquiring faces of his customers, he tells them the strangest story of how one rainy day he received a drenched, half-naked, mysterious young man of thirty, who was looking for a job and who agreed to work as a waiter in his restaurant for his keep. Short, lean, with a face pitted with smallpox, highly intelligent and well versed in several

1. See *Sab'ūn* III, p. 211.
2. It is noticed by comparison with the original in *al-Funnon* that Naimy has changed the colloquial language used by one character Shīn in the first part of the book into the simple classical. He has also removed some of the digressions in the *Memoirs* that seemed unrelated to the main theme.

languages, he served most conscientiously in the restaurant for three years, without ever communing with anyone, saying a single word to anybody or even revealing anything as to his name, nationality or background. Suddenly he disappeared from the restaurant, as silent and as enigmatic as he had first arrived. Upon asking where Pitted Face, as the proprietor had nicknamed him, lived, the two visitors are shown behind an obscure wooden partition in the rear of the restaurant, where among other things they find a wooden box in which they see a copy of the *New Testament*, a carefully-folded Spanish newspaper, and a writing pad on whose cover is written in beautiful Arabic handwriting "From Myself to Myself".

The author asks permission to take the pad home with him. It is discovered to contain *The Memoirs of Pitted Face*, which the author finds it worthwhile to share with the reader.

"Broadly speaking", Pitted Face begins his memoirs — only the name of the Particular day is recorded without reference to the date, the month or the year — "all men may be divided into two categories: those who talk and those who keep their peace".

"I am the silent part of humanity; the rest are all talkers . . Therefore do I keep my peace while others talk".

As the *Memoirs* unfold themselves, we are introduced to the very intimate self of Pitted Face, and under his cloak of silence and absolute detachment from the turbulent exterior world, we are made witnesses to one of the fiercest battles that can ever take place within a man's soul, between the earthly and the divine, between his God-self struggling to lift him up to that mystical level of spiritual perfection experienced by such summits as Christ and Buddha, and his man-self, earthly bound and hopelessly entangled with the passions of the world.

"I must be two Pitted Faces in one", writes Pitted Face on one occasion, "the first is a man who has withdrawn from the world of men and wrapped himself in silence that he may reach a world of a higher order and move with it in an orbit other than that of the earth; the second is a

man cut off from the main human current by some human side currents and striving to rejoin the herd"[1].

Like a string highly strained between two poles, Pitted Face goes on in his *Memoirs* to record at every step the ensuing frequency of his thoughts, feelings and emotions. Throughout, we are never allowed to lose sight of the duality in his life and thought with which he is at grips. As the *Memoirs* proceed, we are made to see that this duality is many-sided. First, the duality in Pitted Face between his present and his past. The *Memoirs* reveal him to us at first in a state of amnesia, unable to regain the memory of his past life, of which, because of a horrible incident only fully revealed to us towards the end of the book, he is totally oblivious; then, the duality between his lower self and his higher self, between the earthly in him and the divine; and lastly, the duality between him, the silent seeker of absolute union with the eternal mystical truth, and the rest of the turbulent world soaked with its own folly and blinded to the higher truth in life by the slush of earthly desires and the superficial ends of everyday existence.

When the conflict is between the Pitted Face of the present and the Pitted Face of the past, the *Memoirs* take on the tone of that distilled pain and sweet benumbing sadness and melancholy experienced at times by a traveller lured on, by a burning devotion to the mysterious unknown awaiting his discovery ahead, and perhaps also his life, and yet tenderly motioned back by the imperceptible but nonetheless alive shades in his memory of the beloved ones, the home and the country he was ruthlessly compelled by his vision to leave behind.

Once and again as Pitted Face sits down at night behind his wooden partition confiding to his *Memoirs* the spiritual summits which his soul had been scaling in silence during the day, an apparition of his past life would emerge

1. *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul*, p. 67 (65): this and all other subsequent quotations from the *Memoirs*, in this chapter, are taken from the English edition. The number between brackets indicates the corresponding page or pages in the second edition of the Arabic original published in Beirut, 1959.

from the darkness and stand speechlessly behind him or to his side in the form of an exceedingly beautiful woman, with a gaping, bleeding wound in her throat and deep, silent sadness in her eyes. "Her breasts protrude as before from under her white, transparent silk gown. Her delicate left hand grasps the wound in her throat as if trying to stay the flow of blood . . . Oh! Her eyes! I looked at them, and it appeared to me as if all the pains and the sorrows of humanity were staring at me from behind their lashes . . . Nor revenge, nor bitterness can be seen in them; but sorrow without end, and a question, or rather a supplication"[1]. "Who is she?" Pitted Face asks himself. "And why? Better to . . ."[2] Pitted Face succeeds in resisting the supplication of his normal past life in spite of all its human and family warmth. Though wholly mesmerised for the moment by the imploring apparition, the gap, he feels, between the Pitted Face who had once lived as a man among men and the Pitted Face who now seeks in silence the concealed cosmic truth, can no more be bridged. He has arrived in his isolated quest at the point of no return and knows very well what it is in terms of human mortification, of smothered living flesh and bleeding body to walk the way to the Golgotha. He has slain earthly bound Pitted Face of the past so that the new purified Pitted Face might emerge[3].

When the conflict, on the other hand, is between the higher self and the lower self in Pitted Face, the hitherto sweet melancholy turns into a mortifying anguish, and the distilled pain is moistened with tears. It is the terrifying anguish flashing in the heart of a devotee at a moment of doubt, when, under the strain of self-deprivation and worldy sacrifice, the bewildering question comes to his mind: what if all that bewitching vision is an illusion and all that sacrifice simply turns out to be a ridiculously unwarranted self-torture?

1. *Memoirs*, p. 11 (19—20).
2. Ibid. p. 10 (18).
3. See other relevant passages on pp. 45—47 (46—48), pp. 69—71 (67—71) and pp. 102—103 (96—97).

At one place, and in a dialogue between the higher self, or known self, as Pitted Face calls it, and the lower self, that bewilderment is brought to a pathetic climax.

"... 'Tell me who I am', the lower or unknown self presses on, 'else loose my tongue and let me be, for I am tired of being dumb'. At that point the features of my known self contracted in pain, and he mumbled with infinite sorrow in his voice:

'Give me time, and you shall have your wish'.

And he wept"[1].

When Pitted Face is faced with the duality between himself on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other, the *Memoirs* take on an elevated tone. He bitterly comments on ways and systems of man which from his emancipated spiritual stand seem to point to the wrong end.

Man, says pitted Face to himself, is a mind endowed with a body, rather than a body endowed with a mind[2]. "That which is transient can never last, that which is permanent can never pass"[3]. Yet men put their minds in the service of their bodies and the permanent in the service of the transient. Having engineered ways and means by which to live, they have gradually preoccupied themselves with the ways and means and forgotten about life itself and its divine purpose in man. "A divine school is life", Pitted Face writes, "whose business is to turn out divinities. To be a graduate from it is to become God"[4]. Instead of a divine school, men have made of life in every way a battlefield. "Behold! The peoples of the earth are engaged in a war the like of which, they say, the earth has never witnessed before . . ."[5]. In this war, Pitted Face sees, it is not only that man is killing man in the name of such empty fallacies as patriotism, honour, pride, national glory and the like but that the beast in man is allowed to overpower the divine[6].

1. *Memoirs*, p. 69 (67).
2. Ibid. p. 7 (61).
3. Ibid. p. 48 (49).
4. Ibid. p. 49 (50).
5. Ibid. p. 23 (29).
6. Ibid. pp. 23—27 (29—33).

In his mystical trances, Pitted Face would see that all men wear the crown of divinity[1]. That they still live on the animal level in them — whence come all their problems whether social, political, economic, religious and the like — is because they are still only guided through life by sense perception and are consequently still incapable of grasping and living the divine . . . "The senses that rely neither on eye nor ear, neither on nose nor tongue, nor hand — such senses are nonsense in the code of men. Should you say to them that they have eyes invisible to their eyes, and ears of finer substance than flesh and blood, and that in silent contemplation they could see what the outer eye is incapable of seeing, and hear what the outer ear is powerless to hear . . . they would dub you on the instant a fool or a lunatic"[2].

It would be easy to knit up Pitted Face's observations on men and life scattered all through his *Memoirs* into a complete system of thought that would be perfectly welcome among other established theosophical systems. Some steps in this direction have already been made by Indian theosophical magazines reporting on the English edition of the *Memoirs* where some sayings of Pitted Face are found expressive of such concepts as the " Astral Light" and "the doctrine of Karma", and of an affinity with Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*[3].

But to concentrate on Pitted Face as a thinker and a preacher of mystical truth is to lose sight of him as a living human being and to consider his book a dissertation on philosophy instead of a work of art, a course which the *Memoirs* try to make us avoid, and quite successfully. From the beginning of the book until the end runs a thin story line on which the memoirs are spread. What ideas, feelings and passions expressed in the book do not mainly interest us in themselves, but in so far as they unfold before us the man behind them who is living the mysterious story of his three-sided conflict, with himself, with his past and with the world.

1. *Memoirs*, p. 65 (63).
2. Ibid. p. 18 (25—26).
3. See for instance the article entitled "From Myself to Myself" in *The Theosophical Movement*, October issue, 1953.

The *Memoirs* at first hint vaguely at the story behind the crisis of Pitted Face. Now and then they give vague clues. Of such clues are: the continuous alarm on the part of Pitted Face, shimmering throughout his *Memoirs*, of his past life, and the delicately conveyed hints that once this past life is remembered his present one is lost; the frequent visitations of that beautiful but silent lady with a gaping wound in her throat, who leaves Pitted Face on each occasion in a pathetic state of spiritual and bodily hypnotism; the special interest, a mixture of love and alarm, which Pitted Face secretly has in Sennacherib, one of the customers who frequent the restaurant; the frequent visits that Sennacherib steals into Pitted Face's wooden partition in his absence, at one time to leave a vague symbolic statement, at another to leave two words "Write your Will", and at a third to leave behind, a certain three-year-old issue of a Spanish newspaper dated June 26, 1913[1], which leads Pitted Face to leave the restaurant with the intention, as the *Memoirs* deliberately hint, of putting an end to his life. All these and other clues keep the reader in suspense and leave him with only half-answered questions.

The full answer is given at the end, when, after the *Memoirs* are concluded, the author, supposedly the publisher of the *Memoirs*, comes out with a supplement in which he gives us the translation of a certain article in the Spanish paper[2]. The article, reporting on a current issue during that period, speaks of a certain Shakeep Na'mān (presumably Pitted Face), who is the only son of a prominent Lebanese immigrant family settled in Argentina. He is exceptionally gifted, keen of mind, and a graduate from the University with honours. He is said, however, to be abnormal in some directions. At the age of thirty he marries Najla, of the same Lebanese immigrant community, whom he had ardently loved and whose only brother, S.N. Harīb (presumably Sennacherib), is his closest friend. The couple choose to spend their honeymoon in the best hotel in the city. One night and a whole day pass without anybody in the hotel seeing the couple

1. In the Arabic version it is 1916.
2. *Memoirs*, pp. 141—144 (129—132).

leave their room. The management gets worried. When the door is knocked at several times with no reply, the Police are called. What they see as the door is forced open is a terrible sight. "On the bed was the beautiful bride, dressed in an elegant nightgown of white silk, and stretched out full length. The gown and the bedding were soaked with blood. The bride's throat was slashed from one side to the other. Of the bridegroom they find no trace except a small slip of paper on which is written:

"I slew my love with my own hand, for it was more than my body could feed and less than my soul hungered after"[1].

"Secret Service men as well as the bride's brother, Señor S.N. Harîb", the article goes on to say, "are already carrying on a feverish search for the groom, who without any doubt is the author of the hideous crime. All, however, are at a loss to assign a possible reason".

With this bit of explanation supplied at the end of the book, the reader's mind is naturally swung back to the memoirs in an attempt to see each mysterious step he had taken with the author in its true light. It is not until one has finished reading through *The Memoirs of Pitted Face* that one's reading of the book really begins.

What of the story of Pitted Face, now clearly stated in outline? Should it be taken literally? But how then would one reconcile Pitted Face the criminal, the maniac, and the writer of the *Memoirs*, prehaps one of the finest and most penetrating records of a human soul in its private, passionate yearning and struggle for spiritual perfection? Should the *Memoirs*, therefore, be taken as a philosophic, or perhaps a mystical, dissertation on life and death, on good and evil, on what is and what ought to be? Then what should be thought of the story and, much more, of the predominant character of Pitted Face which, soaked with the pain of its own anguish and yearning for the mystic truth, draws us more to the self that suffers than to the ideals that call for the suffering? Nor for that can the book be dismissed as an allegory or a piece of poetic symbolism, though in many

1. *Memoirs*, p. 143 (131).

respects it is allegorical and symbolic. How much, on the other hand, can the *Memoirs* be thought to express Naimy's own intellectual autobiography at that stage of his life? Such considerations, becoming more and more pressing as the *Memoirs* draw to an end, make the reader feel as one climbing a peak, that it is only from the top that he can look back and achieve the true estimate of the slope he had been scaling in perspective.

III

"A man", Tolstoy is reported to have told Gorky on one occasion, "goes through earthquakes, epidemics, the horrors of disease, and all sorts of spiritual torments, but the most agonising tragedy he ever knows has been and will always be — the tragedy of the bedroom"[1]. It is only in the light of this so-called tragedy of the bedroom that the plot in *The Memoirs of Pitted Face* can best be appreciated. In as far as human life is concerned, love, in broad terms, is perhaps the greatest witness to man's feeling of his individual insufficiency. It is from this aspect also, as Socrates in Plato's Symposium claims, the greatest urge in man to seek self-fulfilment through union with a greater reality outside himself. Consciously or unconsciously, therefore, man is actually seeking through love a passage from his own limited mortal self to a greater reality where he can be propagated and consequently immortalised. Ordinary people find their self aggrandisement in begetting children, others in accumulating wealth, power, fame and the rest. To the more philosophically sophisticated Socrates type, true aggrandisement is in the union through love with the eternal patterns, the absolute form of the Good, either as it is directly conceived in itself, or as it is manifested through objects of love in the world.

1. Gorky, M. *Literary Portraits*, Moscow, (no date) p. 27.

Pitted Face is the Platonic type of lover, whence it is hinted that he is highly intelligent and of a strikingly brilliant academic record, but also abnormal or strange in some directions[1]. Here is where he coincides with Naimy the contemplative and highly idealistic student at Nazareth and Poltava. Both fall passionately in love: Pitted Face with Najla and Naimy with the Russian Varia[2]. Both are haunted by the tragedy of the bedroom. Pitted Face slays his bride on the nuptial couch before the flesh overpowers the spiritual and takes refuge in a self-imposed silence and seclusion as an obscure waiter in a New York restaurant, in quest of some sort of a universal mystical truth — a greater Platonic love over which the flesh can no more have power. Naimy, on the other hand, tears away Varia from his heart, even after she had attempted suicide under the strain of losing him, because he discovers that they are unable to keep their love chaste. A year after he leaves Russia, Varia follows him to Lebanon but only for her smothered heart to discover that her lover is already in the United States and beyond reach[3]. In New York, and with the tragedy of Varia bleeding his heart, Naimy, like Pitted Face, felt himself to 'have slain his love with his own hand, for it was more than his body could feed, and less than his soul hungered after'.

In so far as love remains a purifying force, a state of elevated spiritual feeling in which the beloved becomes a living embodiment of all the Platonic world of eternal Goodness — of all that the lover's immediate world lacks in reality, truth and beauty, and a passage thereto, both Pitted Face and Naimy are passionate lovers who deify their love. Najla and Varia symbolise a reality beyond any limit that the body can trespass. But the situation takes another turn when the "tragic disillusionment of the bedroom" comes about, where the beloved, the erstwhile embodiment of cherished, but far-removed spiritual ideals, is suddenly stripped naked of her divine halo and

1. *Memoirs*, p. 142 (130).
2. For the full account of Naimy's love for Varia, see *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 199—201; 213—217; 225—228; 264—267.
3. See *Sab'ūn* II, p. 20.

brought back through the sexual fulfilment to the ordinary and insufficient physical world from which, to the lover, she had first seemed a promised emancipation. Najla and Varia as bedmates are " less than either the soul of Pitted Face or that of Naimy hunger after". To avert the tragedy of the bedroom, Pitted Face slays his bride on the nuptial couch, and Naimy drives Varia through his torturously self-imposed chastity first to attempt suicide and later to live the agonising process of reassembling the remnants of her shattered heart after her Lebanese disappointment.

The parallelism between Naimy and Pitted Face goes even a few steps further. In their spiritual quest, both are driven by their actions to the point of no return. To " slay one's love because it is more than one's body could feed and less than one's soul hungers after" is to lay a borderline between what one is and what one longs to be. To Naimy it marks the beginning of a desperate struggle to tame the body and to cleanse love of all selfishness and lust, in an attempt to rise in thought and feeling to a state of mystical elevation where he is no more dragged down and tempted by physical passion but lifted up by spiritual ecstasy; where he no more finds access for his love in the physical possession of another similar self, but in stepping spiritually out of his limited body into the greater self, which is the whole of reality. It is of the demolished ruins of the past, of his love for Varia that his new love should emerge. In the *Memoirs* this phase is symbolised by the fact that Pitted Face loses his memory after the shocking experience of slaying his bride and proceeds on the relatively white sheet of mind with which he is left to show the outlines of the new Pitted Face who is to emerge.

In a certain Bethlehem Steel Company and in the heart of New York, — the mad monster of a materially demented modern world "stretched with open jaws between two rivers, to gulp down both sea and land, but without ever getting quenched or satiated"[1], — Naimy, feeling himself misplaced, obscure and estranged, would lend his body to the keys of a typewriter for

1. See Naimy, *al-Marāhil*, 2nd edition, Beirut (no date), p. 66.

eighty dollars a month and soar with his thoughts in a private world of his own in quest of the higher truths regarding God, man and the world. At night, and after the work in the Company is over, he would confide to his pen in his room what his mind had been gathering during the day[1]. Pitted Face, on his part, a Lebanese immigrant in Argentina, also at grips with the higher truths in life, in the name of which he had slain his bride, similarly finds his way to the heart of the " twentieth century monster city" where, obscure, misplaced and unknown, he envelops himself with silence and lives his own private world while putting his body at the servile disposal of the proprietor and customers of an ignoble Manhattan Syrian restaurant. At night, he, as well, would withdraw to his lodgings behind the wooden partition to confide to his pen what his soul had been registering during the day.

Here the parallelism between Pitted Face and Naimy gives way to unity. The two become one, and as one they write the *Memoirs*, recording the three-sided struggle of a vagrant soul, of Pitted Face in his attempt to extricate himself from his past, from his lower self and from the clutches of the world and to live the higher spiritual truth he glimpsed through his vision.

The *Memoirs*, though mainly dealing with higher truths, are fundamentally and wholly human. They are soaked throughout with that distilled silent and infinitely human pain usually experienced by a super-sensitive man at grips with a primordial psychological conflict. The thin story line that runs through them keeps them moving, and such highly removed theosophical ideas, as the divine origin of man, the universal love, the immanent nature of God, reincarnation, predestination, the divine meaning of pain and death, the futility of modern civilisation and similar others scattered in the book, are brought closer home by the fact that they are all occasioned in Pitted Face by his everyday life and take root in particular incidents arising from his contact with the proprietor, the customers, the

1. *Sab'ūn* II, p. 150.

people in the street, or with conditions in the world at large. Though saturated with thought, it is not thought, we feel, that predominates in the *Memoirs*: it is Pitted Face, the human at grips with the divine. He may occasionally sound like a Buddha or an Indian Brahman, as in his dialogue with death and with his cat companion[1], or like a prophet of Judaea, foretelling doom, as he addresses present civilisation[2], or even like a Hellenistic Stoic, as in his dialogue with himself on pain[3]. But, unlike the Brahman, the prophet of Judaea and the Hellenistic Stoic, Pitted Face does not address himself to us; we are not left outside and talked to, but are led to the very inner and intimate self of the human being in Pitted Face, where we ourselves witness the feelings, emotions and passions in their primordial foggy stage and observe how they take form in ideas, and how the ideas, as in a Dostoyevskian inner world, are transformed into things that shoot off and collide and even tear the very womb that bears them, but finally float out in a harmonious choir of yearning.

As in Dostoyevsky, we find ourselves accepting the ideas and the deeds in the *Memoirs*, through our love and through our sympathy with Pitted Face, to whose inner human sanctuary we have been introduced, but not Pitted Face, through his ideas and deeds, extremely lofty as they may be. The ideas and sayings are so intimately tied up with the very character, life and psychology of Pitted Face that they never succeed, as in the case of a philosopher or a preacher, in absorbing us and breaking us away from the man. The ideas may remain with us while the preacher or the philosopher goes, but not so is the case with the *Memoirs*. They are there and are what they are because Pitted Face is there and is what he is — a particular man with a particular mentality and life history, living a particular situation.

It is in this light that the chief value of *The Memoirs of Pitted Face* as a literary work can best be appreciated. It has given Arabic literature, and perhaps for the first time in its modern history, a genuine human character

1. *Memoirs*, pp. 51—60 (51—59).
2. Ibid. pp. 123—131 (115—121).
3. Ibid. pp. 97—102.

in fiction, who lives a particular situation, a particular issue in life, that is both personal and symbolic: personal because it is basically and truly his own, as a particular human being of a particular mentality and life history, and symbolic because it stands for a universal truth that belongs to the very basic nature of man as such. In living himself, Pitted Face also lives the eternal agonising perplexity of man, ever strained between the two opposite poles that define his very constitution and existence — a lump of clay holding a breath of God. At the one end, he is firmly rooted in the earthly, the animalistic and the corporeal; at the other, he is held fast through his vision by the concealed world of the heavenly, the godly and the incorporeal. To break loose from either end, is to lose one's nature, is to die as man and live either as an animal or as a God. Not to be able to die from one end is to suffer a life-long crucifixion. Pitted Face tried to break loose from the lower end, whence he fought his past, his lower self, and the world. But as long as he lived in a body of flesh and blood, the lower end could not let loose, and he could not escape his crucifixion. His lower life would constantly creep at him, now in the shape of the beautiful woman he slew, now in the form of various bodily needs, and now in the person of Sennacherib, who finally presents him with the Spanish newspaper and brings him back to full consciousness of his real human identity. Under the strain, Pitted Face commits suicide.

As a character in fiction who is both fully alive as an individual and yet universally symbolic, Pitted Face can be grouped, at least in kind, with such as Rascolnikov, Othello, Madame Bovary, and similar characters in world literature. Perhaps the closest to him in nature is Prometheus in the Greek mythology. Both have tried to cross over from one pole to the other. Prometheus as a Titan had tried to associate with man by revealing to him some secrets of the gods. As a consequence, the god was chained to a rock. Pitted Face had tried to lift man to divinity. As a consequence, the man in him was crucified in a vision. The liver of Prometheus was daily gnawed by a vulture, while the elevated soul of Pitted Face was daily torn up by his various physical attachments. Hercules kills the vulture and

Prometheus is freed; Pitted Face breaks loose from his body and is set free. As he spills his own blood he addresses the armies of the physical world with which he had so long been at grips in a challenging voice:

"Bring on your arrows, your powder and bullets. I am mist, and my shield is mist. If you can vanquish mist with your arrows, powder and bullets, then you have won the fight. Otherwise the victory is mine, and yours is disappointment and black defeat", and then to his heart, "Drink in, my heart, the fragrance of the dancing blood"[1]. Pitted Face is emancipated.

The Memoirs of Pitted Face, in its originality of conception, its characterisation, its successful moulding of the particular and the universal and, finally, its delicate intermingling of the philosophic, the symbolic, the poetic and the autobiographic in a graceful fictional sequence, undoubtedly marks the summit of Naimy's literary career. Though Naimy is now better known for others among his works, *The Memoirs of Pitted Face*, we believe, is among two of his works which will ultimately be considered as his chief contribution to literature. The other work is his biography of Gibran Kahlil Gibran.

1. *Memoirs*, p. 139 (127—128).

CHAPTER VI

THE VAGRANT SOUL

(continued)

There is a Golgotha in every heart.
On every Golgotha a cross.
Upon each cross a crucified,
Upon his brow a crown of thorns,
And on his lips a word awaiting utterance.

That do I see in my own heart
What see you, brother, in your heart?

My cross I chisel of my thirst unquenched,
My hunger unappeased,
My hopes still-born,
My tongueless sorrow and my doubt-stung faith.

Is not your cross, brother, like my cross?

He who is nailed upon my cross is I,
The fool who chases Time with Time,
Who looks for his house while living
in his house,

Who created Good and Evil, Life and Death,
only to seek escape
From Good and Evil, Life and Death.
That is my crucified. Is not my crucified
and yours one?

My crown of thorns I plait out of my
attachment to what is attached to nothing,
My hatred of what cannot be loved, therefore
cannot be hated,

My fears of substances which are without substance
My coveting shadows.

That is my crown of thorns. Is there not one like
unto it upon your brow?

As to the word upon my lips, its hour is not yet.
But time is endless.
And I am patient.

One of several unpublished poems in English composed by Naimy in the late twenties. The collection is in the possession of the present writer.

I

The Memoirs of Pitted Face, as may have become obvious from the previous chapter, though taking the form of a novel, is more than a story, more than a sequence of events in time and place. It is primarily a particular human state of mind — a certain intellectual, spiritual and psychological mood or atmosphere which Pitted Face experiences, and which the events in time and place in the *Memoirs* are intended to manifest. With the affinity between him and Naimy, the author, it would seem, therefore, that Pitted Face, with his particular atmosphere, his mood and state of mind, was prior in time to the story sequence in the *Memoirs*. He was more than the sum total of the events in his story, and as such his spirit was destined to remain with the author independently of the *Memoirs* and as long as that state of mind or that psychological mood and intellectual atmosphere predominated.

Indeed, Pitted Face, a man torn between his devotion to the higher spiritual truth he captures through his vision and the lower bonds of his limited human existence — between the human and the divine in himself — was destined to remain alive in Naimy after the *Memoirs*, reappearing

once and again in his later works under different names and in different forms and situations. In *Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān*[1], for instance, he is Gibran himself, in *Liqā'*[2] he is Leonardo, and in *The Book of Mirdad*[3] he is *Mirdad*. In other works of non-fictional nature, Pitted Face often unveils himself and addresses us in the person of Naimy himself, as he actually does in such books of collected essays as *al-Marāhil* (Excursions in the Outer and Inner Life)[4] and *Zād al-Ma'ād* (Food For the Godward Journey)[5]. The only substantial difference we detect in Pitted Face in his varied appearances in Naimy's later works, is not at all in essence but in the particular degree of spiritual and intellectual elevation at which he arrives in his struggle to shift from one pole of his existence to the other — from the man-pole, so to speak, to the God-pole in himself. While he appears in the *Memoirs* as a man seeking emancipation through a desperate struggle to subjugate the human in himself to the divine, he strikes us in *Mirdad* as a God-man preaching to other men the way to salvation.

During the transitional period between Pitted Face the human in the *Memoirs* of 1917 and Pitted Face the divine in the *Mirdad* of 1948, Naimy's spiritual and intellectual life arrived at a certain stage of oscillation where the victory in the conflict within him between the human and the divine was not yet fully decided. So highly strained between the two poles was he at this stage, it seems, that he was not close enough to the divine to write wisdom, as is the case in *Mirdad*, nor so deeply rooted in the human to write a novel as he did in the *Memoirs*. Tossed between the two, his choice was to register the vibrations of his strained soul in lyrical poetry.

The poetry Naimy composed at this stage can for all practical purposes, therefore, be considered another *Memoirs of Pitted Face*, or a continuation

1. First published in Beirut, 1934.
2. A novel, first published in Beirut, 1948. It was later translated into English by the author and published in 1957 by the Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore, under the title of *Till We Meet*.
3. First published in English in Beirut, 1948 and later in Arabic, Beirut, 1952.
4. First published in Beirut, 1932.
5. First published in Beirut, 1936.

of it, with the only major difference that it is this time embodied in a number of separate poems, not by Pitted Face but by Naimy, and without the story sequence.

Naimy's poetical outburst took place shortly after his return from the war in 1919, when, as was the case during the time he started writing *The Memoirs of Pitted Face*, he settled in New York, working as a salesman in a commercial firm by day and devoting the rest of his spare time to creative writing[1]. Apart from three poems composed in 1917 and published consecutively that year in the February, March and Aprill issues of *al-Funoon*[2], most of Naimy's published poems in Arabic are written between the end of 1919 and 1923[3] and scattered between the special issues of *al-Sāyih* and *The Collection of The Pen Bond* (مجموعة الرابطة القلمية) for the year 1921. The last poem he ever wrote in Arabic is "Graves in Rotation" (قبور تدور) dated 1928[4]. *Eyelid Whisperings* (همس الجفون) Naimy's only volume of collected poems, appeared as late as 1945. It includes thirty poems originally written in Arabic between 1917 and 1928, together with translations into Arabic free verse of fourteen other poems originally composed in English between 1925 and 1930 and published in various papers in the United States. One of these poems, "A Solemn Vow" (عهد قاطع), was published in the *New York Sunday Times*, Appril 1, 1928; another two, "Hunger" (الجوع) and "The Endless Race" (السباق) in the *New York Times* on March 14, 1928 and August 30, 1930. Long before the appearance of *Eyelid Whisperings*, however, many of Naimy's Arabic poems, such as "The Frozen River", "If But Thorns Realised" (لو تدرك الأشواك), "The Autumn Leaves" (أوراق الخريف), "The Tranquil Heart" (الطمأنينة), "Comrade !"

1. See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 144—150.
2. The poems are "The Frozen River" (النهر المتجمد), "Comrade!" (أخي) and "Who Are You, My Soul" (من أنت يا نفسي).
3. See Naimy's collected poems in *Eyelid Whisperings* (Hams al Jufūn) 3rd edition, Beirut, 1959, in which each poem is dated.
4. *Eyelid Whisperings*, pp. 68—70.

(أخي) and "Now" (الآن)[1] had already been widely circulated and commented upon in the Arab world, and included in literary textbooks for schools. In addition to the poems, *Eyelid Whisperings* contains five pencil drawings, one by Gibran illustrating Naimy's poem "If But Thorns Realised"[2] and the other four by the poet himself.

II

The keynote to the whole of Naimy's poetry in *Eyelid Whisperings* can perhaps be found in the first poem in the collection "Close Your Eyelids to See" (أغمض جفونك تبصر) from which the collection takes its name. In this poem of eight couplets Naimy says that if you one day find your sky screened with heavy clouds and the earth blanketed with snow; if you are afflicted with a chronic disease and see death approaching with gaping jaws, close your eyelids and you see stars beyond the clouds and meadows beneath the snow. You see the disease itself as the very cure and the grave as the cradle of life.

"Close Your Eyelids to See" is also complemented by a pencil drawing by Naimy, in which a human head in profile, with an exceedingly calm and pensive face, is gracefully enfolded within a shell that resembles a womb. The head, with the showing eye gracefully closed as though in an ethereal dream, slightly leans forward and is seen to rest its chin on the palm of a hand, the first forefinger of which is stretched to touch the forehead between the eyebrows while the other three fingers, half-closed, touch the lower lip.

1. See the English version of the last three poems in Arberry, A. J. *Modern Arabic Poetry*, London, 1950.
2. *Eyelid Whisperings*, 3rd edition, pp. 28—34.

In both the poem and the drawing a sharp distinction is made between appearance and reality — between life as it appears to the senses, and consequently to reason, which ultimately is based on sense experience, and life concealed beyond the sensible and consequently the rationally tenable, and captured only by vision, by the internal senses of the soul. Sense experience reflects only the surface of things. It reveals to us only the clouds. Reason builds on what the senses provide. It can come out with many conclusions about the clouds, but is unwilling by its very nature to commit itself to anything that is beyond them before it is provided vith further evidence. It is only vision within us that is willing to assert on purely internal evidence that beyond the clouds are shining stars, beneath the snow are meadows, and beyond death is life that does not die. So long as we depend on reason and sense experience, we cannot possibly see in life more than a prison, a shell, as the drawing shows, in which we are hopelessly shut from all sides — the shell of time and space which prevents us from seeing anything beyond death or before birth, or finding any significance in having been brought into being. Internal vision alone can break through the shell of appearance and draw up the soul from the world of floating existence to the absolute world of eternal truth where it originally belongs.

"Close Your Eyelids to See" therefore puts us at once face to face with the two Pitted Face poles, so to speak, between which Naimy the poet is strained. As a man among men endowed with physical senses and with reason, he would find life a prison, a shell in which man, afflicted with growth and decay, is made to twitter for a while and then to disappear as nonsensically as he had appeared. As a man endowed with intuition and vision, he would see in place of the shell a womb, from which one day man is destined to emerge as a soul and unite with a higher reality. But it is the fact that man is a composite of both natures, the physical and the visionary, which creates the strain and perplexity in Naimy the poet and constitutes the main theme which runs throughout his poetry.

His perplexity reaches what is perhaps its clearest manifestation in the

poem "Among the Skulls" (بين الجماجم)[1] where the poet, confronted with the dead silence of the scattered bones, is at a loss what to think and whom to believe. Would he believe the vision which constantly promises him immortality and insists that he should close his eyes and see how the grave is the very cradle of life, or should he believe reason and the senses which wave the vision aside and nail the poet down to the solid facts of life: to the "worms crawling in the sand"? "Speak out to me about life", the poet asks the skulls, "perchance I find an answer to silence my unremitting heart "about that ethereal breath of life in Adam which made us forget the soil in us, that left us unsatisfied with the earth and yet unable to grasp the sky. "Poor heart", the poet exclaims, "ever clinging to the beauty in what he imagines, and poor reason, ever frustrating the beauty of imagination".

Almost every poem by Naimy can in one way or another be interpreted in the light of this agonising perplexity of being neither at peace with the world below nor at home with the world above, but simply crucified by both, as the first stanza of his English poem at the opening of this chapter best illustrates:

> There is a Golgotha in every heart.
> On every Golgotha a cross.
> Upon each cross a crucified,
> Upon his brow a crown of thorns,
> And on his lips a word awaiting utterance.

The word awaiting utterance can either be of the family of "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" or of "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit", depending on whether the man on the cross sees disintegration or resurrection as the ultimate end awaiting his agony. It is precisely this word, that the poet with split identity is passionately seeking but, being of split identity, is unable to decide.

> "As to the word upon my lips its hour is not yet".

1. *Eyelid Whisperings*, pp. 99—101.

In "The Strife" (العراك)[1], the agony of the poet's split identity is symbolised by a battle raging in his heart between a devil and an angel each claiming the place to be his own. The poem concludes:

Up to this day I feel in doubt and perplexity.
Not knowing whether it is a demon or an angel in my heart.

Helplessly astray in the bleak wilderness of his earthly existence, the poet in "The Bewildered" (التائه)[2] speaks of a raging fire within him that drives him on. But the fire again is of undecided identity, just as is the bewildered poet within whom it burns. He is at a loss as to whether to take it as the guiding light of vision leading him from the corporeal to the incorporeal, or whether it is the fire of the world eating up his dreams of an incorporeal existence which he is passionately seeking.

Ah, if I but knew what it is.
Is it the torch of God or the fire of death?

"If I am not the echo of your voice", the bewildered poet goes on to ask the god of his vision, "then the voice of whom am I?"

At times the balance straining the poet between the two opposite poles of his existence would tilt to one side or the other, and he would either pessimistically resign himself to the fate of his earthly existence, dismissing all the world of vision as mere hallucinations of a frustrated soul, or be carried away with the vision, dismissing the whole physical existence as floating shadows of a higher world of platonic truths.

Clearly expressive of his first mood of pessimistic resignation is, for instance, the poem "Numbing of Thought" (تخدير أفكار)[3] in which the poet describes his ideal thinking as a false alarm, ever lulling the pains of an earthly existence with promises of a higher reality that is not there, and

1. *Eyelid Whisperings*, p. 96.
2. Ibid. pp. 52—54.
3. Ibid. pp. 50—51.

yet ever sharpening the pains of an imperfect earthly existence by awakening the soul to a higher perfection that is purely imaginative and illusory. The poet passionately implores his thoughts not to lift his eyes from the obvious on earth to the mysteriously screened beyond the sky and spheres, but to leave him floating in the "sea of existence", dumb, blind and deaf — just another dull worm crawling among worms. "How often has the soul believed your false pretence", the poet concludes his address to his higher self, "But how stupid of my soul, and how cruel of you". Fate has no eye to watch over us, Naimy says in another poem, "Your Swearing at the Days" (ذمك الأيام)[1]. We live, suffer and die alone. Fate is totally unmindful of our agonies.

Your swearing at the Days brings you no avail,
For the Days have no ear to lend you.

In "The Frozen River" (النهر المتجمد)[2], both the poet's heart and the river are said to be similarly frozen; the river with cold, the poet's heart with the hard facts of life, empty and futile. Spring will come and the river will flow again, but the poet's heart, struck with the dark reality of life, has no more chance to regain its early infant ideals, hopes and aspirations. This same heart in "The Echoes of Bells" (صدى الأجراس)[3], tries to get loose from its state of doubt and pessimism through a return to the innocent and unsophisticated faith of the poet's childhood in Lebanon.

Pray, leave me alone my doubts.
For this voice is calling me.
It is the voice of my childhood reverberating
Between the valley and the heights of Sannin.

But no sooner does the poet indulge in reminiscences of his innocent childhood, carefree and at peace with the here and the hereafter, than the

1. *Eyelid Whisperings*, pp. 81—82.
2. Ibid. pp. 10—13.
3. Ibid. pp. 40—45.

voice of experience, at grips with the hard facts of life, would wake him up again and bring him back to his present state of agonising doubt and dark pessimism.

Then, other moments would come when the balance in the poet's spiritual mood would tilt to the other side, and Naimy, frustrated with the hard facts of life and their accompanying pessimism, would discard reason and its complementary sense experience as being deceptive and illusory and would throw himself on the mercy of the vision and its basic headquarters in the human heart. Left alone, the heart remains the home of peace and reassuring faith; faith in that, behind this ever-moving flux which is the world is a guiding force, an immanent universal life from which everything issues and to which everything returns, but within the all-containing embrace of which nothing really passes away, nothing really dies. It is only reason, as the poem "To A Worm" (إلى دودة)[1] suggests, that is the source of doubt and pessimism. Based in sense experience and guided by proof, reason is unable to bring within proof God or the Universal Life which, though manifesting itself in the sensible, is never wholly contained in it. To stick to the senses and to reason is to remain at that level of consciousness where one can only be aware of the coming to be and the passing away of things. It is only the human heart which can, through vision, pierce through the shell of appearance and grasp life in its unified eternal essence. Brushing aside reason, Naimy would say in "The Heart Has Awakened" (أفاق القلب)[2]:

Leave men to men,
Measuring the sea with a drinking glass.
And tell Reason that the Heart
Is a sea wide and overflowing.
Other scales are needed to measure it.

or in "Be Quiet, Reason" (يا عقل)[3]:

1. *Eyelid Whisperings*, pp. 83—86.
2. Ibid. pp. 55—63.
3. Ibid. pp. 140—141.

Be quiet, Reason!
Else lay down your crown.
This time my ears are deaf to your commands.

Carried away by intuition and vision beyond the shell of sense experience and the rationally tenable, the poet would see as in "Supplications" (ابتهالات)[1], "Graves in Rotation" (قبور تدور)[2] and "To A Worm", that the whole universe with its multiplicity of shapes, forms and colours, is the manifestation of an eternal immanent reality, which is God, and that "life is but graves in rotation"[3] where man only dies in appearance but remains eternal in essence. In "Who Are You, My Soul?" (من أنت يا نفسي؟)[4] man's eternal essence is said to be the soul which is the emanation of God in us. It is therefore of the very nature of the human soul to feel highly estranged in the world of appearance and to yearn constantly for its homeland, for God the universal self. Such feelings of estrangement and yearning find their full expression in "If But Thorns Realised" (لو تدرك الأشواك)[5] and "The Song of the Winds" (ترنيمة الرياح)[6]. In the second, a symbolic song, the poet, dreaming of having been carried skywards on the wings of the wind, meets a lost angel (a symbol of the emancipated soul) in whom he finds good company in looking for the way back to the original homeland. In the first poem, the poet, fully absorbed in his vision of the spiritual homeland, keeps all to himself and begs of his jubilant friends around him to be excused from taking part in their merrymaking. Not that he has no taste for their particular pleasures, but that he is after a pleasure of a different kind. Thorns and lilies grow in the same soil, but what makes a lily a stranger to all the world of thorns around it is not life, is not the soil, but is the special unthorny fragrance in life, in the soil, which, though

1. *Eyelid Whisperings*, pp. 35—39.
2. Ibid. pp. 68—70.
3. Ibid. p. 68.
4. Ibid. pp. 16—21.
5. Ibid. pp. 28—34.
6. Ibid. pp. 87—92.

accessible to both lilies and thorns, the lily alone discovers in itself and manages to live by. "Thorns may turn into lilies if they but make themselves realise what lilies do realise".

The symbolic meaning of "If But Thorns Realised" is illustrated by a pencil drawing made specially for the purpose by Gibran, Naimy's close friend and associate in Arrabitah. In the drawing is a patch of rough, prickly bramble. Just outside the patch and all by itself stands a white lily with a long stalk. In the bramble and agonizingly caught by the thorns are a number of naked men hopelessly in search of the lily whose smell they detect but whose place they cannot identify. Near the lily and just outside the thorny patch stands a man giant. His back to the men and the thorns, and his head soaring high until it touches the clouds, he is able to see the flower and puts his right hand gently over it.

The bramble with its prickly thorns represents earthly existence with all its difficulties. Man, intrigued by the smell of the flower — by his insatiable thirst for true happiness — is ever on the look-out for it, but in vain does he try to find it among the thorns where it is not. Naimy's friends in the poem are trying to find happiness in drinking, in music, in money-making etc, where every pleasure ultimately ends in pain. It is only the man who pierces through with his vision the shell of earthly existence, whose head soars high above the thorns and touches the sky, who is able to locate the flower and lay hand over it. The thorns of earthly existence cannot prick him any longer because, with his piercing insight, he, unlike other men around him, is able to see the flower beyond the thorns, the cure in the disease, the stars beyond the clouds, life in the cradle of death and consequently immortality as the end of mortality. In this, though he becomes estranged from other men and the world, he feels at peace with men and the world. He is at peace with the transient world of appearance because his soul is in communion with the ultimate eternal reality beyond. Man's salvation therefore, as the poem suggests, lies within him not without. It is only when one closes one's external eye and looks at life through the eye of his inner self that one realises how the soul, an emanation from life

absolute, from God, is ever contained in God and is consequently destined to outlive all the turbulent state of growth and decay characteristic of the floating world of appearance in which man is temporarily made to live. Following up this trend of thought in other poems, Naimy describes human beings on earth in "The Way" (الطريق)[1], as a lost battalion straying in a bleak wilderness, wishing to return to their original quarters but unable to recollect whence they had come. But —

> We shall keep looking for landmarks in this,
> Around us, and the other,
> Until we realise that the road is in us, not there.

The same idea is echoed in "To a New Year" (إلى سنة مقبلة)[2], where he says that people are ever on the look-out for the mystifying secret of life around them, while the secret, if they but knew it, lies hidden within them.

Holding to the vision within him, Naimy feels he has arrived at the secret of life. Looking at things through the eye of life absolute, through God, with whom he is united in vision, everything in the world of appearance to him begins to fall into place. Death becomes an emancipation, pain and suffering become purgatorial, and good and evil become relative terms existing only to eyes with limited or partial vision. In "The Autumn Leaves" (أوراق الخريف)[3], the poet stoically tells the falling leaves, to him the symbol of dying glamour, youth and beauty, to go gently and lovingly down, without remorse or bitterness. To go back to earth is not the end but the beginning.

> Whatever precious thing one has lost
> Find it he will in the grave.

1. *Eyelid Whisperings*, p. 46.
2. Ibid. p. 27.
3. Ibid. pp. 47—49.

In "Good and Evil" (الخير والشر)[1], the poet overhears in his dream a Satan discoursing with an Angel. The two discover that they are twins of one parentage only separated by people's stupidity. In a loving embrace they fly away together and disappear in the infinite space above.

unassailable by the world below because fortified in the world above, the poet is finally rid of his Golgotha and is no more a vagrant soul. His spiritual crucifixion is over. He has discovered his way and he walks it in all tranquility. Such mystical tranquility is characteristic of the translated English poems in *Eyelid Whisperings* composed at a later date and particularly of "The Weaver" (الحائك)[2], "My Solitude"[3] and "Fulfilment"[4], though perhaps most forcefully expressed in the two Arabic poems "Now" (الآن)[5] and "The Tranquil Heart" (الطمأنينة)[6].

In the last of these poems the poet is able to sing in all confidence:

Whatever may befall
My heart is fortified.
Fortune has ta'en my part
And Fate is mine ally.
Ye evil round my heart
Now let your lightnings fly!
Death, dig your trenches here
And let Your traps be laid.
No injury I fear,
No punishment I dread —
Fortune has ta'en my part
And Fate is mine ally[7]

1. *Eyelid Whisperings*, p. 64.
2. pp.138—139.
3. pp. 141—142.
4. pp. 132—133.
5. pp. 108—109.
6. pp. 73—74.
7. See Arberry, p. 65.

III

To discuss content apart from form in poetry is dangerous. To do it with respect to Naimy's poetry is even more dangerous. This is because in poetry, and especially in the lyrical kind such as Naimy's the formal aspect of the poem in terms of letters, words, metre and rhyme, to mention only a few, tends to be as much an integral part of the ideal aspect as, for example, the sound "click" is of the actual meaning the word conveys. But the danger has been risked in this chapter because it is not only Naimy's poetry that we are seeking out but also the man himself; and nothing in Naimy's life at this period had taken so much hold on him as the intellectual and spiritual crisis to which we have tried to give particular emphasis in the discussion of Pitted Face and in the present chapter on *Eyelid Whisperings*.

It must be noted, however, that this intensity with which Naimy lived his intellectual and spiritual crises perhaps also accounts for the many-sided formal originality which his poetry enjoys, and which at the time was in many ways pioneering in the modern world of Arabic poetry.

Apart from "Comrade" (أخي)[1], which was inspired by news of famine in Syria and Lebanon during the First World War, all the poems in *Eyelid Whisperings* seem to be different variations on one theme that remains throughout continuous and alive. So much so that the whole collection in essence strikes one, not as being a group of separate and independent poems treating of different subjects and inspired by different occasions — as the word Dīwān in Arabic literature of the time usually signified — but as one long poem with a number of cantos, each revealing in turn, and in the appropriate form, the particular phase which the intellectual and spiritual struggle raging within the poet has reached. Much like a symphonic composer, the poet moves out to utilise various topics,

1. *Eyelid Whisperings*, pp. 14—15; see also the English version in Arberry pp. 65—66.

sounds and scenes, but is always sure to come back to the original rhythm, which is the spiritual and intellectual experience at work within him, at one time straining him between two worlds — the spiritual and the physical — at another driving him to pessimistic resignation, and at a third elevating him to pure mystical vision.

Being as a whole an expression of a soul in intense anguish, Naimy's poetry is soaked throughout with a distilled imperceptible pain that makes it communicate itself directly to the heart, without having first to pay homage, so to speak, to the ear and eye, as was, on the whole, the practice of traditional Arabic poetry. In fact Naimy tries as much as possible not to depend for poetic effect on the external rhetorical sciences of traditional Arabic poetry. He implements his call in *al-Ghirbāl* that poetry should not be formally subjugated to the classical prosody of al-Khalīl but should, if need be, mould al-Khalīl's prosody to fit its own modern purposes[1], by a successful attempt at this moulding in his own poetry.

Perhaps his first noteworthy attempt in this respect, is his departure from the one uniform rhyming scheme so characteristic of the traditional Arabic poem. Only in very few poems in *Eyelid Whisperings* do we find the rhyme one and uniform. In other poems it takes various forms, reaching at times up to as many as twenty, as in "The Songs of the Winds". This helps the poet not only to escape the monotony of the one single rhyming scheme by achieving a harmony of many sounds in one single poem, but also to acquire a greater opportunity of relaxing the arbitrary hold of the single rhyming scheme on the content. A further step in this direction is Naimy's attempt to escape the rigidity and monotony of the single uniform metre by introducing a variation on it in the same poem, as in "From the Chapter of Time" (من سفر الزمان)[2], "Supplications" and "The Song of the Winds"[3].

1. See above pp. 135—137.
2. *Eyelid Whisperings*, pp. 26—27.
3. In "The Song of the Winds", the metre (فاعلن ، فاعلن ، فاعلن) is alternatively used with the variation (فاعلن ، فاعلن) .

With the rigidity of the rhyme and metre in the poem partially relaxed, Naimy had to treat another remaining obstacle which also arbitrarily handicaps the free flow of content in an Arabic poem. He had to treat the couplet. The couplet is usually treated in traditional Arabic poetry as an independent self-contained unit, only related externally through metre and rhyme to the rest of the couplets constituting the poem. The inescapable result usually is that the content of the poem becomes arbitrarily distributed among the couplets, and one could easily, as has often been attempted, change their order, even add to their number or subtract without incurring any noticeable change on the poem as such[1].

To guarantee freer flow of content, Naimy attempts in some of his poems, to break the couplet into its two constituent parts, where it becomes easier for him to integrate the half couplet (line) into a broader unit, as broad as is suitable for the convenient expression of the content at hand. This broader unit, which takes the place of the couplet and is typical of most of Naimy's poetry, is the stanza. "The Autumn Leaves", for instance, contains four stanzas, each of which consists of eleven lines. "The Heart Has Awoken" contains eighteen stanzas of five lines each, and "The Song of the Winds" has eleven stanzas of seven lines each. In this last poem, for instance, the rhyming scheme in each stanza is distributed among ten lines and not couplets, and is so varied as not to constitute a continuous series of similarly recurring sounds, as in the traditional Arabic poem, but to create an all pervading harmony.

Instead of being a conglomeration of small self-contained unit couplets, therefore, "The Song of the Winds" is a group of harmonious stanzas, and instead of labouring to make each couplet individually rhyme with the other, Naimy attempts to join each stanza as a whole in the poem with the rest of the group, in harmony. This is done through a particular sound or a particular sequence of sounds that keep recurring in each stanza until

1. See in this connection al-'Aqqād's famous experiment on a poem of Shawqī in his book *al-Dīwān* (2nd impri.), Cairo, 1921, pp. 48—53.

the end of the poem. While the rhyming scheme in the first stanza, for instance, is (a.a.b.b.b.a.a.), that in the second is (c.c.d.d.d.a.a.) and so on until the end of the poem.

It takes an expert in the Andalusian poetry of Arab Spain to find exactly how much in common there is between Naimy's poetry, so far as form is concerned, and the *Muwashshah*. That there is much in Naimy's poetry that recommends itself to the Spanish taste, no matter how distantly familiar with its Arab heritage, is perhaps suggested by the fact that while very few individual poems by Naimy were translated into foreign languages, it is only into Spanish and by a Spaniard that *Eyelid Whisperings* was translated as a whole, and quite enthusiastically, as is evident from the introduction[1]. No matter how similar, however, it must be noted that the formal structure in Naimy's poetry developed in complete independence of the *Muwashshah* and was in no way influenced by it. Apart from the fact that Arabic literature in Spain had only recently become available to the general Arab reader on a relatively larger scale, we know from long personal contact with Naimy that his readings in Andalusian literature are very limited and, up to the time he composed his poetry, almost non-existant.

One student of Naimy's poetry thinks that in its light musical structure, it is highly influenced by the folk songs of Mt. Lebanon[2] and that its distinctive characteristic is that its language flows like simple prose but, unlike prose, is continually accompanied with a light rhythm which, from beginning to end, strikes the reader as being inseparably merged with the content and imagery[3]. Another student speaks of Naimy's skill in creating various melodies in different parts of his poem and in succeeding in coordinating them throughout in a general poetic symphony[4]. Struck by the

1. The translation by Leonor Martinez is entitled *El Rumor de Los Parpados*, Adonais CXXXII, Madrid 1956.
2. Najm and 'Abbās, *al-Shi'r al-'Arabi Fi al-Mahjar*, p. 185.
3. Ibid. p. 182.
4. Saidah, George. *Adabuna wa Udabā'una Fi al-Mahājir al-Amirikiyyah*, pp. 181—82, Cairo 1956.

overall music that issues from Naimy's poem as a whole, and which both Najm and Saidah describe in their own way, Muhammad Mandūr in a highly enthusiastic study of one of Naimy's poems, "Comrade"[1], is at a loss what to call this type of poetry. To him, this poem, extremely simple but alive with intimate human feelings and soaked throughout with a distilled music that recommends it directly to the heart, is in sharp contrast with the whole history of Arabic poetry, which has up till the present mainly depended on rhetoric for music and poetic effect. Partly in contrast to this so-called rhetoric nature of Arabic poetry, and perhaps partly inspired by the very title of Naimy's volume of poetry, Mandūr considers "Comrade" and other kindred poems as standing for what he calls 'whispered poetry', (الشعر المهموس) and which he believes, is centuries ahead of what is being composed in Egypt. That this great poetry should come from the Mahjar, and chiefly from Naimy and 'Arida, is explainable to Mandūr[2] partly on the grounds that these people highly mastered Western literature in its own mother languages[3] and partly because they are from a mountainous country full of colour and beauty, and are of a Phoenician descent, a race known for its love of life and yearning for adventure[4].

There is undoubtedly much in what Najm, Saidah and Mandūr, to mention only three, say about the nature of Naimy's poetry. Its language, except with reference to the metre, as Wordsworth says the language of every good poem ought to be, "in no respect differs from that of good prose"[5]. It avoids rhetorics and has something of the nature of folk songs which, simple, alive and melodious, unceremoniously creep into the heart and, like whispered love, leave it in a state of sweet intoxication.

1. See his book *Fi al-Mizān al-Jadid*, Cairo 1944, pp. 48—53.
2. Ibid. p. 61.
3. This can hardly be claimed for 'Arida, see *Sab'ūn* II p. 181.
4. While 'Arida comes from Homs, a dull town in a colourless Syrian plain, neither he nor Naimy ever claimed to be of Phoenician descent.
5. See Grossart, Rev. Alexander. *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, VII, London 1876, p. 85.

As to why this type of poetry should flourish at the hands of Naimy and some of his friends in the Mahjar making them the poets par excellence of the present Arab world, as Mandūr both asks and claims,[1] is a question, we believe, that education and descent alone cannot at all satisfactorily account for. One would easily be able to point out a host of Arab poets contemporary to Naimy and 'Arīda, in both the Arab world and in South America, who were fairly acquainted with Western culture and are, on Mandūr's thesis, traceable back to the Phoenicians, but whose poetry remained unoriginal and classical in both nature and tone. A poet can be polished by education and breeding, but education and breeding cannot produce a poet. The basic poetic substance ought to be there first, and this is no other than the poet's own private self, both as it is and as it is particularly liable to be influenced by the world around; education and environment being two influencing factors.

Says Wordsworth again, "Good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling"[2]. Naimy, the poet, was the son of this romantic Wordsworthian school, whether in its English outburst or in its Lermontovian manifestation in Russia. But while this school could offer him samples of how the powerful feeling spontaneously overflows, it could by no means create in him the powerful feeling itself. This feeling could essentially be or not be in the poet. Naimy's poetry proves that it was. It is by grasping the nature of this powerful feeling in Naimy that the main characteristics of his poetry can best be understood.

Being the vagrant soul that he was, Naimy was totally preoccupied with the spiritual strain within him. His poetry could not help being the expression of a soul in anguish, a soul genuinely living the intense experience of doubt, of faith, and of crucifixion between the two. It is only when one's soul is torturously shattered by such intense feelings that one can no more afford to be rhetorical, decorative, affected, analytical, objective,

1. Mandūr, p. 53;61.
2. Grossart, p. 82.

or any of these evils with which traditional Arabic poetry was afflicted, but can only pour oneself out in spontaneous overflow of feelings; of songs, that are expressive of sadness, of joy or of perplexity, and in which the words are as much a part of the very emotional charge they carry as a sigh is a part of the feeling that gives it utterance. This is how Naimy, whether he felt carried heavenward on the wings of an ascending angel, or forsaken on earth by a departing one, or if he was made witness to an angel and a devil quarrelling within him over the possession of his bleeding heart, could only sing his agony and his burning homesickness for a heavenly world. His songs consequently sound like gusts of ethereal music, issuing from above, molten and distilled. As such they do not strike us as consisting of individual words and meanings consciously arranged and interwoven but as verbal masses in which words, meaning and passions indistinguishably melt in floating melodies. This is particularly true in *Eyelid Whisperings*, of "The Echoes of Bells", "The Autumn Leaves", "The Perplexed" and "The Song of the Winds". Not only are these lyrical poems still unsurpassed in the Romantic world of lyrical Arabic poetry, but they can also stand comparison with the best of their kind in European literature, such as Blake's Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience and Lermontov's "The Angel".

CHAPTER VII

THE CUCKOO CLOCK

These minds and hearts on rail and rubber tyres
Rolling, forever rolling God knows where;
These hurried feet led on by mad desires
Out of one snare into another snare
How can we be their road-fellows, my soul?
They seek too many goals — we seek no goal.
So step aside and let them march and roll.

From "Let Them Pass" an unpublished English poem by Naimy composed 1929. The Arab version is in *Eyelid Whisperings* pp. 134—135.

Among the stories included in *Once Upon a Time* is one entitled "The Cuckoo Clock" (ساعة الكوكو), written in 1925. During this period Naimy, fully at grips with the deeper verities of life as in *The Memoirs of Pitted Face* and *Eyelid Whisperings*, was beginning to evolve a set of definite and final convictions out of which he proceeded to weave his philosophy of life, to the full development of which the rest of his writings are wholly motivated. *Eyelid Whisperings* therefore marks the end of Pitted Face, the vagrant soul and the seeker, and the beginning of Naimy the tranquil-hearted and the initiate. "The Cuckoo Clock", we believe, offers an excellent characterisation of this new phase of development, as well as an appropriate introduction to the discussion of it.

In the story, Khattār, a young Lebanese farmer, lives happily on the soil in one of the high villages in the beautiful mountains. Free of greedy

ambitions and oblivious of the whole turbulent so-called civilised world, he lives hand in hand with generous nature, provides for himself and his parents and is at full peace with himself, with God and the universe. What crowns his happiness is his love for Zumorrod, a daughter of a neighbouring farming family, equally simple and contented, who was first his playmate as a child and is now to become his dear wife shortly after Easter. In the meanwhile, a wealthy middle-aged Lebanese immigrant arrives in the village back from America. Of the many dazzling and breath-taking things he carries with him from the mysteriously and fabulously civilised world beyond the seas, it is the cuckoo clock with which the villagers, and particularly Zumorrod, are most bewitched. Shortly before the assigned wedding day, Zumorrod, enchanted by the cuckoo clock and the world which it symbolises, is discovered to have secretly eloped with the immigrant, an old bachelor, to the New World, shattering Khattār's happy life to pieces.

Khattār blames his rudimentary and primitive life for the catastrophe. Zumorrod, he thinks, is right in being disillusioned about the crude life of the soil and in preferring to seek happiness in the advanced world of the cuckoo clock where happiness really belongs. With his back to his oxen, his mountains and his country, Khattār leaves for the New World, where he soon meets with success. As his business expands he buys himself a luxurious house in America, is particularly careful to purchase a cuckoo clock, which he hangs in the sitting room, and marries Alice, a lady of fashion and daughter of a Lebanese immigrant. But in vain does Khattār await that happiness for whose sake he had left his country. On the contrary, the more he gets involved in the things of the world the more he feels estranged from himself, and the more his possessions increase the more he feels possessed by them.

The modern life strikes him as a complicated mechanism which forces him into a mad perpetual rush that allows him no respite and that cheats him of his sleep by night and his peace and tranquility by day. Even his wife, he discovers, a daughter of this modern world, has simply married

him for his wealth and is too busy with herself and her social life to be interested in him for his own person. An image of his past life in the fields emerges before his eyes, and he finds himself comparing the world of peaceful nature and the world of turbulent civilisation, dealing with the faithful soil and dealing with faithless money, working to provide for one's simple life and living to provide for one's complicated work, loving Zumorrod the innocent and artless and marrying Alice the experienced in the arts of love.

The climax comes one evening when Khattār, having by accident come across Zumorrod working as a waitress in a restaurant, innocently invites her home. Alice pours her wrath over both and takes this as a pretext to ask officially for the divorce that she had long been living in practice. As she leaves, slamming the door in anger, the cuckoo clock strikes twelve. Khattār's disillusionment is complete. He returns to his village in Lebanon under the assumed name of Mr. Thompson to lead the simple life of the country and to dedicate himself to his people and their everyday life and problems. He moves among them like a Messiah or a Tolstoyan convert, warning them against the artificial mutiplication of needs in modern society,against the deception of the cuckoo clock, and teaching them, by example, to seek happiness not in the world but in themselves, and in the simple life of nature, of the soil, where man, least distracted from himself, is himself most and, least screened from nature, is face to face with naked truth and with God.

With the appearance of Mr. Thompson in the village, the wave of emigration to the New World totally stops. So impressed are the people with the man's devotion to them, his life and teachings, that they prefer to nickname him Abū Ma'rūf (The Benevolent One). When he dies the whole village mourns. Not knowing to what sect he belonged, since he professed no particular faith while still alive, the two churches in the village, the Eastern and the Western, claim him. To resolve the problem, the people themselves decide to conduct the funeral without religious ceremonies, to the disappointment and sbsence only of the clergymen of both sects.

"The Cuckoo Clock" in its immediate set up was written, we know, in answer to a certain private situation arising in the author's own family[1]. The Lebanese hysteria for emigration to the New World which had been continually draining the country of its men since the turn of the nineteenth century had already driven Naimy's two elder brothers to the state of Washington. Only his aged parents and his two younger brothers and sister were still living on the family farm at Shakhroob in Mount Lebanon. In 1925 Naimy received in New York a letter from the elder of his younger brothers in Lebanon, Najeeb, in which he wrote of his intention to emigrate to Mexico. Aged twenty-five and already the father of a daughter in her first year, Najeeb was the only one old enough to take care of the whole family at home. Naimy's reaction was to write the story of "The Cuckoo Clock", which he published in *al-Sāyih's* special issue of that year, and sent to his brother. As a consequence, Najeeb's plans were abandoned.

Though primarily written to serve an immediate purpose, "The Cuckoo Clock" remains, however, a vivid depiction in story form of the final convictions Naimy had arrived at in his quest for a philosophy of life, of his disgust, in the light of this philosophy, with modern society in America, and finally of his proposed future line of action. Khattār in America is no other than Pitted Face or, better, Naimy himself. His disillusionment, even disgust, with the material world of modern society, ever blinded from the inner truth in life by its artificial complication of material needs, is no other than the disillusionment, even disgust, of Pitted Face or Naimy in *The Memoirs* and *Eyelid Whisperings*. So also is his yearning for the simple, the natural, the spiritual and Godly. That Khattār in the story, written in 1925, unlike Pitted Face, is made to extricate himself entirely from the illusory world of the cuckoo clock and go back to his people like an inspired prophet bearing a message of truth and salvation, is a sign that Naimy's message of inner truth and spiritual perfection, which had so agonisingly been fermenting within him in the *Memoirs* and *Eyelid Whisperings*, has now

1. See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 241—248.

arrived at a stage where he thinks it has culminated in a clearly conceived doctrine and that the time is approaching when, like Khattār, he should go back home to the Arab world and preach it to his people. That Naimy had really started to feel that he has a doctrine to teach, is apparent in a series of articles of a contemplative nature, written between 1921 and 1931 and scattered during that period between *al-Sāyih* in New York and other papers in Egypt and Lebanon. Here, Naimy's philosophic thought, hitherto only poetically and implicitly immanent in his writings, is for the first time made explicit and didactic. When the articles were first published in book form in Beirut in 1932, they appeared under the evocative title: *Stages, Excursions in the Outer and Inner Life* (المراحل : سياحات في ظواهر الحياة وبواطنها).

On April 19, 1932 Naimy, as the story of "The Cuckoo Clock" had previously implied, took leave of New York and the whole turbulent world it symbolises and went back to share in the simple and frugal life of his hometown and family in the Lebanese mountains, and to dedicate the rest of his years to the quiet elaboration and preaching of the spiritual message he had so long been laboriously conceiving in Palestine, Russia, first World War France and the United States during the past forty-two years of his life. In Baskinta, and in the very secluded family farm, al-Shakhroob, he found the peace and privacy he required. Here he lived with the rest of the family in complete simplicity on the soil and on what scanty income his publications in the Arab world were then able to provide him with. In the warm Summer days when the number of visitors and admirers increasingly interrupted his work, he would retire to a natural grotto in a rocky area to the West of al-Shakhroob and spend the whole day in writing and contemplation. This grotto, which witnessed the birth of a number of Naimy's works in Lebanon, was made specially famous in *The Book of Mirdad* in which it figures as an important symbol. Naimy himself began to be reported to the readers by admirers and newspapermen as 'The Hermit of

Sannin'[1] and later as 'The Hermit of al-Shakhroob'. This nickname is still in circulation.

Once in Lebanon, he was showered with invitations to talk in different literary associations, schools, universities and other institutes of learning in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. On each occasion he would address his audience in the tone of a prophet in possession of an elevated message in which lay human salvation. His talks would frequently take the air of sermons not much different in form, basic conception and even depth, sincerity and beauty, from Christ's Sermon on the Mount, though perhaps more elaborately and philosophically framed. In 1936, a collection of his talks since his arrival in Lebanon, each prefaced by the particular date and occasion on which it was delivered, appeared in Cairo under the title of *Food For The Godward Journey* (Zād al-Ma'ād).

"The Cuckoo Clock", therefore, written in 1925 had really anticipated a new stage in Naimy's life and literature. It signalled the passing away of Naimy the passionate seeker who lives and records the agonies of his thoughts, feelings and emotions as they arise in him, and announced the coming to be of Naimy the philosophically and spiritually tranquil-hearted and the zealous preacher of an accomplished message which professes to teach the way to a life without agony. *Stages, Excursions In The Outer and Inner Life* and *Food For The Godward Journey* offer an excellent introduction to this new stage by revealing Naimy the preacher as contrasted with Naimy the passionate seeker and conceiver in the *Memoirs* and *Eyelid Whisperings*. From the twelve short essays included in *Stages* and the seventeen talks included in *Food For The Godward Journey*[2] we can now safely come out with what might be a draft of the philosophico-spiritual message which Naimy had carried with him as he finally settled in his Lebanese retreat, and to the elaboration and teaching of which the rest of his career up to the present has been wholly dedicated.

1. See an early series of reports on Naimy by Tawfīq Yūsof 'Awwād to *al-Bayraq* (daily), under the title of "A Day With the Hermit of Sannīn" يوم عند ناسك صنين August 30, September 6 and September 12, Beirut, 1932.
2. Subsequently referred to only as *Food*, 2nd edition, Beirut (no date).

Again, the story of "The Cuckoo Clock" may offer us the keynote to Naimy's doctrine at this stage. When Khattār accepts the cuckoo clock and the life it symbolises, he loses his happiness. This is so because he is led to believe that he himself is insufficient and valueless without the world. As he emigrates to America and succeeds in possessing the world, he discovers in the process that he has really lost himself, that he can no more live for himself but for things. This is why, in an attempt to overcome his slavery, khattār, like a Tolstoyan convert, shakes the dust of the artificial world of modern civilisation in America off his feet and returns to his own "Yasnaya Polyana" in Lebanon, where he engages in the simple, contented life of nature and of the unsophisticated country people. Least intrigued by the illusory and artificial hubbub of modern society, he is face to face with naked truth, with God, and is himself most. Similarly, on the eve of making his final decision to abandon New York and retire to his Lebanese mountainous retreat, Naimy, as though giving himself an account of his decision in poetry, says:

> These minds and hearts on rail and rubber tires
> Rolling, forever rolling God knows where;
> These hurried feet led on by mad desires
> Out of one snare into another snare
> How can we be their road-fellows, my soul ?
> They seek too many goals — we seek no goal.
> So step aside and let them march and roll.

Clearly, then, the main issue at stake in Naimy's mind as he "stepped aside" to Lebanon was to elaborate on his rejection of modern civilisation through explaining what does really constitute human happiness and what, in his belief, is the appropriate way for man to achieve it. This issue, along whith kindred ontological questions that branch from it, constitutes the main underlying theme in all the essays in *Stages* and the speeches in *Food*, varied and independent of one another in appearance as they may seem to be. We shall therefore try to come out with a unified sequence of Naimy's thought on this theme, treating the varied material in both *Stages* and *Food* as one body.

II

In an answer to a questionnaire by *al-Hilāl* Monthly in June 1922 on "The Revival of the Arab East and the Extent to Which it Should Draw on Western Civilisation", the following is the rationale of what Naimy had to say[1].

The real criterion of what we are to call "progress" or "Advance", he claims, is the amount of happiness it yields. There is one and only one criterion of happiness. It is the extent to which we are empowered to overcome fear of all kinds — fear of slavery, of death and the rest. In its quest to overcome fear, the East[2], as represented by its age old seers such as Christ, Buddha, Laotzu and Mohammad, has traditionally recommended one route, the West, as modern civilisation witnesses, has taken another.

The East has realised that man shall always be afflicted with fear, as long as he remains subject to the impact of the outside world in which he lives. As such, man, like the rest of things in the world, shall suffer change, disintegration and death. Though corruption and death are characteristic of all things in the corporeal world, one thing remains eternal. It is the overall and underall governing principle, or God or Being, from which everything emerges and to which it returns, but which itself, being all-pervading, is ever one and unchangeable. This overall reality, though governing the corporeal world, is by definition incorporeal. It is, therefore, accessible neither to sense perception nor, because of that, to reason, but to intuition and inner vision. The only way to salvation that the East understands, therefore, is for man to develop his inner faculties in an attempt to break loose from the bonds of his corporeal existence — his lower existence, the

1. See both the questionnaire and Naimy's answer in *Stages*, 2nd ed. Beirut, (no date) pp. 53—60.
2. For a fuller discussion of what Naimy really understands by the term "East", see Chapter VIII below.

source of all his fears, and unite through vision and faith with the higher eternal principle, with God. Laotzu teaches how to break loose from the world of fleeting existence in order to rejoin in spirit the Foster Mother Tao. Buddha speaks of the same process as the way to Nirvana, while Christ has demonstrated that to resurrect in the Kingdom of God is to leave the world on the cross. In short, the essence of the message carried by the East lies in self-negation. Man should, through the development of his inner faculties, step out of his limited corporeal self and gradually merge into the incorporeal greater self of the universe. This is man's only way of escaping change, disintegration and death and of arriving at the Nirvanic state of absolute eternal happiness[1].

In place of self-negation, the West, on the other hand, as witnessed by modern civilisation, is all for self-assertion. Refusing to have any but a rational and scientific approach to things, modern civilisation is confined to what is rationally tenable and scientifically verifiable, and is consequently unwilling to accept as valid the visionary world of transcendental reality. The course that modern civilisation has taken, therefore, to safeguard man against the impact of the outside world in which he lives, is not to reject that world in quest for a Nirvanic happiness through union with a transcendental reality, but to assert oneself in it and against it. Modern civilisation, therefore, has set itself, through the various ways and means of science and technology, to exploit the world of nature in an attempt to put it at the service of man. In this it has made great strides. But being equipped with reason and science in place of inner vision and intuition, modern civilisation could only exploit the physical side of nature, without being able to arrive at its unifying transcendental principle. It has consequently broadened the physical dimensions of man without being able to effect in him a corresponding spiritual growth that would give him a guiding sense of ultimate purpose.

1. A fuller development of this thesis is found in the essay "Faces: The Face of Laotzu; The Face of Buddha; The Face of Christ", *Stages*, pp. 5—52. (وجوه : وجه بوذا ؛ وجه لاوتسو ؛ وجه يسوع).

The physical side of life therefore has become an end in itself, and man as well as nations, blinded by the material successes of the modern world, are engaged in the fiercest competition for the satisfaction of their various physical appetites, whereby they only achieve war instead of peace, corporeality instead of incorporeality, and death in place of life[1].

The ultimate conclusion which Naimy's answer to *al-Hilāl* draws is that should the Arab East wish its cherished revival to lead it to real happiness, then Western civilisation is certainly not the right course to follow.

Typical of what he would say to his fellow countrymen, thousands of whom had at the time emigrated and were still emigrating to the New World in quest of better fortunes, is "People of my country! Let not the lightning flashing in the eyes of Western civilisation dazzle you, for it is a lightning that brings no rain. Nor should you be awe-struck by the thunder roaring within its breast, for it is but a death rattle"[2]. In "Sannīn and the Dollar"[3] he speaks of the New World as a boiling pot in which people are engaged in a mad rush after the dollar, and of the dollar as "a thick curtain shutting out the face of God"[4]. For comparison he offers "Two Scenes" مشهدان[5]: one is from Sannīn in Lebanon where country people, oblivious of the whole turbulent world of modern civilisation, attend to their daily work in the fields in all tranquillity. In their innocent simplicity and contentedness, they are as beautiful, as clean, as holy and as near to truth as the mountain slope on which they work, and which rises majestically until it touches the clear sky overhead as if constituting a link between heaven and earth. The other scene is from a park in New York where people of various kinds and attires, chased by the "Monster City", have come to seek a breathing space. Even here, the Monster has shut out the sky with a thick

1. This thesis is specially emphasised in "The Civilisation of Machines and Crises". (مدنية الآلات و الأزمات). *Food*, pp. 37—44.
2. *Food*, p. 44.
3. Ibid. pp. 30—36.
4. Ibid. p. 35.
5. *Stages*, pp. 61—71.

layer of smoke, has charged the air with dust and has sucked all genuineness and freshness out of the people and the park in which they rest. Soon the Monster will again take them in as readily as he had spat them out a few minutes before, where they once more become lost and slowly consumed in the ominously complicated mechanism.

"The Unknown Warrior" (الجندي المجهول)[1], inspired by the grand funerals held for the unknown soldier simultaneously in both Britain and France shortly after World War I, is a piece of most biting irony depicting a civilisation whose greed for riches, power and empty glory makes her send her own chidren to death but whose hypocrisy brings her forth in all solemn pretence to walk in their funerals.

From the more general question of East and West, Naimy moves on in the other talks and essays to elaborate further on the nature of God and man and the problems of life and death and human happiness.

Taking his stand in Eastern mysticism, particularly Buddhism and Taoism and such corresponding mystical interpretations of Christianity, he claims[2] that the whole world of physical existence is a world of change and unreality. Since everything physical is necessarily composite and by definition corrupt, nothing physical can be real and consequently the whole material world in which man lives is a world of flux, ever coming to be and ever passing away but never really being. True being, therefore, is of the permanent and, consequently, of the essentially one, the ideal and the immaterial.

A closer look at the world of fleeting existence, however, instantly reveals that eternally changing and passing away as that world may appear to be, it yet never really perishes, nothing in it really passes away. Things keep decomposing only to compose again in various shapes and forms, and keep disintegrating as certain particular phenomena only to be reintegrated

1. *Stages*, pp. 72-91.
2. See in *Stages* "The Face of Buddha", "The Face of Laotzu" and "The Face of of Christ "وجه بوذا" "وجه لاوتسو" "وجه يسوع".

into others. Just as man, for instance, derives his life and existence from his parents who brought him forth, from the earth on which he lives, the air he inhales, the space that contains him, the climate, the light, the water etc. etc., together with the infinite series of things on which these depend in their turn, so does he also by decomposition pass into the forming of an infinite number of things in the universe, including other men, by which he is ultimately assimilated.

Things in the world of physical nature, therefore, no matter how varied and distinct they seem to be, have no reality, no substance of their own. Ever interpenetrating, ever assimilating and being assimilated, shedding off one set of physical qualities only to put on another, in an eternal process of infinite order and regularity, they can only be various manifestations of one and the same immaterial substance which is common to all, a certain universal reality or Being in which they all participate in various degrees but which itself, being common to all and the origin of all, is no thing in particular. It is immaterial, having no qualities, no dimensions, no definition, for to be qualified is to be limited and consequently composite and derivative. It is, in short, that immaterial and undefinable substance of all that exists, which, like the sea, ever spreads itself out in various shapes and forms and ever gathers itself in, but ever remains in essence one and unchangeable[1]. Laotzu calls it Tao, the foster mother of all that exists; Buddha calls it the Universal Self, the origin and ultimate end of every other self in the universe; Christ calls it God, the Father and Creator of all. Laotzu's Foster Mother Tao, Buddha's Universal Self and Christ's God the Father therefore are only different names for one and the same reality[2].

The universe as a whole, therefore, despite its apparent multiplicity, is in reality one and integral. Every particular thing in it, from the lowliest leaf of grass on earth to the highest firmanent in heaven, is seen to be an

1. See *Food*, p. 22.
2. *Stages*, p. 36.

inseparable and an essential part of everything else. Consequently everything is, in so far as it is related to the whole of reality, in so far as it is one with God. Once isolated, things cease to be. All the differentiating qualities and borderlines therefore through which the various entities in Nature seem to acquire their distinctive features and concrete individualities are really fictitious. When closely scrutinised, they are found to interpenetrate and to melt into the totality of God, the one all-inclusive reality from which everything arises and to which all return, but which in itself, being all-inclusive and all-pervading, is ever one, unqualified and unqualifiable, infinite and absolute.

That the universe, or God or reality, absolutely one, permanent and immaterial in essence, should seem pluralistic, transient and composite is because man is in the habit of looking at things through the medium of sense perception.

Sense perception, private and surface-bound by definition, can only reveal how things seem to be from the standpoint of a perceiver, but not how they really are in themselves. It can only give their faint qualities and physical delineations, but not the underlying universal and imperceptible principle of Being or God which they commonly manifest and through which only, they are what they seem to be. To sense experience, things may appear big or small, hard or soft, near or far, hot or cold, separate or joined etc. etc., relative not to themselves but to the particular standpoint and temporal condition of the perceiver. For what may be considered near at a particular time and place and in a particular circumstance, may seem far at another; what is cold to a man on the equator may be considered hot by another at the north pole, and what seems joined to a naked eye may appear disconnected under a microscope[1].

Sense experience, therefore, speaks more of the particular medium through which it is carried than of the true nature of the object perceived. It testifies more to the nature of man's physical senses than to the nature

1. See "The Imagination" (الخيال) , *Food*, pp. 7—20.

of reality as it truly exists in itself. But the bodily senses are absolutely relative, varying not only from one individual to another, but also with respect to themselves and to one another in the same person. What one individual confirms through his senses the other may deny, and not only does one sense faculty in a person occasionally report what another or all the remaining faculties fail to confirm, but it also is apt under various conditions and at different times to contradict itself on one and the same issue. It therefore follows that the whole perceptual world reported through the senses has no objective truth, no real identity or permanence whatsoever, and is no more than a projection of man's own personal illusions.

To arrive at the objective truth and permanent identity of both himself and the world in which he lives, man therefore has to see what is beyond the illusory appearances, beyond the perceptual qualities of things and, consequently, to resort to means of knowledge other than sense perception. As every perceptual quality is necessarily a spatiotemporal phenomena, and all the perceptual world, elusive and illusory as it is, is by definition no other than the exterior world of spatiotemporal existence, it follows that in order to see what is beyond the perceptual world man is to pierce through its various space-time dimensions, and consequently to look at things not through his bodily senses but through the non-spatial and the non-temporal in himself — through the inner eye, or what Naimy calls the imagination (الخيال)[1].

All that is of space-time dimensions in man, i. e. man as a body, is in continuous process and can have no permanent identity. Like everything spatial, it is subject to perpetual composition and decomposition, and like all temporal things, in time it comes and in time it goes. That man, despite the continuous change that accompanies his body in all its various spatial and temporal stages in life from infancy to old age, is nonetheless able to maintain throughout a constant feeling of self identity and sameness is an indication that what constitutes the self or "I" or "ego" in him is not in

1. See his definition of the imagination in *Food*, p. 9.

truth those finite spatial and temporal dimensions which are the body and which are the same at no two consecutive moments but a certain unchangeable and imperceptible power or soul or being within him which, though dwelling in the body, is not of the body and, though operating through spatial and temporal dimensions, is itself undimensional. It is this undimensional inner self, or I, or ego, which is the seat of such transcendental powers in man as vision, or imagination, as Naimy terms it, which enable him, though confined in body to a particular time and place, to stretch himself at once into time past and time future, and to roam in places at infinite distance from his dwelling place and, though confined by sense perception to the outer surfaces of things, to pierce through to their inner reality[1].

The moment man approaches the universe in which he lives through his inner eye, through imagination and vision, and sees it in its naked reality, he instantly realises that all things, like himself, though constituted in appearance of finite space and time dimensions, are in essence dimensionless, infinite and boundless. Man instantly realises through imagination and vision that there can be no possible time or space limit, no conceivable borderline where one thing in the universe ends and another begins[2]. Starting with himself, for instance, he understands, as vision projects him beyond his instantaneous spatiotemporal context, that he is inseparably linked to the whole of existence, to his parents who brought him forth, to the air he inhales, to the food he eats, to the soil, the water, the light, together with the infinite series of other things to which these are in turn inseparably linked, and which cannot stop short of the infinite universe.

Seen in this light therefore, man, together with all other things in Nature, though seemingly varied and disconnected in appearance, is in essence one and inseparable. To define a man, a beetle or even a grain of sand, is to include all that through which it is what it is, and consequently to stop no shorter than the infinite universe[3]. Consequently, all things in

1. "The Imagination", *Food*, pp. 13—16.
2. See "The Sermon of the Crow" (موعظة الغراب), in *Stages* and the "Founts of Pain" (ينابيع الألم), in *Food*.
3. *Food*, pp. 15—16.

nature, varied in space and time as they may seem to be, have in reality one definition, one essence, one common self or I or ego, which is the infinite self of the whole universe, the "I" absolute or God, in which and through which alone they exist and without which nothing can be or be conceived. Every existing thing, therefore, has invariably two sides to its nature; the apparent and the real, the finite and the infinite. In its narrow spatiotemporal individuality, it is only a shadow of its true being, an arbitrary fragment of its true definition and, as such, it can have no reality and belongs to the world of permanent flux. But regarded through its essence, through its true definition, it is as infinite in space and time as the universe in which and through which it exists and is, therefore, one with the self absolute, with God the essence of all existence, apart from which nothing can be or be conceived[1].

Since man is the only creature on earth endowed with intelligence and consequently with imagination and vision, he is the only creature capable, through his innate powers, of dismissing the apparent side of his nature for the real, and of consciously passing through Understanding from the finite in himself to the infinite[2]. To those whose means of understanding are the physical senses, the dimensions of the self are only those of the body. Therefore is the world on the whole ever divided in their eyes into two opposite camps - the "I" and the "not-I" and the "mine" and the "not-mine"[3] - and therefore are their lives ever based on duality. What is advantageous to the I, they covet and consider good, beautiful, just, wholesome, joyful, beloved etc. etc. to the end of the series of the so-called positive values in human life; what is disadvantageous to the self, they repel and classify as evil, ugly, false, unjust etc. etc. to the end of the detested series of negative values.

Since each individual believes himself to be distinct and separate from every other self and since all live in one and the same universe, nothing that is deemed positive or negative by one I or for one "mine", be it a

1. See "Life and Death" (الموت والحياة) , *Food*, pp. 83—90.
2. "The Understanding and the School" (المعرفة والمدرسة) , *Food*, pp. 45—51.
3. "The Sermon of the Crow", *Stages*.

person, a class, a nation, an ideology or otherwise, can be positive or negative for all persons, all classes, all nations and all ideologies. Therefore has the history of mankind in all its aspects, whether economic, political, social, religious or otherwise, been one of clashing values and conflicting interests, and therefore is human life ever shattered by strife and discord[1]. "Yes, as soon as man said 'I-and-the-world' he created from himself an antithesis to himself and, by creating an antithesis to himself, he precipitated an antithesis to all things. Consequently, he began looking at everything through two different eyes: through the one he would see the I, through the other he would see the 'not-I'. In this way, things, while one in nature, split in his eyes in two and, with everything he saw, he was instantly bound to see its opposite . . ."[2]

Since every antithesis is of a nature to obliterate its thesis, therefore are the I and the "not-I", the "mine" and the "not-mine" in human life in all their various manifestations ever engaged in a process of constant obliteration. Not only is man himself ultimately obliterated through death by the world against which he has constantly and desperately tried to hold his ground, but also are all his dealings, works and institutions in life infected with duality through which they are invariably consumed. While seeking riches, for instance, he creates poverty, together with struggle between the rich and the poor. While belonging to one class, faith, nationality etc. he disowns other classes, faiths and nationalities, and consequently while seeking peace, happiness and life for himself and his own, he finds himself ever at war with things, with institutions and with other men whose peace, happiness and life are in conflict with his own[3]. Consequently, "ever since man came into being he has tirelessly been building fortresses for peace only to see them transformed into castles for war, and erecting altars for concord but finding concord the only sacrifice being offered thereon.

1. See "The Peace of God and the Peace of Man" (سلام الله و سلام الناس), *Food*.
2. *Stages*, pp. 130—131.
3. "The Peace of God and the Peace of Man", *Food*.

He has ever been yearning for harmony but only embracing discord, ever longing for tranquillity but only arriving at anxiety and fear"[1].

Ever cherishing happiness therefore, the mother ideal from which all his ideals branch, such as permanence in life, peace, prosperity, honour, freedom, love etc. etc., yet, living on the level of the thesis and the antithesis, the I and the "not-I", man, instead, finds himself ever dealing in life with split happiness and consequently with split ideals[2]. But split happiness is only another name for pain.

Therefore is pain in all its various manifestations, such as discord, poverty, disgrace, slavery, hatred, death, etc. etc., the mother evil from which all human evils branch, and the antithesis with which man finds himself wrestling from the hour he is born to the hour he dies[3].

Pain in all its manifestations, however, "being humanity's bitterest enemy is also its greatest saviour"[4]. It is an enemy because like every antithesis, it is destined to break up the thesis and dissolve it, and it is a saviour because the antithesis is the only means through which the thesis, being dissolved, is purged of its irrelevancies, so to speak, and enabled to pass over and re-emerge in its greater reality which is the synthesis.

If pain, therefore, in all its manifestations is a constant witness to the perpetual breaking up and dissolution of man through his life-long confrontation and struggle with the "not-I", it is also a reminder that it will not cease so long as the duality between the I and the "not-I" is not synthesised, so longas the human awareness of the self is not purged of its narrow confinement to the body and man comes to realise that, in essence, he is one with God the absolute and ultimate synthesis of all that exists.

Once fully aware of his true self, man realises that his real dimensions are as infinite as God, and that in dividing the world into the I and the

1. *Food*, p. 111.
2. See "The Broken Horns" (الأبواق المحطمة), *Food*.
3. "The Founts of Pain", *Food*.
4. *Food*, p. 61.

"not-I" he has actually split himself in twain; hence is his abiding experience of the multifarious types of pain as the two parts engage in a life-long clash. Pain therefore is a call for man in his quest for happiness to transcend through love the duality of the I and the "not-I" for the I absolute. It reminds him as it characterises his various insufficiences in the face of the infinite world in which he lives, that in rejecting anything or anybody in the world he actually rejects himself, and that in setting any front or borderline of whatever kind between himself or his own and the rest of things he, in fact, shuts himself off from himself[1]. "For as long as you remain cut off from anything or anybody, you remain cut off from God as he is in that thing or that person ... The more bridges you extend from your hearts to people, the closer you get to your true selves and consequently to God as he dwells within you. But the wider and more numerous the clefts in your hearts and minds which separate you from others, the longer is your estrangement from yourselves and consequently from God, apart from whom no self can be yours"[2].

To achieve happiness, therefore, man is to emancipate from pain, and to emancipate from pain he is to transcend through love and understanding all duality and finitude, all distinctions, contours and borderlines, that divide the universe into mutually exclusive entities, and consequently to lose himself in God, the absolutely one and infinite.

By losing oneself in God one detaches onself from the detachable, the external, the ever dying in nature only to be attached to its unifying, indwelling and eternal principle. "For whoever clings to his corporeal self loses his living one, and whoever denies his mortal self lays hold within him on the self that does not die. Yet whosoever finds his undying self lays hold thereby on life absolute. Self-negation therefore is only self-assertion. For it does not actually mean the negation of anything in the universe, but signifies the expansion of the self to the extent that nothing

1. "The Founts of Pain", *Food*.
2. *Food*, pp. 137—138.

in the universe is left without. Nor for that does it imply self-detestation but love of the Self which is immanent in all things"[1].

But how is man to find his way to self-negation? If happiness, complete and unalloyed by pain is, as it is, the ultimate and final goal of man in life as well as the driving force behind every human endeavour, then human life in all its workings and manifestations is, in truth, a Godward journey - a journey in which the God in man, intercepted and estranged by the faint shrouds of earthly existence, ever works on breaking up and pulling down all confronting limitations in an attempt to regain its unity with God the absolute. "And we, who are we, but drops estranged from the greater sea of Being. No matter how long their alienation lasts, they are sure to find their way back to the great sea ..."[2].

If man therefore is to find his way to God the absolute and infinite, he only has to know his way to the absolute and infinite within him - he only has to know the self - himself. "For it is God alone who is capable of knowing God ... It is that very God alive in every man who has the power to know the God who dwells in all things and in everybody"[3].

In seeking to capture the I within him, man is to find his sense perception of no avail. Surface bound by definition and consequently conditioned by time and place, sense experience can only provide man as he proceeds from minute to minute and from place to place with a series of fragmentary and unrelated percepts. That these fragmentary and unrelated spatiotemporal percepts are constantly provided in man and throughout his life with a single unifying principle, a fixed point of reference, a sense of belonging to one and the same experiencing ego or self, is an indication that the I in man is Necessarily prior to sense experience and presupposed by it. Therefore is the I in man beyond sense experience and other than the perceptible in him. "What is perceptible has no value in itself; its value is only measurable by the nonperceptual in it ... I am not my body,

1. *Food*, p. 66.
2. *Food*, p. 147.
3. *Food*, p. 136.

even though it is all that people perceive of me. I am but the 'void' or power which fills the skeleton of my bones and flesh. That part of me which is 'existing' or, rather, perceptible is not 'me', while the 'non-existent' part or, rather, the non-perceptual is 'me' ''[1].

Nor is science, therefore, capable of providing man with any basic truth regarding himself and consequently regarding the self absolute[2]. For science, whose primary concern is to abstract from its objects what finite characteristics they possess, is based on sense experience and cannot by definition deal with any subject the theories of which do not admit of empirical verification. Therefore is the I in man, as well as the I or God in Nature, outside the scope of science, and therefore has science in all its achievements been unable to bring man an inch nearer to his knowledge of God. ''Do not depend on science alone, for science does not instruct. It does not instruct because it depends in what it teaches on sense perception, which, no matter how broad in scope, cannot grasp Being''[3]. On the contrary, science has diverted man's attention from the world within to the world without[4], whereby it extends his physical dimensions without being able to inspire him with any sense of ultimate purpose. Consequently, while primarily intended to instruct, science has more been utilised for destruction[5].

Accessible neither to sense perception nor to science, the I in man, which is the key to the I in nature, is also beyond the scope of reason[6]. For reason, which works by definition and proof, is analytic and dialectic. It works its way to wholes through the examination, the classification and the juxtaposition of their constituent parts. But the I, the unifying principle in man, which is beyond and other than the perceptual and the divisible in him, does not lend itself to analysis and consequently to definition and proof. Therefore is the God in man, as the God in nature, beyond proof and definition.

1. From "The Face of Laotzu", *Stages* p. 20.
2. See "The Code of Nature" (دستور الطبيعة) *Food.*
3. *Food*, p. 94.
4. See *Food*, pp. 139—141.
5. "The Peace of God and the Peace of Man", *Food.*
6. See "The Imagination", *Food.*

As the I or God in man, which is the guide to God in nature, is so utterly beyond definition, therefore, the only means left through which to grasp the self is inner vision[1]. Inner vision alone is capable of carrying man beyond the confines of the physical world of sense perception to which he is chained in body; beyond the rationally definable and empirically verifiable, and of making him see in a flash the transcendental source of all being, the self absolute or God which manifests itself in all things in time and place but which itself remains eternally independent of time and place and immanifest[2]. Since it is only through seeing light that man is made conscious of his sight and of darkness, so it is as man sees God the self absolute through vision that he is made aware of his true self and recognises that the I in him is an imperceptible and undefinable divine spark, intercepted and held by the world of corporeality and flux where it does not belong. Therefore does he realise that life is a Godward Journey and that "the way to God is the way to nudity"[3], to self-negation. It is to free the soul through spiritual elevation from all its attachment to the physical, the finite and the corporeal and to bring it to a state of purity whereby it can emancipate from the fetters of time and place and achieve its ecstatic reunion with God the infinite and absolute.

"Haven't you heard of the revelation of prophets, or the rapture of prophets, or the ecstasy of prophets? It is a spiritual state in which the tongues of the confused senses are made dumb, voices of their tumultuous lusts are made mute, their raging fire is made extinct, and their revolting muscles are paralysed. It is a state in which man feels as though he is no more of flesh and blood. Seeing - whether the eyes are open or closed - what the eye cannot see, and hearing - whether the ears are open or shut - what the ear cannot hear. The fetters of time let loose and man sees

1. Naimy at times calls it revelation (وحي), or rapture (نشوة) or ecstasy (غيبوبة), as in *Food*, p. 136, or "imagination" (خيال), as in the essay in *Food* under that title. At times he calls it faith (إيمان), as in *Food*, p. 78.
2. See "Religion and Youth" (الدين و الشباب), *Food*.
3. *Food*, p. 138.

himself in all time, and the borderlines of space collapse and he sees himself in all space. He in fact feels as though there were no time or space, no life or death, but Being infinite and absolute and indescribable by either tongue or pen"[1].

This state of spiritual accomplishment which brings man to his ultimate ecstatic reunion with God may not be achieved during one lifetime nor, indeed, during several lifetimes[2], but life is a school in which pain is the unchallenged teacher[3] and man shall through reincarnation enter and reenter this school until he is ultimately purged through pain of his ignorance and freed through knowledge of his true identity from his earthly bondage.

1. *Food*, p. 136.
2. *Food*, p. 46.
3. "The Founts of Pain", *Food*.

CHAPTER VIII

A RISING EAST AND A WANING WEST

> "I can see the inner vision of the East dawning upon the world anew. He who shall bear its torch is a prophet wearing the strength of the earth in his legs, the might of heaven in his arms, the glow of truth in his eyes, the tranquillity of understanding on his tongue and the sweetness of love in his heart. And he shall go among men East and West... holding his heart on his plam as food for whoever is hungry. Therefore shall they eat of it in the West and get poisoned and shall take of it in the East and shall live. And he shall not be crucified".
>
> Naimy: *Voice of The World*, pp. 58-59.

Ever since Naimy made his cuckoo clock retirement from New York in 1932 and from the whole turbulent world of modern society and civilisation which it symbolises, and after his self-imposed semi seclusion in Baskinta and the family farm high up in Mount Lebanon where he has wholly dedicated himself to contemplation and to the elaboration of his spiritual message, his writings seem hardly to have contributed anything fundamentally new in philosophic content to the basic body of thought contained in *Stages* and *Food*. His utter devotion to the cultivation of his inner life has increasingly both immunized and antagonized him in every other respect against the challenging and novel impact of the world without and fostered within him a feeling of intellectual self-sufficiency. Viewing things through the eyes of a convinced mystic, he has come to feel that the type of world he retired from can have little or nothing to teach him, while he has everything to teach both himself and that world. The mystic truth, as

fundamentally contained in *Stages* and *Food*, seems to be the chief lesson that Naimy has been able to teach in his later writings and to expound to the world in various literary forms.

What real additional contribution and novelty Naimy seems to have been able to offer in the subsequent part of his literary career lies not so much in the body of thought expressed as in the particular literary art through which the body of thought is presented. And this on the whole is to be mainly sought in those works of his that have, unlike *Stages* and *Food*, departed from the essay form, particularly his biography of Kahlil Gibran[1], *Liqā'*, a novel[2] and *The Book of Mirdad*[3], all dealt with in subsequent chapters. The greater part of his other works up to 1960, like *Stages* and *Food*, consist of collections of short essays and talks originally written for various Arab magazines, papers and broadcasting stations or delivered at different academic institutions, and can on the whole be described as variations and elaborations on the theme already made familiar. In practically all of them, Naimy, like one of the Biblical prophets, speaks in the tone of a spiritual teacher and seer, fully possessed of the ultimate truth and inwardly called upon to lecture to a world that has insanely and catastrophically departed from the life of the spirit - the only true life that there can be - on the way to sanity and salvation. His utterings are saturated throughout with an intense feeling that, wholly engaged on attending to the material side of man's nature to the neglect of the divine, the entire world of modern civilisation is doomed to perdition and self-annihilation and disaster. This intense feeling specially prevails in a series of twenty-six talks, mostly written during the Second World War and transmitted through the Lebanese Broadcasting Station, then Radio Orient. These, published in book form in Beirut in 1945, under the title of *Threshing Floors* (البيادر) constituted the first collection to appear after *Food*.

1. *Gubrān Khalil Gubrān*, Beirut, 1934.
2. Beirut, 1946.
3. Beirut, 1948.

In "Tomorrow the War Ends" (غداً تنتهي الحرب)[1], inspired in 1945 by the prospect of the war drawing to an end, Naimy meets the rising hopes of humanity of a coming world of peace, by emphatically insisting that the war about to end is only an introduction to more and more devastating wars to come. It is only a link in a chain that stretches from the past and is bound to stretch far into the future. Wars are not simply isolated accidents that menace human society from time to time, but are phenomena that follow from the very definition of the sort of life man is and has been leading from the beginning of history. So long as the aggrandisement and the satisfaction of man's physical existence remain the main driving force behind human activity, society is bound to be constantly shattered by intersecting goals and interests that are as numerous as the number of individuals of which it is constituted, and men necessarily find themselves in a state of perpetual warfare of multifarious types and forms: "wars of the fathers and the sons.. the producers and the consumers, the vendors and the buyers, the landlords and the tenants.. the employers and the employees, the hungry and the replete, the judges, the solicitors and the litigants.. wars of the ruler and the ruled, the oppressor and the oppressed.. the believer and the atheist.. wars of political conferences, of temperaments, ideas and conventions.. wars of eyes, tongues and pens..." etc. etc[2]. That only when the conflict at times arrives at a more obvious degree of intensity people call it war, does not therefore mean, Naimy claims, that human society was first at peace or that it can hope for a peace to come. To arrive at a perpetual peace, human society must change the very ideological foundation on which it rests[3]. Only an enlightend faith that God is the origin as well as the ultimate destiny of man, can provide human society in all its multifarious functions with a sense of direction and a unified and all-unifying purpose. In the light of such faith, humanity realises that nothing which is disadvantageous to one man or group or nation can

1. *Threshing Floors*, fourth edition, Beirut, 1960, p. 217.
2. *Threshing Floors*, p. 219.
3. See "The Defeat" (الهزيمة), *Threshing Floors*, p. 80.

possibly be advantageous to another man or group or nation, and that any move or thought or action which is designed for other than the purpose of helping man to rise above the animalistic, the earthly and the corporeal, and come closer to his original godly image, which is his ultimate salvation, is bound to be a stumbling block for both doer and sufferer alike. "Every struggle carried on by men in the name of whatever country other than that country [the state of becoming one with God], or a purpose other than the purpose of getting emancipated from the alienation of exile [state of being away from God], or a pleasure other than the pleasure of beholding the face of truth, is in fact a human defeat in which the lot of both victor or vanquished, gainer or loser, is one and the same"[1].

In "The Twins: The East and The West" (التوأمان : الشرق والغرب) which, in so far as length as well as general theme are concerned, seems to be not only the major essay in the whole collection but also the expression in outline of the major thoughts reiterated again and again in Naimy's subsequent collections, Naimy speaks of the East - the cradle of all revealed religions - as having been the first to provide humanity with the guiding light of visionary truth and to set its eyes on the right goal which man is destined to reach. Having been able to realise through inner vision that behind the visible world of flux is an imperceptible all-pervading eternal principle, and that beneath the corporeal spatiotemporal structure of man is an indestructible soul or unifying principle, the East never tired of preaching through its age-old seers that the human soul is a spark of God, that man in his temporal existence is only a God in exile, and that humanity's indefatigable efforts acquire meaning and value only in the extent to which they are dedicated to the sole purpose of bringing man to spiritual maturity, whereby he is able to overcome his physical limitations and regain his divine status.

What the prophetic seers of the East could see through inner vision — the supreme human faculty — the common herd, Naimy emphasises,

1. *Threshing Floors*, p. 81.

living on the leviel of sense perception, had failed to visualise. No sooner, therefore, had the religions of the East reached the crowds than their central visionary light was dimmed and they were transformed into routine practices and rigid dogmas. Consequently, Eastern attempts to found human society on the living faith and to lead it through vision to its appropriate destiny, eventually gave way. Eastern civilisations lost their original inner meaning as they rose, and one by one they gradually dwindled and decayed. It is as though humanity, whose spiritual awakening was yet in its infancy, was unable to keep pace with the soaring vision of a Christ, a Buddha, or a Laotzu and was more at home with the materially tangible and empirically verifiable.

The Eastern thesis therefore gave way before the Western antithesis. With the ebb of an Eastern spiritualism, set on leading humanity in the light of visionary truth to its ultimate destiny in the world above, came the flow of a materialistic Western civilisation, based on the rationally tenable and empirically verifiable, and primarily set on making man at home in the world below. Here reason has replaced vision, science has taken the place of religion and the body has gained primary importance over the soul. Through a civilisation primarily based on science, industry and technology, man soon succeeded in spreading his domain over much of physical nature and in broadening his physical dimensions through his inumerable modern inventions beyond even the most ambitious of his ancient dreams. What Western civilisation, however, having now swept all over the world, has not been able to do, nor will, by its very definition, be able to do, is that, having released through science great reservoirs of power in physical nature and put them at the disposal of man, making him the unchallenged master in the world in which he lives, it has at the same time failed to effect in him a corresponding spiritual growth that can provide him with a sense of ultimate purpose. Unable by definition to provide man with a purpose other than and beyond itself, science has created a civilisation in which, the craving for more and more physical power for the achievement of greater and greater material expansion and vice versa, has become an

end in itself. Men, therefore, have found themselves inescapably drawn to what seems to be an endless as well as a futile competition with an ever accelerating ferocity and means of mutual destruction. With the horrid experiences of two devastating world wars, and the prospect of a third to come, the whole world of modern man, operating in the absence of any supreme guiding principle and, consequently, driven to a state of self destruction, has virtually become, Naimy asserts once and again, "a straw in the wind"[1], "a world that has gone insane"[2].

For the present world — the child of Western civilisation — to cease being the victim of its own scientific genius and avert its ultimate disaster, it should complement the great physical forces released by science and put at the disposal of man through technology and industry, with a sense of a higher purpose, a final end towards which those forces are to be motivated. Such higher purpose and final end can only be seen through a comprehensive understanding of man's primordial concern to know who he is, from where he first came into being and to where he is finally destined to arrive. The answers to these primordial questions, in the light of which alone the ultimate value of any human activity in life can be assessed, lie beyond the scope of reason and science, and consequently beyond anything that Western civilisation, fundamentally based on reason and science, can offer. Only the human heart, equipped with intuition and vision, can pierce through the rationally tenable and scientifically verifiable and provide man, through faith, with his long cherished answers.

The West, one of humanity's twins, has therefore, in Naimy's view, enriched human life in bulk but not in value, in power but not in meaning,

1. *A Staraw In The Wind* (في مهب الريح) as used in the present context, provides the name as well as the main theme of a subsequent collection of talks and essays by Naimy, mainly written between 1950 and 1953 and first published in book form in Beirut, 1953. It also is the title of the opening talk in that collection delivered on 31 January, 1952 at Al-Maqâsid al-Islâmiyyah in Beirut.
2. See the essay "A World That Has Gone Insane"(عالم جن جنونه) in *Light and Darkness* (النور و الديجور), another collection of talks and essays by Naimy, written betwen 1948 and 1950 and first published in book form in Beirut, 1950.

and in expediency but not in purpose. No wonder, therefore, that the more Western civilisation approaches its climax, the nearer it comes to its own self destruction.

Naimy concludes his essay with what sounds like a prophecy, to the effect that Western civilisation has exhausted its potentialities and its role is coming to a close. Gradually, world leadership will again shift to the East, humanity's other twin — the East of intuition, vision and faith. The message of the East will consist in subjugating reason to faith, science to intuition, and the material and temporal in human life to the spiritual and eternal. In this it will not be dismissing the findings of Western civilisation but supplementing them with a purpose, the purpose of utilising science, technology and industry, together with all the forces and capabilities with which man is equipped, not as mighty instruments in the devastating conflict among men over the possession of the material world, but as means of liberating humanity as a whole from its material and physical limitations and handicaps, in a drive towards the spiritual emancipation of man and his final reunion with God. In redirecting men's eyes to the one supreme common goal, which they are all by nature destined to seek as Gods in exile, the leadership of the East will by definition eventually culminate in a civilisation of human brotherhood in which there can be no place for enmity, hatred and discord. As Gods in exile, men would live up to the divine bond that ties each to each as brothers in arms against one common enemy, which is human bondage, and for the achievement of one common victory, which is the final emancipation of man from the prison of his spatiotemporal existence.

The theme, as well as the logic of "The Twins: The East and The West" in *Threshing Floors*, is kept up, even to the point of redundancy at times, throughout the major essays and talks in Naimy's subsequent collections from *Voice of The World* (صوت العالم)[1], through *Light and Darkness* and *A Straw In The Wind* to *Roads* (دروب)[2], not excluding *The Idols* (الأوثان), a

1. First published in Cairo, 1948.
2. First published in Beirut, 1954.

booklet containing one long essay in eight parts written in one stretch and published in Beirut, 1946. In *Voice of The World* alone, the thesis that Western civilisation, based on reason and science and the symbol of modern life in all its manifestations, has played itself out, and that the world, having arrived at an alarming state of turbulence and perdition, awaits the guidance of a visionary faith which the East by nature is destined to provide, is repeated with only subsidiary variations in four major essays, namely: "Voice of the World", a title essay, "The Civilisation of Reason and the Civilisation of Vision" (مدنية العقل ومدنية الخيال) "The Story of the East and the West" (حكاية الشرق والغرب) and "Where To?" (إلى أين ؟). This is not to mention the greater number of the remaining essays whether in *Voice of The World* or in the other collections which are invariably dedicated either to the depiction and condemnation of one aspect or another of modern life and civilisation, or to the further elaboration on one point or another of the proposed spiritual message, the outlines of which have already been made familiar, and in the light of which the East, Naimy expects, is destined to lead the world. It would, therefore, seem unnecessary at the present stage of this work, to go through each of the above-mentioned books. Having attempted in this chapter to come out with the basic framework of Naimy's thought at this stage of his career, we shall, as we proceed only pick on those talks and essays that can genuinely add to the picture and consequently to the two main questions that now seem to come to the foreground. Granted, in the light of Naimy's thought, that Western civilisation, based on reason, science and technology, is not by itself the right answer to man's ultimate need in life, and that human salvation lies in its being supplemented by the East, with the guiding light of a supreme faith based on visionary truth, the question arises as to what East does Naimy have in mind? And, secondly, what in the logic of his own thinking drives him to his much repeated prophecy that the Eastern spiritual leadership is now bound to come and, may be, within the next generation or two, as one may conclude from his essay "The Story of The East and the West"[1]?

1. See *Voice of The World*, 2nd edition, Cairo 1957, p. 151.

II

In spite of the fact that Naimy never specifies in his discussion of East and West but invariably sticks to general terms, it goes without saying that the East he has in mind is certainly not the communist. This is made doubly clear in his book *Beyond Moscow and Washington* (أبعد من موسكو ومن واشنطن)[1]. Nor does he think much of the existing practices of the noncommunist East, outwardly and superficially bragging of its ancestral achievements, yet inwardly and disgracefully bent on an indiscriminate imitation and a humiliating admiration of the ways and means of Western civilisation[2].

When in his booklet, *The Idols*, Naimy speaks of the present world as a whole as a world of idol worshippers, he makes no distinction in this practice between East and West. The seven idols he discusses are, in his belief, the real worshipped Gods in the world of today, even more so by the very people who claim to be followers of the one Supreme Being[3]. The idols he individually discusses as chiefly constituting the Gods of present-day society, Eastern and Western alike, are: Money المال, Power القوة, Dominion السلطان, Public Opinion الرأي العام, Nationalism القومية, The Printed Word الكلمة السوداء and Science العلم. His thesis throughout is that instead of these being used as means to further the cause of man in his primordial struggle to realise himself and his fellow men in God, they have become final ends at the hands of modern society. Man has become the servant and slave of the very idols he himself has created. We shall in passing give his main ideas on six of these so-called idols, his views regarding science having already become familiar.

1. Beirut, 1957.
2. Special reference in this respect can be made to whole passages in the essays, "An Intuitive East and a Visualising West" (شرق بصير وغرب مبصر), *Threshing Floors*, 4th edition, p. 142; "Voice of The World", *Voice of the World*, 2nd edition, pp. 24—27; "A Straw In The Wind", *A Straw In The Wind*, 2nd edition, pp. 19—24.
3. See the preface to *The Idols*.

Money, he believes, essentially an expedient symbol indicating the value of what contribution in labour man adds to the common human wealth, has, paradoxically enough, taken the place of labour as a criterion of value. Consequently, instead of assigning what value money should hold, man himself has come to be evaluated through money. Hence is the feverish race the world over, not after additional contributions to the common wealth of humanity but in pursuit of the individual acquisition of greater and greater value through the accumulation of greater and greater capital. Therefore has the tragic and utterly disgraceful situation arisen whereby, one man at times should become worth a thousand men, even a million, taking for himself alone what should otherwise be the share of others in the common human wealth, while millions of others are left with not even a single share and are evaluated as so many zeros to the left[1].

The same logic with which Naimy treats Money, he applies to Power and Dominion. Power of whatever kind, whose essential worth lies in the extent to which it can rid human society of weakness and fear and help it in its quest for higher and higher degrees of liberty, freedom and happiness, has come to be regarded as an absolute value feverishly sought by individuals, groups or nations precisely for the purpose of implanting fear and timidity in other individuals, groups or nations. Therefore does the world ever find itself divided into warring camps that constantly live in an atmosphere of terror.

Dominion, on the other hand, is only power monopolised and disguised under the name of delegated authority. Ruling bodies, so keen on safeguarding their monopolised power, their worshipped idol, are ever careful to give it an air of sanctity. When the figment of ruling by divine right was exhausted, it was replaced by an equally fictitious yet equally sanctified theory of ruling by the will of the people. This, Naimy claims, has led to the creation of another worshipped idol of modern times, which is public opinion[2]. Public opinion is a fiction, simply because it is non-existent. "When",

1. See *The Idols*, 2nd edition, Beirut 1958, p. 16.
2. See "The Public Opinion", Ibid. p. 32.

claims Naimy, "have the general public been more than herds that are as easily driven to the slaughterhouse as to the pastures"[1] and that can be made to cater for the crucifixion of a Christ as readily as they are made to clap for a Pontius Pilate? It is the men in power and their various beneficiaries who are the fabricators of public opinion or will, through which they are where they are. It is their real interest, therefore, to make the public believe that they have a will, that that will is sacred and that they are its living embodiment. Hence comes one of humanity's most nurtured and most worshipped idol of the present time, which is nationalism. In what light, Naimy argues, other than the narrow greedy interests by the dominating few, can one see the world still divided into conflicting and mutually exclusive national blocks, at a time when the natural course of life, is every day weaving the whole people of the world into one single interdependent community?

Naimy's sixth idol is the Printed Word. To him the printed word is something holy in that it is the greatest organ at the disposal of modern man for the establishment of truth. It is, if rightly and conscientiously applied, the most effective means in elevating man and leading him from the animalistic state in which he presently is, to the God that he is destined to become. But, claims Naimy, in a society where the worship of idols has replaced the worship of truth, the printed word has been turned into an instrument of make-believe. It is not so much used to propagate truth as it is to make truth subservient to propaganda. Hence it is widely and wildly exploited by the various leading self-centred institutions, whether commercial, industrial, political, scientific or religious, primarily keen on making people believe in what they have to offer, irrespective of whether that which they offer is inspired by the right belief.

That nationalism is included among the idols and is boldly described as being "no more than a hollow skeleton"[2], is a clear indication that the promised East which Naimy has in mind is certainly not the present East

1. *The Idols* p. 34.
2. Ibid. p. 39.

of vigorously rising nationalisms. Much less, in spite of Naimy's spiritualism or, more precisely, because of his thorough-going spiritualism, is it the East of existing religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. Much as he is wholly devoted to the lives and inner concepts of Laotzu, Buddha and Christ[1], who constitute, as must have become quite apparent, the mainspring of his thought as well as inspire his attitude towards the materially sophisticated human society, he is totally adverse to the various churches and religious institutions of modern times which, to him, are rigid dogmas in which the inner light of the original messages for which they claim to stand, has long been extinguished.

"My firm belief", he emphatically claims, "is that the reviving East can rescue the world from disaster if it only knows how to liberate itself from the fetters of rigid dogmas and how to derive power and guidance from its great teachers"[2]. The Arab world on the whole, still fanatically clinging to its various churches and religious practices, whether Moslem, Christian or Jew, he dismisses as a world whose religion is only on its tongue[3]. "I know of no country", he says, "where religion has so flourished on the lips and so dried up in the heart as is the case in this country"[4].

Neither the communist East, therefore, nor the East of rising nationalisms and social development on Western lines, nor the East of present churches and prevailing religions, is the one destined in Naimy's mind, for the proposed coming leadership. To him, beneath all this facade, lurks a dormant absolute and universal truth which has, again and again in history, been captured by various Eastern seers of soaring imagination and vision and which has again and again sunk into oblivion at the hands of the

1. Specially significant in this respect is his long essay "Three Faces" comprising "The Face of Laotzu", "The Face of Buddha", and "The Face of Christ", *Stages* pp. 5—52.
2. From the essay "The Message of the Reviving East" (رسالة الشرق المتجدد), *Roads*, 2nd edition, p. 16.
3. See the talk "A Country whose Religion is on its Lips" (بلاد دينها في فمها) *Threshing Floors*.
4. Ibid. p. 129.

crowds, whose vision was still in its infancy and who still lived on the level of sense perception. Visionary by nature, and consequently inexpressible, this one universal truth, though captured by the Eastern seers, could only be approximated by their words. Therefore can their lives and teachings be only regarded as various approximations of the one and the same reality with which they were in communion.

In translating the truth of one religion into the other, Naimy argues that the one supreme God conceived by Moses, is the same approximation of the One Absolute Allah conceived by Mohammad, while both are echoes of the Atman in the Upanishad of Hinduism, of the World Soul preached by Buddha, the Tao of Laotzu and the Heavenly Father of Christ.[1] "The self same Nirvana", he says, "is what Christ calls the Kingdom of God and Mohammad calls Paradise"[2]. What obvious differences there are between these various concepts, Naimy seems to dismiss as belonging to the letter expressing the truth, rather than to the truth conceived. Hence is his grouping together in his essay "Faces"[3] of the countenance of Laotzu, the countenance of Buddha and the countenance of Christ as representing the one and the same truth which they individually preached. His attempted interpretation of Christ's teachings regarding the facing of evil with good in this essay, puts Jesus in perfect line with the Buddhist doctrine of Karma, which stretches the law that action and reaction are equal and opposite, to the moral realm. Jesus is reported to mean that an evil action creates an equal and opposite evil reaction and that the only way therefore to neutralise evil and hence, overcome it, is to face it with good[4].

This leads Naimy to an equally Buddhistic interpretation of Christ's teachings regarding God, Heaven and Hell and the Day of Judgement,

1. See "The Civilisation of Reason and the Civilisation of Vision" in *Voice of The World*, 2nd edition.
2. From the essay "The First and Last Resort" (الملاذ الأول و الأخير) *Roads*, 2nd edition, p. 33.
3. *Stages*, pp. 5—52.
4. *Stages*, pp. 29—30.

which makes him reject the common orthodox Christian doctrine. In speaking of God as the Father of all, the only source of life and the One whose power fills heaven and earth, Christ is taken by Naimy to be referring to the World Soul, from which everything issues and to which everything returns but which itself remains one and eternal[1]. Hell is understood to signify an accompanying state of suffering to man's present estrangement from God and attachment to the world of physical existence. Hence are Christ's teachings against the enticements of the world. Heaven is a nirvanic spiritual state arrived at through the soul's emancipation from the physical and the material, and its final reunion with God[2]. Christ the Son of Man is human, born of a human father and a human mother[3]. His crucifixion is the last link in his life-long struggle through self-negation and spiritual elevation, against earthly bondage. His resurrection is his final spiritual emancipation from earthly bondage, from the human to the divine, and consequently his absolute victory over death.

By achieving Godhood through the humiliation and the rejection of the material and the physical, Christ, the human being, has given a living demonstration of how all human souls in physical and earthly captivity, can find their way back to the World Soul, to God their Kingdom of Heaven. It is in this largely Buddhistic and Taoistic light, that Naimy chooses to understand Christ's assurances that He is the Path, the Truth and the Life, and that none can come to the Father save through Him[4]. Therefore, Naimy, understands the Day of Judgement not to be a day but a sort of continuous Karmic phenomena, whereby the emancipated souls (the sheep) accordingly rejoin the great sea of Being, becoming one with God, while others (the goats), still devoted to the world of earthly existence, are drawn back by their lower attachments and reincarnated again and again

1. *Stages*, pp. 38—39.
2. Ibid. pp. 38—42.
3. Ibid. p. 40.
4. Ibid. pp. 38—39.

in that world wherein is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" until they are finally purged[1].

Not only does Naimy believe that Christ, Buddha, Laotzu and even Moses and Mohammad are only different visionary seers of one and the same Eastern truth which they tried to approximate in words, and that the Gospels can serve as the key, as he approvingly reports that Gandhi had actually experienced, to the Bhagavad Gita[2], but that the same truth also must have been captured by other Eastern civilisations as remote as the Assyrian, the Babylonian and the Egyptian, as can be seen from their various attempts to give it expression in some of their extant monuments and literature. The Sphinx, Naimy is confident, can only have been created by people who were aware that man, based in the beast and the unintelligent, is destined to evolve into a state of pure intelligence. The pyramids must have symbolised in the understanding of their builders what is the gradual dissolution of the material, the physical and finite into the immaterial, the spiritual and infinite[3].

The Egyptian God Raa in the *Book of the Dead*, Naimy believes, stands for more than the sun, as is usually claimed. To people highly learned, especially in astronomy, as the Egyptians are believed to have been, the sun could not have constituted a God. On the contrary, the sun itself, one of the most generous sources of warmth, light and life in the world, must have been taken by such imaginative people as the Egyptians, as a perceivable symbol of the imperceptual, absolute and all-comprehensive Raa[4].

1. *Stages*, pp. 41—42. Naimy's belief in reincarnation and in the purgatorial nature and ultimate purpose of man's life on earth is justified at greater length in such essays as "The Urge for Being" (مهماز البقاء) in *Voice of The World* and "Light and Darkness, in *Light and Darkness*.
2. See the essay "Ghandi — The Awakened Conscience of the East" (غاندي ضمير الشرق المستيقظ) in *A Straw in the Wind*.
3. See the essay "The Civilisation of Reason and the Civilisation of Vision" in *Voice of The World*.
4. See the essay "The Phoenix Bird" (طائر الفينيكس) in *Voice of The World*.

The fable of the Phoenix bird, known in one version or another to almost all ancient civilisations in the East, is another expression of the Eastern faith, in which death is the gate to life and that only in burning or crucifying or negating the mortal, the temporal and the finite in oneself, can one attain resurrection in the immortal, the eternal and infinite[1].

It can therefore be concluded that the particular East conceived by Naimy as being destined for the right leadership of humanity, is not the East of particular existing or extinct beliefs or religious doctrines. For all these, in his reckoning, are or were hazy manifestations of an indescribable transcendental truth which the visionary East has from time to time been able to capture, but of which it could at best give an approximate expression. The East destined to lead the world, therefore, is not the one that shall fall back on Islam or Christianity or Hinduism and the rest — for falling on the expression will end, as it has always done in history, in missing the truth expressed — but the East that will again take to vision and bring itself, as well as the rest of the world, in all aspects of life into direct and constant communion with the very truth itself which has inspired Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity and the rest.

III

It is nowhere made quite clear in Naimy's writings as to how the East shall play its role in practice. Though he sounds clear about the message which the East is to carry yet, when coming to touch upon the means through which it is to be realised, he instantly lapses into the poetic, the figurative and the allegorical. A conspicuous instance of this, which can be taken as fairly representative, is the highly worded ending to one of his essays where he says[2], "I can see the vision of the East dawning

1. See "The Phoenix Bird" in *Voice of the World.*
2. *Voice of The World*, pp. 58—59.

upon the world anew. He who shall bear its torch, is a prophet bearing the srength of the earth in his legs, the might of heaven in his arms, the glow of truth in his eyes, the tranquillity of understanding in his tongue, and the sweetness of love in his heart".

"And he shall go among men East and West and shall be followed by even some of those who still cling to reason and its sense objects, while many of those reckoning to have arrived at the head of the Sphinx[1], while being, in truth, still at the tail, shall take to flight".

"This prophet shall bear his heart upon his palm as food for whoever is hungry. Therefore shall they eat of it in the West and get poisoned, and shall take of it in the East and live. And he shall not be crucified".

Vague, romantic and allegorical as it sounds in the above quotation, the idea of an inspired human Messiah, incarnate of the eternal truth, who will suddenly emerge from the unexpected, or, rather, the least expected, and direct the whole misguided world, wholly possessed by the unusual magnetism of his mystic character and of the irresistible power and charm of the truth in his words, in the road to true understanding and salvation, seems, nonetheless, to be seriously taken by Naimy. Its parentage, however, is in the very classical East from which Naimy draws his inspiration. It runs from Laotzu, Budda and the Indian Brahman to Christ and the Biblical prophets, to Mohammad, not to mention such other ideas as the expected Mahdi (المهدي المنتظر) in Shi'ite sects "who is to fill the world with goodness and righteousness after it has been filled with evil and injustice" (الذي يملأ الأرض عدلا كما ملئت جوراً).

It is in line with this literature that Naimy readily sees in a man's life — Gandhi's, for instance, in his passive and out of the ordinary way of leader ship — the conscience of the East, as he calls it, in its first awakening; an awakening which testifies that the whole world is soon to enter the dawn of a new era[2].

1. Alluding to his own interpretation of the Sphinx as a symbol; see above p. 237.
2. See "Gandhi — The Awakened Conscience of the East" in *Voice of The World.*

Naimy, though primarily forecasting the near coming into the world of a Messianic Eastern leadership, is also unable himself in his collected talks and essays from *Stages* up to *Roads* to avoid the Biblical tone. Not only is this true of the ideological content of these talks but also of their whole approach, Nowhere does Naimy, in his essays, try to enter modern society and reform it from within and from the level on which it stands. He aims instead, in the tradition of Eastern prophecy, at transforming it in accordance with an external and apriori conceived spiritual moral doctrine which he holds and whose main claim to universality and unquestionable truth, is that it is supra-rational and supra-rationally conceived.

We find ourselves aware throughout that his underlying thesis is an outright dismissal, as in the attitudes of Biblical prophets, of the whole existing society in all its multifarious institutions and practices, whether economic, political, social or religious, as being totally in the wrong, as being helplessly doomed to disaster. "If you now ask me about modern civilisation whither is it destined", says he in what fairly summarises his basic approach, "I would answer you without hesitation: to the bottomless pit"[1]. Therefore does he sound throughout like the Eastern, and particularly Biblical prophets, pouring his wrath, on the one hand, on a society that has helplessly gone astray and offering it through his teaching, on the other, its only alternative route to redemption and salvation. Like the prophets, he addresses himself in his talks and essays, irrespective of the particular occasion or even the subject on which and for which he is talking or writing, to human society at large and is quick, no matter how particular and local the subject at hand may be, to slip into its universal implications, where it becomes easy for him to fit it into his moral and ideological system.

Addressing the Y.M.C.A. in Jerusalem in 1935, for instance[2], he instantly embarks, after giving a brief account of what the city meant for him as a visitor and as an admirer of the whole culture for which it stands,

1. From "Where to?" in *Voice of The World*, p. 166.
2. See "The Peace of God and the Peace of Men" in *Food*.

in history, on the Hebrew name Yerushālam — City of Peace. From here, his way is open to discuss war and peace in their absolute meanings and to launch his attack on the existing human society as a whole, which is ever seeking peace yet ever engaged in war. Human society has not yet learned that the only war wortly of man, is the war of the human in him against the beast, and that the only real peace that man can achieve, is his final emancipation from the corporeal and his reunion with God, who alone constitutes man's eternal Yerushālam.

This approach often takes a complete parabolic form where the affinity between Naimy as a teacher and the Biblical prophets, especially Christ, becomes extremely sharp. Fairly representative in this direction is his talk "Threshing Floors"[1], whence his collection of that name derives its title. After giving a vivid and lively description of threshing floors in Mt. Lebanon and of the various activities of threshing, sifting, sieving etc. that take place thereon, he moves on to speak of Life as a threshing floor and of the workings of Life as the hands of divine providence ever operating on man, an ear bearing the divine seed, "with the purpose of emancipating the grain imprisoned in the husks and of unveiling the essence screened by the external skin"[2]. Just as the ear of wheat is destined by life to serve as a temporary shelter for the infant seed until it becomes as mature as the mother seed that first gave it birth, so is the human body and all the physical world of time and place to which it belongs, only a temporary shelter for the human soul from which, like the grain of wheat, it is destined to emancipate and regain its divine status with God as soon as it achieves spiritual maturity. The quicker man achieves that maturity, the sooner he is emancipated; and the more readily he takes to self-negation, to the shedding of his bodily attachments and earthly desires, the less exposed he becomes to the various threshing, sifting and sieving experiences of life, which are the pains and afflictions of earthly existence and reincarnation therein.

1. Delivered from Beirut Radio, December 20, 1942.
2. *Threshing Floors*, 4th edition, p. 110.

All this, coupled with an extremely lucid, sharply-cut and simple language, saturated with poetry and charged throughout with a marked tone of authority, gives Naimy's teachings an air of prophecy and marks Naimy, the writer and teacher, as a believer not only in the Eastern prophetic truth but also in the prophetic manner of delivery.

Al-'Aqqād, in a critical essay on Stages, justly classifies Naimy's style and that of Nietzsche in *Zarathustra* in one group in so far as the Biblical tone and prophetic manner of expression are concerned[1]. Another, Fādil Nimr, carried away by a series of talks conducted by Naimy in Palestine, 1935 and included in *Food*, cables from Bethlehem to the president of the Literary Club in Nazareth, where Naimy was attending a big reception held in his honour, saying: "Naimy left Nazareth as a student, but has now come back as a Messenger and a Prophet". (خرج الأستاذ نعيمه من الناصرة تلميذاً وعاد إليها رسولا ونبياً)[2]. Mahjūb bin Mīlād, at present the best-known Tunisian essayist and critic, acclaims Naimy in his essay writings, as the incarnate spirit of the immortal East[3].

IV

Naimy's thorough devotion and dedication to the Eastern prophetic approach, however, comes to its clearest manifestation during this latter part of his career, in the few of his writings that bear a fictional character. As an essayist and a lecturer, he could only write and preach the Messianic truth in whaterver prophetic tone and style he was capable of, but the Messiah himself had always to be missing. Fiction, therefore,

1. al-'Aqqād, 'Abbās, Review of *al-Marāhil: Siyāhāt fi Zawāhir al-Hayāt wa Bawātiniha* by Mikhail Naimy, *al-Jihād*, February 21, 1933.
2. The telegram, dated 31 March 1935, is in the possession of the present writer.
3. See his article "Mikhail Naimy, or the Resurrected Wisdom of The East". (ميخائيل نعيمه أو حكمة الشرق تبعث) in *al-Fikr*, monthly, April, 1957.

seems to have afforded him a greater freedom to present the reader with both the Messiah and the mission and to paint as actual what in his mind and soul was only an object of earnest aspiration.

It is not the intention at this stage to attempt a study of Naimy's *The Book of Mirdad*[1], a philosophic novel more or less similar in form and style to Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, though it is the best illustrative instance of the point under discussion. A more detailed account of the book is reserved for a subsequent chapter[2]. Sufficient to say for the moment, that Mirdad, the central character in the book, is the fulfilment of Naimy's concept of a prophet, who is the incarnation of the eternal truth and who acts through the magnetism of his mystic character and through the dynamism of the visionary truth he preaches, as the tempest that takes the world by surprise, tearing down from men's hearts and minds the veils of ignorance and deception that enslave them to the material and spatiotemporal, and setting them back on the road to true understanding and final emancipation.

Mirdad the prophet in the book, takes over from Naimy the lecturer and essayist. The Biblical tone of the language and the categorical way of expression, together with the accompanying prophetic authority that runs throughout, gain a more natural setting. Mirdad is a Christ, but a Christ after Naimy's heart, in whom the faces of Jesus, Buddha and Laotzu, together with the Gospels, the Bhagavad Gita and the Tao-Teh-King are made one and indistinguishable. He first appears, as if from nowhere, as a humble beggar seeking refuge in an extremely rich and old monastery that traces its history back to the days of the Flood and claims to be founded by Noah's son, Sam on the very peak on which the ark had landed. Gradually, Mirdad begins to unveil himself. The monks, hesitant at first, are taken at last by the magnetism of his character and the power of his teaching, of which the book serves as a record. Finally, the monks, fully saturated, like

1. Originally conceived and written in English in 1946—7 and first published in Beirut, 1948.
2. See Chapter X below.

the disciples of Christ, with the new message, distribute all the monastery's lands and riches among the poor tenants and, with their teacher, leave the monastery and come down from the peak to the world where they are to act as the yeast in the fermenting of a new civilisation to come.

Just as the various teachings, or better, sermons of Mirdad to the monks, saturated throughout with Eastern theosophy, are no more in essence than the essays and talks of Naimy fitted through fiction into a prophetic setting, so also are the few short stories he wrote for various Arab magazines between 1940 and 1959. These were collected in two volumes and first published in Beirut, one in 1956 under the title of *Highbrows* (Akābir) and the other in 1959 under the title of *Abu Battah* (The Man With The Fat Calf).

In these stories, and under the impact of his Messianic doctrine in which he has become fully asbsorbed, Naimy on the whole, seems to be no more able, or perhaps willing, as was his practice in *Once Upon A Time* twenty years earlier, to let the incidents speak for themselves or even less, to let the characters speak for themselves. We say no more willing because every story of the thirteen in *Highbrows* and the twenty in *Abu Battah* starts with a totally realistic opening, as realistic as any in Chekhov or Gorky. The characters, as well as the settings, are carefully picked from real life, the everyday and the common and are meticulously as well as vividly painted by one who can be judged as a master realist. But, as the story proceeds, Naimy's obsession with the mystical idea that the perceptual is only a manifestation of an eternal imperceptual principle, and that the visible is only a moving shadow of the visionary, soon intervenes, and the hitherto realistic and natural setting gradually lends itself to the supernatural, and the hitherto ordinary and common characters with great realistic potentialities are actualised in the unexpected, the mysterious and the visionary.

An excellent illustration in this direction is the story "A Nail-Paring" (قلامة ظفر) in *Abu Battah*[1]. The story introduces us to a little shabby

1. "A Nail-Paring" is also among twelve others of Naimy's Arabic stories which have been translated by him into English and published in one volume by The Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore, India, 1957, under the title of *Till We Meet*.

shop in the slum area of the city, (presumably Beirut), which specialises in the making and selling of belts. The author comes there on a mission. A village neighbour of his, happening to learn that he is going down to the city for the day, asks him if he would kindly have a wooden belt-tuckle made in that shop for her young daughter's dress. This he is supposed to bring back with him in the evening.

The cramped, filthy shop with its dusty shelves cluttered with an all bewildering variety of rust-eaten hardware, together with the solitary lean and bespectacled shopkeeper, leaning over his overworked table wholly absorbed in his work, are all painted with a masterly and strikingly vivid realism.

Gradually, the prophetic in the story intervenes, emerging where it is least expected: from the shopkeeper. "Is your time of gold?" he first questions the author curtly, and upon receiving his dry negative answer, he bids him come in two hours for his buckle.

This is repeated several times during the day, until, finally, coming for the fourth time to his repeatedly put off appointment and fully prepared to make a scene, the author finds the man, to his exceeding fury, sitting quietly behind his table and trimming, not the buckle, but his fingernails. Instead of responding to the author's unleashed anger, the man meets it with a broad smile and invites him to a chair and a pair of scissors, explaining that he would like him to trim his nails as well before he can give him the buckle and let him go. The author bitterly answers that his fingernails are well taken care of.

What follows is a double-levelled conversation in which the shopkeeper gradually unfolds the meaning of his mysterious behaviour to his stupefied, unimaginative and mentally surface-bound customer.

All time and all labour spent by man on other than nail-trimming, the belt-maker eagerly tries to drive home to his customer, is time and labour wasted. One may have one's fingernails well trimmed, but what of one's other nails: the nails of the eye, the mind and the heart. "... Ferocity,

blood-thirstiness, gluttony, hate, anger vengefulness and the like are nails or clowns ... Therefore must they be clipped by all who wish to be deserving of the honourable title of man"[1]. "... Impatience, too, is a nail which should be clipped. Believe me, there is nothing in the world worth being impatient about. The whole world is not worth a nail-paring; whereas a nail-paring may sometimes be worth a whole world ...[2]. "... Each paring is a witness of some sin of commission or omission I have perpetrated. And let me tell you, friend, that sins grow like nails, and if left unclipped are likely to tear our own skin and to strangle us in the end ..."[3].

Asked by the author as to why he should have chosen to reveal all these things to him, never having met him before, the prophetically illumined belt-maker answers in what is the very core of theosophy: "Sufficient for me to meet you once in order to know that I have met you times without number in the past, and shall meet you times without number in the future. One is the road we all travel; and road companions are responsible the one for the other"[4].

Practically every other story in Naimy's collections revolves, like "Nail-Paring", around a central figure or thing or idea that is first introduced as ordinary, common and relatively unimportant, but that gradually is developed through the allegorical and the grotesque into the extraordinary, the mysterious and the visionary, whence it functions as a prophetic revealer of one side or another of the Cosmic Truth.

"Yellow Teeth"[5], as a life long beggar in the village was nicknamed, suddenly appears to the author while taking a walk among the graves in Spring, and lectures him on the futility of possession and the profit of being depossessed. Having intuitively divined that he is to die within the hour,

1. *Till We Meet*, pp. 99—100.
2. Ibid. p. 100.
3. Ibid. p. 102.
4. Ibid. p. 101.
5. See the story, "Yellow Teeth" (أصفر الناب), in *Abu Battah*. The same is also included in *Till We Meet*.

Yellow Teeth speaks of all living people, rich or poor, as being beggars of one sort or another. Only he himself at that moment is no longer a beggar nor will ever be one again, for death is a passage to the world of God where one seeks nothing because one has all.

Going on foot from his farm to the nearby Conscription Office which is to send him to the war front[1], 'Abbās, on his way through the forest, suddenly comes on a man fallen helplessly to the ground with his wooden leg in splinters. The crippled man lectures him at length, and from past experience, on wars and on the insanity of the whole human civilisation that leads to it, and advises him to go back home. 'Abbās goes to fetch some help but comes back to find that the strange man has already disappeared.

In "A Passer By" (عابر سبيل)[2], the mother is bewildered to find that the picture her crippled daughter has drawn in bed of a man she claims to have seen only in her dream, is the very picture of the beggar her rich husband chased away from their door the previous evening. The beggar turns out in the story to be a mere reminder to the parents of what the Buddhist would call Distributive Karma, and to which would correspond in Naimy's Christianity such a statement as "The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge"[3]. For the daughter claims that the stranger has told her in her dream that she would recover from her chronic illness only when her parents recover from theirs [presumably their richness in wealth and poverty in love and charity]. When the father's conscience is at last awakened by his daughter's persistent weeping for the stranger, and he prepares to go and fetch him himself and make amends, the daughter is discovered to have risen to her feet and walked across the room.

The eternal doctrine of Distributive Karma has taken its unavoidable course in the family. The Beggar in the story is the mysterious clue to the

1. See the story, "Two Soldiers" (جنديان), in *Abu Battah* and also in *Till We Meet*.
2. Included in *Highbrows*.
3. *Jeremiah* XI, 29.

family's realisation of the theosophic truth that "no man can rise superior to his individual failings without lifting, be it ever so little, the whole body of which he is an integral part. In the same way, no one can sin, nor suffer the effects of sin alone"[1].

Perhaps the greatest prophetic figure in stature in Naimy's short stories is Leonardo in "Till We Meet", which serves as the title story in the English collection and which, in Arabic, is published separately as a novelette under the title of Liqā' (لقاء)[2]. Not that Leonardo differs in essence from Naimy's other heroes, acting as revealers of the absolute and the visionary screened from men's eyes by the ordinary, the relative and the perceptual, but that he differs in scope. He stands in the novel as a demonstrative instance of how it is possible for man through spiritual sublimation to be transported into a higher sphere of consciousness where he breaks loose from the wheel of time and place and, consequently, becomes beyond the reach of all things that exist therein, including death.

The theme of the story is love; but love in the sense of Diotima's explanation to Socrates in Plato's Symposium, where the philosopher lover mounts through intellectual and spiritual sublimation from union with the relative and transient beauty in the beloved to union with the absolute form of beauty which she or he manifests, and in which he is consequently immortalised.

Leonardo, a poor violinist, is asked by the innkeeper, his employer, to play on the eve of his daughter's marriage to a rich man. With his rendering of the tune "Till We Meet", he succeeds in sending Baha, the daughter, into a lasting trance from which nobody is able to make her recover. The police, al-Karrams, Baha's parents, as well as the would-be bridegroom and his friends, join hands in a desperate search for the runaway Leonardo, who is accused of magic, but are unable to find him. Only the author, also narrator of the story and a friend of the al-Karrams, comes across Leonardo

1. Blavatsky, H.P., *The Key To Theosophy*, p. 200.
2. Written in 1946 and first published during the same year in Beirut.

by accident while exploring a certain grotto in "The Virgins' Valley", a wild and rocky place which he is in the habit of frequenting for quiet, peace of mind and contemplation. In the grotto the author finds Leonardo with a reed flute and two companion foxes that play the unswerving captives of his tunes. To the mystified but yet encouragingly sympathetic and understanding author, Leonardo explains that his story with Baha goes back to a previous existence of his, ages ago, when her father was the prince of the district and he, Leonardo, was the shepherd of his flocks. She had loved him then and followed him once to the grotto in The Virgin's Valley. He had thought then that he had sufficiently sublimated his passions for the physical and is able to rise with her in love to a spiritual union in the eternal. But, playing her on his reed the tune of final emancipation, he had failed to make it wholly pure of animal passion, and the attempt had failed. Therefore both of them have been brought again to life for a second schooling, which, as the recent attempt on the eve of Baha's wedding proved, had not yet been fully accomplished.

Therefore, also, is Leonardo's coming to the Virgins' Valley, leaving Baha in her trance, not an escape from justice but an attempt through rigorous and unmolested spiritual discipline, the resultant power of which is now tested on the foxes, to purify his transporting tune through purifying himself of what streak of animal passion still lurks in it; from what is still "just a trace — a very faint one — of bestiality in Leonardo's soul"[1].

Soon after his meeting with the author, Leonardo is betrayed to the police by the gamewarden of the district and is imprisoned. The author, upon Leonardo's demand, persuades the authorities to grant him a short leave to see Baha, still in her swoon. Leonardo plays her the tune which he has by now succeeded in purifying. Baha, recovers and the two immediately fall motionless. Leonardo's age-old aim — "My aim was to become one with her beyond the bounds of time and space"[2] — is fulfilled.

1. *Till We Meet*, p. 62.
2. Ibid. p. 68.

The story, of course, meanders through sharp contrasts in situations and characters, and through a good variety of monologues and dialogues on life and death, reincarnation, reason and intuition, appearance and reality. But it all springs from and revolves around one main conviction, that all forms of life, being manifestations of one supreme life, are inter-related in a complex web beyond our full conceiving. Only those who pierce through vision the web of appearances and look back at things through the eye of life absolute, or through the eye of eternity, as Spinoza would call it, can see the complexity in full, and in it their life history, past, present and future. Those alone can work on extricating themselves, as well as others who are in a position to understand them, from the web, and on retracing their steps back to their first origin. The first condition, therefore, is to clarify the vision and put the soul in harmony. Once this is done, the road is clear. To clarify his vision, Leonardo had first to silence all the multifarious voices of the body. To put his soul in harmony he utilised music. Both done, his road to final emancipation was clear. Therefore, his body and that of Baha were no longer necessary for their continued existence. They, therefore, leave them behind at the end of the story as the true meeting is accomplished. Baha and Leonardo are finally extricated from the web.

Conceived in the light of theosophic convictions, Naimy's heroes on the whole, therefore, from Leonardo, Yellow Teeth, the belt-maker, the passer by, the unknown crippled soldier, to a host of many other lesser or greater ones that populate his short stories, live and move on two levels. As men living among men, they belong to the complex web, to the generally accepted as natural and real, and are, to begin with, painted as such. Leonardo is an ordinary violinist in the employ of an innkeeper, just as Mohammad, for instance, was an ordinary man in the employ of Khadijah, Christ the ordinary son of a carpenter, Buddha the normal son of a normal prince. The belt-maker is an ordinary shopkeeper, and Yellow Teeth is a common beggar, known all over the village. But as visionaries, those heroes live and act in the real world beyond the web. It is here that they, while acting,

speaking and behaving in accordance with the truly natural and real, prove, as Naimy is careful to make them, so different from all men, and are, for that, judged by the rest as mysterious, supernatural and impossible.

While indulging in driving his heroes from the natural to the supernatural, and from the ordinary to the mysterious, Naimy therefore still considered himself to be playing the realist, or more precisely, the true realist. His point of support is perhaps best summarised in the course of a dialogue when Leonardo exclaims to the bewildered narrator in the grotto[1], "What is not natural to you may be quite natural to another. There can be nothing unnatural or supernatural in Nature, even if it transcends the bounds of the usual and the familiar in the estimation of the eye - and ear - bound wiseacres of the world. There is nothing *impossible* in Nature".

V

It may very well be true, as Naimy believes, that there is nothing impossible in Nature, and that what is not natural to one may be quite natural to another, but this in no way denies the fact that there is such a thing as human nature, which is not necessarily natural or supernatural, moral or immoral, but simply is and exists by its own right, and which Naimy's stories under discussion seem on the whole to have ignored. In them we find the Leonardo who kills the beast in himself and finally resurrects in the world of the spirit, the shopkeeper who behaves and speaks in the manner and tongue of a redeemer, the boy who becomes the instrument for the execution of the doctrine of *Ahimsa* (non-harming)[2], the Monsieur Alphonse (المسيو ألفونس)[3], who is endowed with a sixth sense and is able to

1. *Till We Meet*, p. 66.
2. See the story "A Bird and a Man" (عصفور وإنسان) in *Highbrows*.
3. See the story by this title in both *Till We Meet* and *Abu Battah*.

foresee the coming of unprecedented events etc. etc. But no more do we see the Imm Ilyās, the Nāssīf the Sa'ādat al-Bayk, and the Shaikh Abu-Nāssīf etc. of *Fathers and Sons* and *Once Upon A Time*, who do not live because they serve a profound metaphysical truth or a moral code or a prophetic message, but who inspire one with truths, physical and metaphysical, with moral values and with lofty messages precisely because they live[1].

Closely observant at this prophetic stage of his literary career, of his unique literary credo that "... art, no matter how highly regarded by its own creator and his fellowmen, is of little value save when translated by its creator and by men into a power capable of leading them from the bounds of limited existence to the boundlessness of life — from the man in God to the God in man"[2], Naimy has become too concerned in his stories with man rising to the state of Godhood, or with the potential God that man is, to pay much attention to man who is neither this nor that but simply is himself and exists by his own right and his particular nature. It is not by accident, we believe, nor without great significance in this direction, that the first two countries to show great interest in Naimy's fictional works outside the Arab world, were India and the U.S.S.R.

Recommended by the prophetic nature of the characters in them, carefully made to move "from the man in God to the God in man", Naimy's collected translations into English of *Liqā'* (*Till We Meet*), the title story, and twelve other stories selected from *Abu Battah*, were readily published by the Indian Institute of World Culture. Attracted, on the other hand partly by Naimy's Chekhovian realism in his early stories of *Once Upon A Time*, and partly by his stress on the God that man is in those of his later stories where the immanent mystical tone is more or less shadowed by a depiction of social injustice, the Soviet Union had two collected selections from Naimy's short stories translated and published. One, in Ukrainian, entitled *Znatni (Highbrows)*[3] is a collection of nine stories selected from *Highbrows*

1. See our discussion of Naimy's early works of fiction in Chapter IV.
2. Naimy, Mikhail: *Kahlil Gibran*, a biography. p. 9.
3. Published by Derjavne Vidavnitstvo Khoudojnoi Literaturi, Kiev, 1958.

and *Once Upon A Time*, and another in Russian, entitled *Livanskie Novelli* (Lebanese Stories)[1] and is a selection of twelve stories from *Highbrows*, *Abu Battah* and *Once Upon A Time*. Seven of the stories in both collections are recurrent.

That communist Russia should find interest in some of Naimy's later stories, saturated as they are with theosophy, is explainable, we believe, on the grounds that both, wildly opposed as the doctrines they stand for may be, have at least one major thing in common. Each party is unwilling, and from its own standpoint, to recognise man in his existing conditions as something concrete, definite and final. Their eyes are set more, not on man as he is, but on what he ought not to be, on the one hand, and on what he ought and is destined to become, on the other. It is only when the stress in Naimy's stories is on what man is destined to become, as is demonstrated in *Till We Meet*, that he ideologically becomes unacceptable to the communists. None of those stories included in the Indian collection, in which the heroes creep from the ordinary to the prophetic, as in "Till We Meet", "A Nail-Paring", "Yellow Teeth", "Two Soldiers", "Monsieur Alphonse" and seven others, enter the Soviet selections. Of Naimy's later stories that have interested the Russians are those like "Highbrows" in which the stress is mostly on what man ought not to be, and where the theosophic line, though immanent, is overshadowed by a strong depiction of the sophisticated modern society which, absorbed in its own selfich needs, lives on the labour, the suffering and the deprivation of the lower and unsophisticated strata of humanity.

"Highbrows", included in both the Ukrainian and the Russian collections, tells the story of a tenant, his wife and their seven-year-old son, Rashid. All live and labour in utter poverty on the farm of an absentee landlord, a lawyer, who lives with his sophisticated wife and their spoilt little daughter, Nūnu, down in the city. Hearing that the landlord and his family are coming to arrange for their annual share of the crops, already

1. Published by Izdatelstvo Inostrannoy Literaturi, Moskva, 1959.

impoverished by that year's drought, Abu-Rashid and Imm-Rashid (Rashid's father and mother) get busy, in their anxiety, preparing a lunch worthy of the honourable visitors and tidying their shabby hut for the great occasion. They kill one of their only three hens; the rooster and the kid having been discussed as alternatives, are saved by the frantic sobbing of Rashid who is unwilling to part with his two dearest playmates. The visitors come but find it, to the mortifying embarrassment and humiliation of their hosts, below their dignity and taste to enter the hut or to eat of what Imm-Rashid has prepared. Instead, the lawyer gives the penniless Abu-Rashid an ultimatum to settle his outstanding debts to him, and departs with his family to their luxurious car. Nūnu, who had been fascinated all the while by the performances of the rooster and the kid at play with Rashid, asks her mother whether she could have them. Abu-Rashid is ordered to carry the two pets to the car. As Rashid realises what has happened, the car moves off. In tears, he frantically runs after it calling his two darlings by their chosen names, but to no avail. "And heaven", the story ends, "was hearing the cries, and the valley was repeating the echo"[1].

Taking the story as it stands, one can, of course, by-pass the theosophic, and more precisely, the Karmic, overtones of the more or less Chekhovian mufled ending and understand it on communist lines, as the communists presumably have done. The cry of Rashid for his confiscated rooster and kid would be the very cry of Abu-Rashid and Imm-Rashid and the whole innocent, deprived and cheated proletariat, against the non-working, parasitic and monstrously oppressive privileged classes. The only answer to Rashid's call would, of course, be the revolt of the proletariat.

But if the story is to be understood against the ideological and artistic background supplied in Naimy's essays and stories discussed in this and the previous chapters, it would not only be impossible to by-pass the Karmic overtones in the ending but one would also be forced to consider them as the fulcrum on which the whole story turns. In the light of such background,

1. *Highbrows*, p. 17.

the heaven, said to have been hearing Rashīd's cries, would be the all-pervading, all-containing and all-recording and retributive Law Absolute, or God or World Soul, which Naimy calls in *The Book of Mirdad*[1] "the Omniwill which neither errs in anything nor overlooks a thing". It is the law of Karma, which operates mechanically in the universe and on all levels of sentient life, and through which each action automatically invites an equal and opposite reaction. An evil-doer is ultimately punished by the very nature of his deeds, and the oppressors of Rashid and Rashīd's parents are sooner or later bound to pay the cost of their oppression in one way or another from the very substance of their life and existence — a cost as painful as the pain they have inflicted.

It is in the spirit of this Law which operates through things, but is yet beyond things and cannot be escaped, that the belt-maker in "A Nail-Paring" tells the narrator, "And let me tell you, friend, that sins grow like nails, and if left unclipped are likely to tear our own skin and to strangle us at the end"[2].

Seen in this light, therefore, the whole body of "Highbrows", the story, becomes just another of those typical, realistic introductions of Naimy's for the emergence of the mysterious at the end. The hero this time is not a person. He is not Rashīd, nor his parents, nor the landlord, but the Universal Law or Karma, which makes its appearance at the end — "and heaven was hearing the cries".

This Universal Law also plays the chief, but yet realistically concealed role in several others of Naimy's later short stories included in both the Russian and Ukrainian selections, such as "A Present" (هدية), "The Stone Breaker" (كسار الحصى) and "The Donkey's Tail" (ذنب الحمار)[3] and evidently overlooked by the communist translators.

1. See the British edition, London, 1962, p. 100.
2. *Till We Meet*, p. 102.
3. All included in *Highbrows*.

VI

Overlooked or not, however, this absolute and all-governing Universal Law, is made to constitute the very guiding light in one of Naimy's later nonfictional works for the appreciation of two major phenomena of present-day society of which, communism itself, as championed by the Soviet Union, stands for one. The other phenomenon is capitalism, as championed by the United States. The book is *Beyond Moscow and Washington* (أبعد من موسكو ومن واشنطن) writeen in 1956—57 after a month's visit to the Soviet Union in August 1956, in answer to an invitation by the Association of Soviet Writers in Moscow. This visit, it may be significant to note, was Naimy's first venture outside the Arab world since his return to Lebanon from the United States in 1932.

Leaving out those parts of the book where Naimy reports on his visit and on his past life and experiences in Russia, 1906—11, and in the United States, 1911—32, and which were later exposed at a greater length in the first two volumes of *Sab'ūn*, we are left with the first fifty-six pages in which the gist of the intended message of *Beyond Moscow and Washington* is contained.

Though the book is in no way a work of fiction, and is in every way a serious discussion in which Naimy attempts to express his own views regarding the present world situation, shattered between communism and capitalism (Moscow and Washington) to an extent that threatens the whole human race with extinction, it can, nonetheless, be conveniently and rewardingly analysed for the present purpose in conjunction, and at the same level, with the stories presently discussed, and especially "Highbrows".

If we by-pass the essay form in *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, the first fifty-six pages, — the chief part of the book, — can easily be seen, apart from a few literary allowances, as just another "Highbrows" magnified. The small farm belonging to the capitalist lawyer which constitutes the

setting in "Highbrows" becomes in *Beyond Moscow and Washington* the whole present world of modern society. The gulf between the Abu-Rashids, on the one hand, and the capitalist lawyer's family on the other, becomes the chasm between the haves and the have-nots in human society. Little Rashid and his parents in the story give place in *Beyond Moscow and Washington* to the communists, as championed by Moscow, while the lawyer and his family are replaced by capitalism, as marshalled by Washington. What in "Highbrows" stands out as the heaven which, though seemingly beyond the Abu-Rashids and the lawyer's family, is yet implied to be fully aware of what goes on between them as well as fully engaged on bringing about what appropriate retributions are to follow on both sides, is here described as the all-governing cosmic power which is beyond Moscow and Washington as two world phenomena, and which is imperceptibly but, nonetheless, fully and decisively in control of both as well as of all other phenomena in the infinite universe[1].

Up to this point the parallelism between "Highbrows" and *Beyond Moscow and Washington* is complete. What distinction the latter enjoys in this direction, however, is that its essay form has allowed a greater opportunity for elucidation and elaboration, which the story form in the former has discouraged.

Elaborating on his concept of the all-governing cosmic power[2], which in "Highbrows" figures as heaven, and which vaguely conceived by people across the ages, he believes, was called by various names, such as Jehovah, Krishna, Tao, Zeus and God[3], Naimy calls it The Universal Law (النظام الكوني)[4]. This Law governs all things big and small in the infinite universe, on the physical as well as the moral and spiritual levels, tieing each to each in an unbreakable and absolutely inescapable cause and effect relationship. "You need not be a philosopher", says Naimy, "in order to realise that you live

1. See the title chapter in *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, pp. 8—16.
2. See the chapter entitled "The Third Power" (القوة الثالثة), Ibid. pp. 45—56.
3. Ibid. p. 47.
4. Ibid. p. 48.

in a universe absolutely subject in both universals and particulars to law"[1]. Therefore, Naimy concludes, there can be nothing accidental in Nature. Whatever comes to be or passes away, can only do so in accordance with the all-prevalent Law of causality — the Universal Law (النظام الكوني). Once the cause of a thing is supplied, the effect readily follows. "Had it not been that we detect the Law in ourselves and in all that falls under our senses and within the reach of our reason and imagination, all our sciences and endeavours, and consequently our life, would have only been some kind of stupidity, or madness, or building castles in the air"[2].

Yet people, Naimy emphasises, aware of the unchallenged mastery of the Universal Law in the physical realm, are still ignorant of, or perhaps tend to ignore, its equally unfailing prevalence over the moral, spiritual and all other realms of sentient life. While they have realised that in conforming to the Universal Law in their approach to physical nature, they have more and more been able, through understanding the causes of natural phenomena, to prevail over the effects and hence becom the masters rather than slaves of nature, they have paid little attention to such conformity in their moral life. Therefore is the world of human society, whether in its sociological, economic, political, religious or other aspects, in an uncontrollable state of perpetual conflict and discord.

"How often do people sow", says Naimy, "and then forget what they have sown? But the 'Universal Law' does not forget, and returns to them the yield of what they have sown"[3]. If evil, hatred, discord etc., then the return is evil, hatred, and discord, and if good, love, peace etc., then good, love and peace.

Turning to communism and capitalism, which seem to be the two chief engineers of the present world crisis that threatens the whole human race with utter extinction, Naimy explains[4] that neither is, in truth, the cause

1. *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, p. 48.
2. Ibid. p. 51.
3. Ibid. p. 53.
4. Ibid. pp. 8—16.

of what unrest, terror, oppression, poverty, ignorance etc.etc. there is in the world of present-day society, as claimed by its opponent. Both communism and capitalism are only necessary results and not original causes. The causes are deeply rooted in the accumulated history of human society. If communism or capitalism is an evil, then to crush that evil is not to crush communism or capitalism as such, but to go back in the light of the all-governing Universal Law of cause and effect to the original evil in the human heart which has across the ages been paving the way for whatever present conditions that weigh on us, and there to crush that evil. What the world, antagonistically divided between Washington and Moscow heedless of the unshakable all-prevalent Law beyond and above the two, is doing, is to add another cause to the series of causes for the worse to come in human history.

"Therefore do people seem to be still very far from — or, say, incapable of — comprehending the Universal Law and the ethical or spiritual side of it. Therefore there shall be no stability for whatever action they bring or law they invent and neither democracy, nor capitalism, nor communism, nor any other principle or creed can go far in time without beginning to disintegrate ..."[1]. The only stable and eternal is the Universal Law through which alone man shall always be made to reap and suffer the yield of what he sows until he is finally brought to realise, through suffering, that in order not to suffer evil it is imperative that he should not do evil. In order to live in love, peace and happiness, man should first see that he does not hate, or war or engage in the creation of other people's misery, and in order to enjoy life that stretches beyond the confines of time and place, he should first subdue, master and negate the mortal part of himself — the narrow ego which lives within the confines of time and place.

The stress in *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, as must have been evident, is neither on Moscow nor on Washington, but is, as is characteristic of Naimy, on the Beyond. In his discussion, though taking an essay form,

1. *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, p. 55.

the main characteristics of his fictional works prevail. From apparently realistic introductions, he leads the reader to supra-real and supra-rational conclusions. And just as he had ignored human nature as such in his stories, and had mainly concentrated on characterising what man ought not to be and what he is destined to become, so does he nowhere, here, stop to analyse and study the nature of either communism or capitalism as it particularly exists, and tries instead to assess them both from a stand *beyond* Moscow and Washington, pointing out what they claim to be but are not and where they are destined to end, but are unaware.

Whatever the case may be, however, it is Naimy's elaboration on this stand beyond, this all-governing 'Universal Law' or God or Divine Providence, which is specially significant for the conclusion of this chapter. Not only does it now put the story "Highbrows", and especially the originally vague role of heaven introduced at the end, in perfectly clear perspective, but also sheds more light on the roles of some characters in the rest of the stories discussed. It is in the name of the 'Universal Law' that the belt maker in "A Nail-Paring", Yellow Teeth, and the crippled soldier in "Two Soldiers" come forth with their admonishments. The beggar in "A Passer By" is a personification of it, while in "Till We Meet" it is the accompanying guiding light of Leonardo in all the stages of his emancipative passage from "the man in God to the God in man".

Above all, the 'Universal Law' as conceived in *Beyond Moscow and Washington* offers, as one might detect, an excellent summary of the proposed role of the prophetic East insisted upon by Naimy in the essays discussed earlier — the role of raising modern society above communism, capitalism, democracy and the rest of its perverse systems and of putting it in touch with the Law Absolute.

CHAPTER IX

THE FLINT SLOPE

> Man's only glory lies in his gradual ascent from the human in him to the divine; from the perishable to the unperishable; from the unbeautiful to the beautiful; from delusion to Truth; from Life's dual appearances to Life's inner unity... But the way is strewn with aches, furrowed with pitfalls and shadowed with snarling passions.
>
> Naimy, *Kahlil Gibran, a biography*, p. 263

If our interpretation of Naimy's teachings in this work so far is valid, then the gist of those teachings, as must by now have become evident, is that every man is a God in embryo — a potential Christ, so to speak, and that the ultimate end of human existence is for every man to actualise the God in himself; to accomplish the hazardous ascent "strewn with aches, furrowed with pitfalls and shadowed with snarling passions", from the human in him to the divine, whence lies his final salvation. If this is not accomplished through one lifetime, then through as many as would make him, by the threshing and purgating experiences of earthly existence, realise his divine origin and thereby achieve emancipation. In other words, life and death are only purgatories, or threshing floors, and there can be no escape for man, destined for the Godward ascent, from the Golgotha, so to speak, of self-negation — the negation through spiritual sublimation, of the lower, the perceptual and the spatiotemporal self — as a prerequisite for final resurrection in the higher, the visionary and the all-time and all-space Universal Self beyond.

What is true of man as an individual is also and necessarily true of people as groups. Human society shall not be emancipated from the state of continuous turmoil, bloodshed and mutual annihilation which characterise its history past and present, until it is rescued from its egoistically and worldly inspired and motivated laws, traditions and practices, by a prophetic leadership that will reorganise it and redirect all its forces and potentialities towards the achievement of a higher motive. This motive is realising man, not in communism or capitalism or any other code or system known to human history, but in introducing him to the Universal Law "beyond Moscow and Washington", through which alone the God in him is uncovered, discovered and actualised.

Taken individually or in society, therefore, man in Naimy's teachings seems to be solitary and tragic. Tragic because he has no self-identity. At the one pole he is a God; at the other he is an animal. As a man he is neither, but is simply strained between the two. To achieve self-identity in God, he has to engage in the agonising life-long mystical process of killing the beast in him; to identify himself with the animal is to become God-forsaken, to lose his human status and to lead the life of the beast.

Man, in Naimy's teachings, seems solitary, on the other hand, because his fundamental problem, which is the struggle for self-identity, is purely subjective and he cannot but face it alone. Stranded on the slope within him, so to speak, between the God-pole above and the animal-pole below and operating within the mechanistic framework of the Universal Law of Karma, he alone, and with no possible external help, is to make his own decisions, bear the consequences of each step he takes and weave his awn destiny. He can count on no external Divine Grace or redeeming power or prophet or saint, as in Christianity or Islam, nor can he seek refuge in society, each member of which is like him — equally stranded. If he chooses to rise to the God-pole, he can depend only on himself for the obliteration of the beast within. Like the belt-maker in "A Nail-Paring", he has to clip his own nails — the nails of his beastly nature, or like Leonardo in "Till We Meet", he has to wage his own battle alone against his lower self and

arrange for his own meeting with the Universal Self above. Should he, on the other hand, decide to let himself fall towards his animal-pole, he alone will have to bear the consequence of his animal passions, which, in the words of the belt-maker again, "grow like nails, and if left unclipped, are likely to tear our own skin and to strangle us at the end"[1]. For man, however, to remain living as half God and half beast is to suffer perpetual crucifixion.

If our understanding of the implications of Naimy's teachings regarding man is correct, then those teachings may seem to weaken their own self justification. For a man, whose tragic fundamental problem is purely subjective and belongs to his very nature, there is practically little or nothing that external instruction and lecturing can do. To require of man, torturingly strained as he is, between the two opposite poles of his very nature, that he should realise himself in the God-pole and get saved may prove an easy and unwarranted dismissal of the whole question of human nature and, is consequently, unjustified.

To push the premise of Naimy's teachings to its logical conclusion is to say that just as man is unable to move to the God-pole of his nature without first killing the animal in him, so also is he equally unable by the very nature of things to rid himself of the animal without first being a God. To ask him, while being a man, as Naimy does, to carry out the process is virtually asking him to commit suicide. Quite symbolic in this direction is Pitted Face, the hero in Naimy's fictional masterpiece *The Memoirs of A Vagrant Soul*[2]. The struggle of Pitted Face against his lower nature in an attempt to realise himself in the higher, drives him in the process, not only to slay his bride on the nuptial couch, but also to conclude his multi-sided war against the animal in him and in the world, by slaying himself.

It is difficult to see how men, whether as individuals or as a society, can engage in the Pitted Face quest of moving from the "man in God to the God in man", and yet avoid his tragic end. Communism, capitalism,

1. *Till We Meet*, p. 102.
2. See Chapter V above.

democracy, or any other form of society known to human history, may very well be far from the ideal, but they are, nonetheless, human. To ask human society to actualise itself in the Universal Law "beyond Moscow and Washington" is virtually asking it for self-dissolution; for it would then be a society of Gods and, consequently, no society at all.

There would certainly be nothing against saying that "man's only glory lies in his ascent from the human in him to the divine" if such an ascent were possible; if the gap between man and God were in act bridgeable. Those claimed to have attempted it in history are reported to have been either Gods, like Christ, who nevertheless still had to be crucified in the process, or men who, like the builders of the 'Tower of Babel', in the Bible, ended in tragedy. It is not a coincidence therefore that Naimy's optimism as a theorist and a teacher in his talks, essays and discussions, has on the whole failed him as a novelist and story-writer. Fully convinced that man is ultimately destined for Godhood, and motivated by his literary credo that the value of art is in the extent to which it can lead man "from the bounds of limited existence to the boundlessness of life — from the man in God to the God in man"[1], Naimy has dedicated himself in his teachings to provide what the title of one of his best-known collected talks labels as "food for the Godward journey". But no sooner does Naimy the story-writer set in, where life in theory gives way to life in practice, than the erstwhile optimist is thoroughly transformed into an accomplished tragedian. It is particularly noteworthy that among all the stories that Naimy ever wrote, not even excluding the early ones of *Once Upon A Time*, there is not one which is not thoroughly soaked with the tragic. Charged with the whole unexecutable task of self realisation in God, and handled with the Chekhovian and Dostoyevskian 19th century Russian realism with which Naimy the fiction writer is saturated, the characters in his stories invariably and inescapably crack under the strain. Some, like Rashid in "Highbrows", or like Abu Battah in the title story "Abu Battah", little Lalu in "Suicide",

1. See the talk entitled "Literature, Its Essence and Its Function" (ماهية الأدب و مهمته) in *Roads*, 2nd editon.

Zahra, the mother, in "Defrosting the World"[1] and a host of others, are abandoned to their tragedy, with heaven or the Universal Law above seeing, hearing and recording everything. Others gradually release themselves from the heavy burden by finally slipping away in one or the other of two alternative directions. They either release themselves, as does Leonardo in "Till We Meet" from the clutches of the author's realism and end up by slipping into the world of the mysterious in a show of final spiritual emancipation, or remain loyal to their realistic setting, as in the case of Pitted Face, and finally crush themselves or get crushed. Essentially, however, there is little or no difference between the fate of Pitted Face, who concludes the life-long struggle between the higher and the lower selves within him by putting an end to his life, and that of Leonardo, who ends the same type of struggle by a final Plotinian leap to the mystical world of pure Being. As *human beings* they have both, and for all practical purposes, committed suicide and both their lives, were equally solitary and tragic. What difference there is between the final destinies of both is that, while Pitted Face's suicide is a natural conclusion to the tragic drama of his life, which he performs from beginning to end with Hamlet-like heroism, the Nirvanic emancipation of Leonardo serves as a *deus ex machina*, not only to help bridge the realistically unbridgeable gap between the human and the divine in the hero, but also to help Naimy the optimist theorist and teacher, out of Naimy, the tragic story-writer; or better, Naimy, the Nirvanic Buddhist, out of Naimy, the Dostoyevskian realist.

When in *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul* both the mystic and the realist in Naimy worked hand in hand, the outcome was Pitted Face, a tragic figure but nonetheless a human giant. But when the Buddhist succeeds in divorcing the realist in "Till We Meet", the result is Leonardo, a pigmy God. Leonardo's emancipation therefore, does not prove that man's proposed Godward journey is accomplishable in act, but that the act of accomplishing it can only be done in fantasy. Consequently, while

1. The latter three stores are included in *Till We Meet*.

Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul can be considered as a great novel, and must indeed be classified as a masterpiece in modern Arabic literature, "Till We Meet" (*Liqā'*) remains, in this respect, only a well-conceived and carefully knitted mystical fantasy.

In the course of his post-American Messianic teachings, from *Food For the Godward Journey*, *Threshing Floors* up to *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, all of which are centered in the one main theme, which is the propagation of man's emancipatory journey to God, Naimy has engaged in two other major attempts at revealing his recommended Godward ascent in act by providing it with a living human embodiment. The first is his biography of Kahlil Gibran, written between 1932—34, almost sixteen years after his Pitted Face attempt; the other is his prophetic novel *The Book of Mirdad*[1]. written in 1946—7, roughly one year after his creation of Leonardo. How far has the spirit of Pitted Face entered into the appreciation and the writing by Naimy of Gibran's biography to make it another masterpiece in Arabic, and perhaps in world literature, and how far has the emancipated Leonardo entered into the creation of Mirdad to make him another shadow-God, will it is hoped, become manifest in the course of our discussion of the two books in this and the following chapter.

II

Naimy's biography of Gibran, *Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān*; *his life, his death, his literature and his art* (جبران خليل جبران : حياته . موته . أدبه . فنه), was first published in Beirut, 1934, three years after Gibran's death and two years after Naimy's retirement to Lebanon from New York. In 1960 it ran into its fourth Arabic edition, in addition to a cheap fifth edition produced by the Egyptian *Silsilat Iqra'* (Read Series). In 1950, after being translated

1. See above pp. 243—44.

by the author himself into English, it was published by the Philosophical Library in New York under the title of *Kahlil Gibran: A Biography*[1].

It might, at the outset, seem rather unusual that we should consider Naimy's book on Gibran, which is a biography, in conjunction with his grand fictional works and in relation to his efforts to paint in those works the human characters in whom his theories regarding the Godward ascent are made manifest in action. A word is therefore necessary to show how and why the book was written in the first place, and that our discussion of the character of Gibran in it, in conjunction with Pitted Face, Leonardo and, later on, Mirdad is not actually taking it out of its biographical context, but rather putting it in the context through which Naimy in his book has come to understand it and appreciate it and, consequently, to find it answerable to the very cause which Pitted Face, Leonardo and Mirdad, in his literature, are made to serve.

"Had I not found in the life of Gibran", explains Naimy at one time, "what lends itself to the application of my theories on life in general, and on human life in particular, I would not have ventured to write my book on him"[2].

What precisely are those things in Gibran's life which Naimy finds applicable to his theories on human life, is not far to seek. For he himself declares in his 'Apologia' to Gibran's biography that "the best and noblest in his life [Gibran's life] was his stubborn, incessant struggle with himself to cleanse his soul from all impurities, and to make it as beautiful as the beauty he glimpsed with his imagination and so generously spread in his books and drawings"[3].

This instantly makes us see Gibran in Naimy's understanding as a second Pitted Face. For what *raison d'être* has Pitted Face, on the one hand, other than serving as a living embodiment of Naimy's philosophic

1. Unless otherwise stated, references hereafter will be made to the English edition, *Gibran*.
2. *Sab'ūn* III, p. 102.
3. *Gibran*, p, ix.

theory, and what conspicuous significance does his character and, indeed, his whole existence, have, on the other, apart from the heroic display of "his stubborn, incessant struggle with himself to cleanse his soul from all impurities, and to make it as beautiful as the beauty he glimpsed with his imagination"?

It may be argued, however, that the imagination of Pitted Face is that which Naimy has imparted to him from his own, just as is the truth and beauty which he conceived thereby and to which he aspired to elevate himself; while Gibran's imagination, together with the particular truth and beauty he conceived, remain his own. This, of course, would have made the characters of Pitted Face and Gibran in Naimy's literature of two different stocks, and would have impaired the attempt to consider the character of Gibran in the biography, alongside Pitted Face, Leonardo and Mirdad. But was there in fact, or had Naimy at least recognised, any basic difference between the higher truths for which Gibran the man and he himself had stood. Speaking on one occasion of the genuine understanding with which he came to characterise Gibran in his book on him, Naimy says: "That would not have been possible, had there not been an astonishing affinity between his thinking and mine on the questions of life and death, and between his disposition and mine regarding literature and its appropriate message. Had it not been for this affinity in thought, disposition and spirit, I would not have ventured to write a book on him"[1].

It can be safely concluded, therefore, that Naimy's interest in Gibran the man as a literary subject, is a continuation or, more precisely , a propagation of his previous interest in Pitted Face, the fictional character, which later manifests itself again in Leonardo and Mirdad. All interest him in so far as they allow him to personify his basic conviction that behind and beyond the perceptual world of contingent existence, is an all-governing transcendental world of absolute visionary truth or Universal Self or God. What drove him to write the story of Gibran's life is exactly what drove

1. *Sab'ūn* III, p. 101.

him to write the story of Pitted Face before or that of Leonardo and Mirdad afterwards. He is eager, as shown throughout his Messianic teachings from the time he contemplated his cuckoo clock retirement from New York up to the present, to see his theories regarding the Godward ascent translated into action; to paint men who — divided between the transcendental self, the God-pole of their nature, to which they are attached in imagination and vision, and the lower world of contingent existence in which they are deeply rooted in body — live the emancipative and hence Golgothic struggle of extricating themselves from the contingent, so as to live the absolute. That Gibran was such a man in Naimy's eyes, and that his life was deemed interpretable on such Golgothic lines, is the *raison d'être* of Naimy's book on him. "Therefore", explains Naimy to one of his critics[1], "my purpose in writing the book is to reveal how far Gibran has crossed during his short lifetime 'from the bounds of limited existence to the boundlessness of life' — from the human in him to the divine"[2].

The parallelism between Pitted Face and Gibran as literary objects in Naimy's literature, therefore, is almost complete. The difference between the two is not in essence but in existence, is not in the plot, but in the story sequence in the lives of both characters. The essence of the plot in both is the extent to which their life stories could be revealed as reflections of the Golgothic struggle within them between the human and the divine. But while in the case of Pitted Face, the fictional character, Naimy had to invent the life story of his hero that would answer to the central plot, in Gibran, the actual man, the life story through which the plot is made manifest was readily supplied. Through his poetico-mystical works, on the one hand, arriving at their Arabic peak in his *al-'Awāsif* (The Tempests)[3] and at their English peak in his poetico-mystical masterpiece *The Prophet*[4], Gibran,

1. The critic is Amīn al-Rīhāni who, among other points in an open letter to Naimy, accuses him of stressing the psychlogical in his book on Gibran at the expense of the historical. See al-Rīhāni's letter and Naimy,'s reply in *Sab'ūn* III, pp. 104—117.
2. *Sab'ūn* III, p. 114.
3. A collection of essays and short stories, first published in Cairo, 1920.
4. First published in the U.S.A., 1923.

the poet, the artist and the mystic, revealed the God-pole of existence which "he glimpsed with his imagination" and in which he aspired to actualise himself.

The "Venturesome Violet" (البنفسجة الطموحة) in *The Tempests*, a symbolic short story, often considered to supply the keynote to Gibran's Philosophy of life in his Arabic writings, most of which had by then already appeared[1], tells the story of a violet which had always aspired to transcend her nature and become a rose, elevated enough to soar high above the soil and turn her face towards the sun and the ethereal sky. Her wish is granted. But as the tempest blows and she is no longer lowly and immune as before, she is dashed to pieces. She mystically answers her mocking fellow violets as she dies: "I listened to the stillness of night, and heard the higher world say to the lower 'surely the purpose of existence is to transcend existence to the world beyond'[2].

What probably best illustrates the main theme of his drawings is one on freedom that appears in his long Arabic poem entitled *al-Māwākib* (The Processions)[3]. A tall, powerfully-built young man, with two wings affixed to his shoulders and spread for flight, is agonisingly held back from taking off by snake-like hawsers ominously wrapped round his legs and feet and firmly tied to the ground[4]. From the verse, which the drawing presumably illustrates[5], it can be deduced that the hawsers are no other than the cravings, lusts and passions of man's earthly existence, without the

1. See an enlightening study by Naimy on Gibran's *The Tempests* in general and his "Venturesome Violet" in particular in *al-Ghirbāl*, 6th edition, Beirut, 1960, pp. 218—243; also Hâwi Khalil, *Kahlil Gibran* His Background Character and Works, Beirut, 1963, pp. 202—3.
2. *al-Majmū'ah al- Kāmilah Li Mu'allafāt Gubrān Khalil Gubrān.* 3 vols. edited with an introduction by Naimy, Mikhail (Beirut, 1949), p. 161.
3. First published in New York, 1918.
4. See *al-Majmu'ah al-Kāmilah Li Mu'allafāt Gubrān Khalil Gubrān*, p. 261.
5. Ibid. p. 252. "The free in the earth, unaware, build of their cravings prisons for themselves".

والحرُّ في الأرْضِ يبني من منازعه سجناً وهو لا يَدري فيُؤتَسرُ

cutting of which he is unable to realise himself in the divine[1].

In *The Prophet*, which represents the summit of Gibran's mystical thought, al-Mustafa, Gibran's highest ideal of a liberated man, is represented as having finally cut the hawsers. The City of Orphalese, which represents the earth, he looks upon as a prison. His fellow citizens in it he calls prisoners and calls himself a stranger. After twelve years of self-negation and spiritual sublimation in preparation for the homeward journey [the Godward journey] he happily sees his ship coming in mist to take him to the "isle of his birth"[2].

While Gibran's works, so expressive of the mystical truth, provided Naimy, the equally mystic biographer, with the God-pole in his hero, the naked historic data of Gibran's life as a man, from the time he was born in Bisharri, Lebanon, 1883, until he died in New York, 1931, supplied him with the corresponding man-pole. What remained for the Pitted Face-saturated Naimy in his biography of Gibran, was to be in full grasp of the two, and then to follow them as they are woven one into the other through a live interaction in the living Gibran, the slope climber from the human in him to the divine, engaged in a "stubborn, incessant struggle with himself to cleanse his soul from all impurities, and to make it as beautiful as the beauty he glimpsed with his imagination and so generously spread in his books and drawings".

That Naimy was in full grasp of the two poles in Gibran is evident not only from the masterly way in which he was able in the biography to weave the two into a naturally living fabric, which is Gibran, but also from the long period of pen fellowship and brotherly friendship, and spiritual as well as intellectual intimacy which the two men shared in New York City, from the Autumn of 1916, when they first met, until Gibran's death on April 10, 1931. This fellowship, no other student or biographer of

1. See also Naimy's discussion of *The Processions* and of the drawing in *Gibran*, pp. 145—152.
2. See Naimy's discussion of Gibran's *The Prophet* in *Gibran*, pp. 185—93.

Gibran could claim for himself[1]. Naimy's first contact with Gibran, however, goes back to 1913 when, still an undergraduate in the University of Seattle, he chanced to read Gibran's novelette in Arabic, *The Broken Wings* (الأجنحة المتكسرة)[2] and wrote his outspoken comment on it "The Dawn of Hope After the Night of Despair" (فجر الأمل بعد ليل اليأس)[3], which constituted his debut in the literary world[4].

In this article, Naimy sees in Gibran, whom he had not yet met in person, a dawn of hope for an Arabic literature still lurking in a state of dark mediaevalism. But only a dawn of hope, for Gibran's novelette to him, though an innovation in the Arabic Language in that it is suffused with melodies, colourful description and genuine sentiments, is entirely lacking in movement, characterisation and realism ... it is devoid of the breath of life ... and, in short, disfigured"[5]. "Only our poverty in nationally produced novels", Naimy concludes suggestively, "makes us welcome those 'wings' in spite of their being 'broken'"[6].

Naimy's first personal acquaintance with Gibran took place in the office of *al-Funoon* the same day he arrived in New York in the Autumn of 1916, in answer to 'Arîda's repeated pleas that he should come and help the staggering *al-Funoon* to balance[7]. The first meeting between the two men

1. Of all the writers of important sources on Gibran (see the Bibliography to the article "Djabran Kahlil Djabran" by A. Karam in the New Edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. II, 1962) only two other than Naimy had ever met him. Barbara Young, American authoress of *This Man From Lebanon*, New York, 1945, knew Gibran only during the last seven years of his life, and in the capacity of an admirer and occasional volunteer secretary. Yûssof al-Huwayyik, author of *Dhikrayâti Ma' Gubrân*, Beirut, 1958, mixed with Gibran for only two years when they were both art students in Paris, 1908—10.
2. First published in New York, 1912; also translated into English by Anthony R. Ferris and first published in New York, 1957.
3. *al-Funoon* Vol.1, No. 4, 1913.
4. See *Gibran*, pp. 130—132 and *Sab'ûn* II, p. 30.
5. *al-Funoon* Vol. I, No. 4, p. 64.
6. Ibid. p. 70.
7. See some of 'Arîda's letters to Naimy in *Sab'ûn* II, pp. 51—60.

is described as having been exceedingly warm[1], in spite of Naimy's earlier and rather biting criticism of *The Broken Wings*. The acquaintance soon developed into an extremely warm intimacy and pen fellowship which, as described in *Gibran* and confirmed by letters from Gibran to Naimy when one of the two chanced to be away from New York, lasted unimpaired throughout the remaining fifteen years of Gibran's life[2].

By this time (1916), Gibran, who was seven years Naimy's senior, had already four other books published in Arabic besides *The Broken Wings*, all of the same romanticised intellectual and stylistic nature[3]. None of his mature works either in Arabic or in English had yet appeared. Naimy, on the other hand, had only at that time one play, *Fathers and Sons*, which was yet unpublished in book form, and several other short stories and critical essays scattered in *al-Funoon*[4]. Though the transcendental theosophico-mystical outlook, which was later to shape the minds of both Gibran and Naimy and bring them to the point of almost absolute identicalness, is as detectable in its crude form in Naimy's *Fathers and sons*, and especially in the character of the hero, Dāūd, as in Gibran's prose poems of *A Tear and A Smile*, and before they saw anything of one another, it remains true to say that it is together and in mutual collaboration that they both arrived at their intellectual and spiritual maturity. Together they formed The Pen Bond, enlisting a few other comrades, as has previously been discussed, with Gibran as president and Naimy as counsellor, and with the objective of breathing a new life into the hitherto mediaeval sterility of Arabic literature[5]. From Naimy's book, and especially from the chapter entitled "The Two Voices"[6], we are made to understand that rarely did either of them write

1. *Gibran*, p. 133.
2. See a group of these letters from Gibran to Naimy in *Gibran* pp. 239—261.
3. *Music* (الموسيقى); *Nymphs of The Valley* (عرائس المروج); *Spirits Rebellious* (الأرواح المتمردة) and *A Tear and A Smile* (دمعة و ابتسامة).
4. See above pp. 114—18.
5. See above pp. 119—20.
6. *Gibran*, pp. 145—152.

anything for publication without first reading it in manuscript to the other. Naimy's two critical essays in *al-Ghirbāl*, one on Gibran's English book the *Forerunner* (New York, 1920)[1] and another on his Arabic book *The Tempests*[2], offer excellent examples of the kind of outspoken but, nonetheless, sympathetic criticism by the two men of one another's works.

It cannot really be said of this period of mutal growth, as some writers uncritically hasten to say, that Gibran was influenced by Naimy[3], or that Naimy grew in the shadow of Gibran[4]. What is obvious from the writings of both men is that what was particularly Naimy's before the two met has remained Naimy's until the present, and what was originally Gibran's has remained Gibran's. Naimy's Russian realism in style, which has helped him to be the pioneering critic, story writer and dramatist, in the modern sense, in the Arab world, has never managed to find its way to Gibran; nor, in the same way, has Gibran's high-flown, poetic surrealism in style ever permeated Naimy. It is only those transcendental theosophico-mystical elements which they happened to hold in common before they ever met that made them, having once met, develop in mutual intellectual and spiritual growth, understanding and interpenetration until the end. Naimy's mystical bent of mind, starting as early as his Nazareth days[5], nourished in Russia, by Dostoyevsky, Gordiev and Tolstoy, and finally stamped in Seattle by American transcendentalism, and his direct contact with organised Theosophy[6] readily found its counterpart in Gibran's equal fascination with the visionary world of William Blake[7] and its complementary face in Indian

1. *al-Ghirbāl*, pp. 170—177.
2. Ibid. pp. 218—243.
3. See, for instance, Kan'ān, Halīm: "The Elements From Which The Soul of Gibran Was Nourished: Bisharri or Nietzsche or Blake or Naimy?", (العناصر التي تغذت منها نفس جبران : بشري أم نيتشه أم بلايك أم نعيمه) *al-Makshūf* (magazine), No. 194, Beirut, 1939.
4. See Bin Mīlād, Mahjūb: "Mikhail Naimy", *al-Fikr* Magazine, April issue, Tunis, 1957.
5. See above pp. 76—85.
6. See above p. 110, also Sab'ūn II, pp. 43—50.
7. See On the impact of Blake on Gibran, *Gibran*, pp. 87—89.

mysticism. So carried away was Gibran as early as 1916 with Indian mysticism that, in a mysterious attempt of make-believe, he at one time was prompted to claim Bombay rather than Bisharri, Lebanon, as his birthplace[1].

While each retained his own independent literary style, they both seem to have worked hand in hand in developing their common literary content. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that, stripped of their distinctive literary garbs, the mature works of both Naimy and Gibran become one and indistinguishable. Youssof Abu Rizq had hit the truth when, in an article on Naimy, "The Hermit of al-Shakhroob", he poetically described the two men reaching out for the one mystical truth as "two candles on one and the same beacon"[2]. In a review of Naimy's *Gibran*, Mary Haskell, a well-to-do American lady, who had loved Gibran and patronised him financially until he died[3], describes the two friends, devoted seekers of "the All-Life, the Universal" as reminiscent "of the Himalayan climbers, straining for the summits"[4].

In a letter to Naimy, his co-climber of life's mystical slope rising from the human to the divine, Gibran, not very long before he died, wrote: "I feel that I shall not leave the slope of this mountain before the break of dawn"[5]. Gibran left "the slope of the mountain" on the night of April 10, 1931. Of all his Arab friends, Naimy was the only one who was called to his bedside and who witnessed his struggle with death until the end[6].

1. In a biographical sketch under the title of "A Word On The Writers in *al-Funoon*" (كلمة عن أدباء الفنون) it is recorded: "Gibran was born in the year 1883 in Bisharri, Lebanon (and more precisely, it is said, in Bombay, India); *al-Funoon*, Vol. II, No. 4, 1916; see also *Gibran* p. 129.
2. *al-Makshūf*, No. 199, 1939.
3. Mention of Gibran's relations with Mary Haskell occur in many places in Naimy's Gibran; chief reference is to pp. 56—66 and 102—106. Miss Haskell later married, becoming Mrs Mines.
4. Mines, Mary H. "Kahlil Gibran by Mikhail Naimy", *Savanah Morning News*, Sunday, November 19, 1950.
5. *Gibran*, p. 250.
6. See the vivid account of the whole scene in *Gibran*, pp. 3—12.

It is evidently in conformity with Gibran's mystical convictions and with his own that death is a beginning, that Naimy begins his biography of his friend with a vivid and all in all suggestive description of Gibran as he last saw him in his death coma bidding life his last farewell.

Having furnished the background and the setting of Naimy's biography of Gibran, we now move to a closer discussion of the book itself.

III

Though classified as a biography, Naimy's book on Gibran cannot pass under that name without qualification. Apparently aware of this, Naimy himself hastens to warn the reader, in his short prefatory 'Apologia' that his purpose in writing the book is not to relate the 'history' of Gibran's life, but to give a vivid image of Gibran as *he* saw him and knew him.

In Naimy's eyes, even as in his own, Gibran, the mystically minded believer, was bound to be reflected as a slope climber from the human in him to the divine. While writing on his friend, therefore, Naimy, much like a novelist, was bound to work within a preconceived plot or framework. Just as a novelist, his eyes constantly on his preconceived plot, so utilises the story sequence at hand that he can best unfold it, so has Naimy utilised Gibran's biographical data with the preconceived intention of unfolding the various stages of his man-God pilgrimage. In a sense, Naimy's biography of Gibran can be regarded as another *Pilgrim's Progress*. It partakes of the nature of both the novel and the biography. It is a novel in so far as it is written in the form and style of a novel, and it is a biography in that the characters, as well as the story in which they are engaged, are not fictitious but have existed in actual life.

When Mr. Despondency in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was summoned to God, his last words as he stepped into the river were: "Farewell night,

welcome day"[1]. Naimy's biography of Gibran, a pilgrim in the author's eyes, is apparently conceived on relatively the same lines as Mr. Despondency's final conviction. The book, apart from the prefatory notes and the Appendix, falls into three parts each consisting of eight short chapters, and representing three different stages in Gibran's progress towards the mystic truth. The first, covering Gibran's life from the time he was born in Bisharri, Lebanon, 1883, up to the beginning of the period of his association with Naimy in New York, 1916, is entitled "Twilight". The second part, unfolding the story up to nearly 1921, the beginning of that stage when Gibran's thoughts began to crystallise in *The Prophet*, is entitled "Night". The third part, dealing with the final stage of Gibran's life, opened and illumined throughout with the mystic light of *The Prophet* and finally crowned with death in 1931, is entitled "Dawn".

That Naimy should have chosen to divide Gibran's life into three stages rather than two, including Gibran's childhood, boyhood and youth under "Twilight", which is neither "Dawn" nor "Night" but a mixture of the two, is, as one might conjecture, because he was less of a Bunyan in thought and more of a Wordsworth. Man's soul, in his reckoning — and in this connection, Gibran's soul — at birth must have had.

> "...elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar:
> Not in entire forgetfulness
> And not in utter nakedness..."[2]

Therefore does Naimy open part one, "Twilight", of his book, and indeed the whole biography, with a highly dramatic, vivid and moving chapter describing Gibran in his last hours as he — the author — sat by his bed in a certain St. Vincent's Hospital in New York perturbedly contemplating

1. See the Everyman Library 10th edition, London 1927, p. 374.
2. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Selincourt, E. de, and Darbishire, Helen, Volume IV (Oxford, 1947), the poem "Intimations of Immortality" pp. 279—285.

the fate of his friend and listening to his death-rattle. Following this chapter immediately is another, equally dramatic, vivid and moving, describing Gibran's birth in Lebanon. So arranged side by side at the opening of the book, the two chapters supply the reader at the outset with the main clue to Naimy's approach throughout the whole biography: Gibran's death in New York marks the beginning for him of another existence elsewhere, just as his birth in Bisharri had marked the end of a previous existence.

"Not in entire forgetfulness": Gibran carries with him at birth reminiscences of the mystic world from whence he had come — "From God, who is our home", as Wordsworth in his poem puts it. "Not in utter nakedness", the Vision in him is clouded and blurred by the very nature of the contingent world into which he has been born. Therefore, Naimy, throughout the first part of his book, provides the reader with consecutive quick-moving dramatic scenes from Gibran's childhood, boyhood and youth in which the pure vision in him and the blurring impact of his everyday existence are brought to a most revealing juxtaposition: his early love and devotion to Christ, on the one hand, and the bitterly sectarian Christian society in Lebanon into which he was born: his love of his mother and all loving people, and his fear of his alcoholic, quarrelsome father: his love for art and the beautiful, and his being punished by the priest at school and by his father at home for having occupied his time in drawing visionary figures instead of studying his Syriac lesson: his love of learning and his poverty-stricken, illiterate family.

From Bisharri, and in the same quick, film-like succession of vivid scenes, Naimy moves on with twelve-year-old Gibran, his mother, two sisters and elder brother to Chinatown in Boston in search of better financial prospects. He pictures Gibran at school in Boston — His visit to an artist's studio, and his seduction at fourteen by a woman of over twenty-five — Alone in Lebanon at sixteen for four years of shooling in Arabic — A short visit to Paris — Back in Boston at twenty — Death of sister, mother and brother — His first exhibition and its failure — Spiritually tormented by

his elevated love for Mary Haskell, on the one hand, and his physical indulgence with Micheline — Back for three years in Paris to study art, financed by Mary Haskell — Enthralment by William Blake — Two more years in Boston and the final settling in New York, 1912. Throughout these biographic snapshots, woven one into the other with a warm narrative style, Naimy keeps hold of the two opposite forces working on Gibran and within him. The first is the mystic light born with him, continuously clamouring for self realisation in his mystical drawings and in his early writings, saturated with colour, music and poetry, and expressive of a romantic soul yearning for the beauty of the beyond. The second is the dimming impact on that mystic light or that primordial "voice of innocence", to use the terms of Blake, of the world of "experience", closing on Gibran from without in the form of poverty, emigration, the deaths of his mother, brother and sister through tuberculosis, and the failure of his first exhibition, and tightening its grip from within through his human weaknesses such as sex, drink, love of money and lust for fame and outward show.

Because the biographical data at the disposal of Naimy concerning this early period of Gibran's life before the two men had met is thin, he has throughout worked like a historical novelist, inventing dialogues, painting scenes, and bringing about situations in such a way as to vitalise the data at hand and yet avoid distorting history. He was, of course, helped in providing the thin and naked historic facts of Gibran's early life at Bisharri and Boston with clothing of his own making, by the very fact of having been himself a Lebanese immigrant in the U.S.A. preparing, like Gibran, for a literary career, and coming from the same economic, social, geographic and family background. To keep the reader aware, however, that whatever picture he has painted for him of Gibran's early life remains hazy, despite his offorts to supply it with a suitable literary frame, Naimy has put the two chapters dealing with Gibran's life in Bisharri and in Boston under the suggestive titles of "Bisharri Shadows" and "Boston Shadows"[1].

1. See Naimy's own clarification on this point in *Sab'ūn* III, pp. 115—16.

From the "Twilight" stage of Gibran's mystical pilgrimage, covering his childhood, boyhood and youth, Naimy moves to the second stage, which he characterises as "Night" and during which he had come to know Gibran intimately. What sort of "Night" Naimy means in this connection can perhaps be best illustrated also by another quotation from Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" —

> Heaven lies about us in our infancy !
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing boy ...

The "shades of the prison-house" gradually closing "upon the growing boy" which Naimy was particularly careful to stress in the first part of his book, are no other than the heavy demands made on Gibran the visionary poet and artist by his lower nature, on the one hand, and by the frustrating impact of the outside world, on the other. The "prisoner" is no other than Gibran's mystic soul which, in spite of its being entrapped through birth into the prison, still clamoured through his drawings and writings, particularly in his collection of Arabic prose poems, *A Tear and A Smile* (New York, 1913), for the freedom of the mystic homeland beyond.

That the growing "shades of the prison-house" during the first stage of Gibran's life had reached, in the second stage, such thickness as to seal in the mystic guiding light and transfer Gibran from "Twilight" to "Night", is testified, in Naimy's reckoning, by Gibran's utter surrender during this period to a thorough-going enthralment by Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra.*

Though the second part of Naimy's book includes two chapters, namely "The Scattered Re-gathered" and "Arrabitah" which, together with other relevant information scattered in the other parts, constitute the first of two and only two existing relatively detailed first-hand accounts of the formation of Arrabitah, the chance coming together in New York City of its ten constituent members and the rise of the Syro-North American movement

in modern Arabic literature[1], the fact remains that its main theme throughout is the gloom which had enveloped the mystic soul of Gibran as it was completely surrendered to Nietzsche's Zarathustra. One by one, Naimy takes the works of Gibran written during this period, from *Spirits Rebellious* (الأرواح المتمردة) (Cairo, 1922), through *Processions* (المواكب) (New York, 1918), his first book in English, *The Madman* (New York, 1920), to *The Tempests* (العواصف) (Cairo, 1920), and shows through a most revealing comparative study, the alarming extent to which Gibran had become in them a duplicate of Nietzsche. The similarity in theme and style between the two is at times brought so close by Naimy as even to hint at plagiarism[2].

It is not on Gibran the Nietzschean as such, however, that Naimy lays his main stress, but on Gibran the Christ-like loving youth, the Platonic idealist and the Blakean visionary in *A Tear And A Smile* and other earlier works, who was frustrated in manhood by the unappreciative human society to which he addressed himself through his writings and drawings, by poverty and cruelty with which life handled him and his family, and by his utter failure as a man to strike a balance between his lower desires, especially the sexual, and the elevated ideals for which he stood as an artist and a priest of spiritual beauty[3]. Gibran readily crossed over to Nietzsche to cover up his weakness and to avenge himself against human society and the world. Assuming for himself the air of a Superman, he poured his wrath in *Spirits*

1. The other first-hand source is Naimy's *Sab'ūn* II. It is to be regretted that no similar attempts to write extensively on The Pen Bond were ever made by any other of its members. 'Abd al-Massīh Haddād, the only late survivor besides Naimy, died as recently as 1962.
2. See particularly the chapter in *Gibran* entitled "Grave-Digger", pp. 119—129.
3. See the outspoken passages on some of Gibran's sexual affairs on pp. 61—75; 90—95; 219—221. Also significant in this connection is a short report "Gift for mimicry harms poet; with head in clouds, feet mired" by a certain American, Idella Purnell, in which she seconds Naimy's thesis on Gibran's divided nature and relates one of her personal experiences with him during a visit she paid him with another lady admirer in his New York studio. *Los Angeles Daily News*, Saturday, November 4, 1950.

Rebellious, *Processions* and especially in *The Tempests*, on human society at large, on conventional morality, and on all existing civilisation, declaring all people in his "Grave-Digger" (حفار القبور)[1] together with the Gods they meekly worship, as virtually dead, and that the most appropriate occupation for the man who has managed to be "a God unto himself", is grave-digging. For in burying the living, he prepares for a generation of giants to come.

Naimy, therefore, and still on lines that seem quite parallel to those in Wordsworth's same poem —

> The Youth, who daily farther from the east
> Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the vision splendid
> Is on his way attended:
> At length the Man perceives it die away,
> And fade into the common day,

sees that Gibran the "Man", has moved literally and figuratively from the "imagination of the East" which "would not be contained within bounds, but ever seeks to pass from beginnings to beginning-lesses, from the finite to the infinite, and from that which is material to that which is non-material"[2] and has buried in Nietzsche the anti-Christ and anti-world-to-come, "the vision splendid" of Gibran the Youth. Therefore was Gibran left in spiritual darkness.

The main theme of "Dawn", the third and also last part of the biography covering that stage of Gibran's life starting roughly in 1920 and brought to a conclusion by death in 1931, is that the burial of "the vision splendid" of Gibran the Youth in Nietzsche was only temporary, just as the Nietzschean darkness was only a passing stage in Gibran's life. The "vision splendid" was bound to resurrect in Gibran again and to usher him from "Night" into "Dawn". The beginning of that "Dawn", Naimy sees in Gibran's *The Prophet*, written between 1920 and 1923 and published in New York in 1923.

1. See Gibran's *The Tempests*.
2. *Gibran*, p. 180.

In the chapter "Mist Becoming Crystallised", introducing *The Prophet*, Naimy portrays Gibran as having taken his Nietzschean stand and poured his wrath on human society, its worshipped Gods and conventional moralities, not so much because he had really become Nietzschean at heart and had lost faith in his youthful quest for the universal and the absolute, as because he so much wanted to avenge his failure in making society applaud him and give him the honour and distinction of which he had thought himself deserving. His quest for the Universal and the Absolute during his Nietzschean period, therefore, was destined to be only suspended but not totally forsaken. As soon as Gibran's lower desires, whether for wealth, women, fame or otherwise, were fully or partially satiated — "As soon, however, as Gibran won the first round with poverty, and felt himself secure in his art and literature, which were winning more and more readers and admirers: and as soon as his heart was emptied of all women but one[1], he went back to his soul in search of new spiritual comforts... His soul did not disappoint him"[2]. Beneath the Niezschean facade of *Spirits Rebellios*, *The Processions*, *The Tempests* and *The Madman*, he once more found himself face to face with the mystic youth of *A Tear And A Smile*, longing to realise himself in the beyond. Made so keenly aware of the duality that had all this period existed between appearance and reality in his life and character, he solemnly confessed to Naimy during one of their intimate walks: "Mischa! I am a false alarm"[3]. He, therefore, felt it his concern then to rescue himself from himself — to pull up Gibran, the youth, from the mist of Gibran, the Nietzschean man, and bring him into a brighter "Dawn". Gibran's major attempt at the rescue, was his work *The Prophet*.

In the chapter entitled "Almustafa", Naimy gives a penetrating and

1. Miss Mary Haskel, the woman who financed Gibran's stay in Paris, and who cotinued to supply him with a monthly allowance of 75 dollars until his death. A slight misunderstanding on Gibran's part frustrated his proposal of marriage to her. See the chapter "Man Proposes", *Gibran* pp. 102—108.
2. *Gibran*, p. 179.
3. Mischa, as Naimy was called by Gibran, is the Russian diminutive of Mikhail. See the chapter in Gibran entitled "False Alarm".

most revealing study of *The Prophet*, both as it stands in itself and in relation to Gibran's struggle to emancipate himself from his Nietzschean state of aberration. In a careful analysis of the form and style in both *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *The Prophet*, Naimy is able to expose a striking similarity, between the two books. As regads substance, he finds the two books far apart. The central theme in the sermons of Almustafa in *The Prophet* to the people of Orphalese on the basic questions of life and death, centres on the Platonic concept of love, which ultimately lends itself to the Buddhistic concept of self-negation. Man cannot attain real happiness unless he coordinates his individual will, in a process of self-negation through love, with the Will Universal. That Almustafa delivers to the people of Orphalese his various sermons, which constitute the body of *The Prophet*, on the eve of his seeing his ship "coming in mist" to take him back to his "isle of birth", is to indicate that he has so coordinated his will and is ready for final emancipation and reunion with God.

Naimy expresses his uncertainty as to whether Gibran "had meant *The Prophet* to be an expression of his deeper longings for final spiritual emancipation, or whether he had meant it as a representation that he himself, had actually reached that emancipation"[1]. But it can be concluded from the picture he gives of Gibran's post-*Prophet* life and works such as *Jesus The Son of Man* and *The Garden of The Prophet* — which to him represent an anti-climax — and from previous hints in the biography, that he is decidedly of the opinion that Gibran as a man remained far from realising *The Prophet* in his private life, and that Almustafa remains only an impersonation of his deeper longings.

"But woe to the one", says Naimy at one place, "whose imagination is much stronger than his will. Such a one is like a kite flown by a child. No sooner does it taste the freedom of the freer space than it is pulled down to the earth and the bondage of the earth. Even death cannot liberate such a man from bondage to the earth. That was the case of Gibran with his imagination and will"[2].

1. *Gibran*, p. 193.
2. *Gibran*, p. 181.

In the remaining chapters subsequent to "Almustafa", and particularly in "Shares in Heaven and Shares in Earth", Naimy is careful to paint the "kite" that was Gibran. While keeping one eye throughout on the mystical heights to which Gibran's imagination and vision had reached in *The Prophet*, *Jesus The Son of Man*, *The Earth Gods*, *The Wanderer* and *The Garden of The Prophet*, he keeps the other on the lower depths to which Gibran, the man, was attached and from which his incompetent will had failed to lift him. Scene after scene is related from his private life, from his business transactions in Boston, 1921, which ended in a catastrophe that nearly cost him all the money he had been saving until then, to the certain girl who came to him carried away by *The Prophet* but went out disillusioned about the author — "preaching what he did not do, doing what he did not preach"[1] leaving Gibran to regret, as he had often regretted before with other women, having "slaughtered his love on the altar of his passions"[2], and finally to his continuously advancing illness[3], which more than anything else, had acted on pulling back Gibran, the soaring "kite", to the lower, physical world of pain and suffering.

In no other part of Naimy's book does the character of Gibran come so infinitely close to the character of Pitted Face. So clearly and vividly are the two poles in Gibran's nature delineated: the one as it expressed itself in his writings and drawings; the other as it was made manifest through his lower attachments and illness, and so delicately and sympathetically is the strain in Gibran's divided nature portrayed, that one is almost enabled to touch the anguish in Gibran's soul as he once significantly wrote about his illness to Naimy: "My ailment is seated in something much deeper than mucle and bone. I have often wondered if it were not a state of health"[4].

To one who considers the body, together with all the world of physical existence a prison, illness is sure to be a state of health. It is just another

1. *Gibran*, p. 220.
2. See the similar incident with Micheline, *Gibran*, pp. 89—95.
3. Cirrhosis of the liver with incipient tuberculosis in one of the lungs, *Gibran*, p. 7.
4. *Gibran*, p. 222.

step towards death the final liberator. When the life-long attempt at the Godward flight by Pitted Face was constantly frustrated by his being attached to "muscle and bone", he finally slew himself and was thereby emancipated. Had Gibran been a fictional character, in the hands of Naimy, he would probably have met the same fate. In that he was real, Naimy could at best arrange and write his life-story in such a way as to convey that his birth was a "Twilight", his manhood a "Night", and that stage beginning with The Prophet and concluded in death, "Dawn".

Part four of the biography, an appendix, includes Gibran's Will, burial, twenty-seven letters to Naimy, together with a memorial poem and a memorial address to the Arab world by Naimy and a list of Gibran's works available in English up to 1950. This last item does not appear in the Arabic editions, just as an unpublished Arabic play, *The King of The Land and The Shepherd* (ملك البلاد و راعي الغنم) by Gibran, is dropped in the English edition.

In a short prefatory note to the Will, in which none of the "Pen Bond" members is mentioned, Naimy explains that it is dated March 13, 1930; almost a year before Gibran's death, and cannot therefore be the one which Gibran mentioned afterwards to him, to Nasseeb 'Arīda, to several American friends and, only three days before he died, to 'Abd al-Massīh Haddād, telling each in turn: "I have mentioned you in my Will"[1]. Naimy emphatically rejects that Gibran might not have been telling the truth to his friends and hints at the possibility of some foul play after Gibran's death which might have prevented the real Will from coming to light[2].

1. See the full account in *Gibran*, pp. 227—228; see also 'Abd al-Massīh Haddād's testimony to the same effect in the last article of a series of six by him on "Naimy's Book on Gibran" (كتاب النعيمي عن جبران) *Sawt al-Ahrār*, Sunday-Monday issue, June 23—24, 1935.
2. See Naimy's prefatory notes to the Will in *Gibran*, 4th Arabic edition, Beirut, 1960, p. 244.

IV

So far, no other book by Naimy has succeeded in exciting such wide comment in the literary world and, on the whole, been so highly praised as his biography of Gibran. In a learned comment on the book, including a rather extensive outline, Professor I. Kratchkowsky says[1]: "Mikhail Naimy's recently published book on G. Gibran appears as a great event in the history of modern Arabic literatur and literature itself. It is at once interesting as a characterisation of the hero and the author ..."

"The task set by the author is brilliantly carried out. The living Gibran actually stands up before the reader. In none of the wide literature devoted to him, even on a smaller scale, can one find such a clear picture of Gibran".

Examining the art of biography writing both as it has first started and developed in the West and as it has subsequently made its appearance in the Arab world, Dr. Ihsān 'Abbās in his book, *Fann al-Sīrah* (The Art of Biography Writing), finds Naimy's Gibran from the theoretic as well as the practical aspects, the only book "in which the biographical art in modern Arabic literature has achieved its full existence" (وفيه اكتمل للسيرة العربية وجودها من حيث الغاية و التطبيق)[2]. Through the outspoken and yet sympathetic and artistic manner with which he courageously and sincerely reproduces Gibran the man, with all the shades and lights in his life and character, irrespective of whether they are pleasing or repellant, Naimy, 'Abbās believes, has done for the Arabic biography what Strachey had done for the English[3].

Writing in the same year as 'Abbās and following quite the same trend of thought, Georg Saidah, a "Mahjarite" poet and critic contemporary to Naimy and Gibran, says: "Twenty years have passed since the appearance of the first edition of his [Naimy's] book *Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān*,

1. *Soviet Oriental Studies*, Vol. II August, 1936, pp. 291—293.
2. 'Abbās, I: *Fann al-Sīrah*, Beirut, 1956, p. 68.
3. Ibid. p. 71; also p. 91.

and yet it has not been equalled as a master-piece of narrative art. Naimy has moulded Gibran's life-story into a piece of narrative art in which he excelled in design, narration and dialogue, offering the most accurate depiction of his subject's literary, artistic and philosphic tendencies, and surprising society with an outspokenness which it had not previosly known in the biographies of distinguished figures in the Arab nation. It is a book that immortalises Gibran, the man — the great man..."[1]

In a more extensive study of Gibran, verifying Naimy's sources and describing his artistic way of weaving his data into dramatic, quick-moving scenes from which Gibran, the man, the artist and the writer, emerges before the reader with all his vices and virtues, failures and successes, together with his characteristic life-long struggle to co-ordinate the human in him with the mystical and visionary, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ashtar[2] writes: "Never before [meaning in Arabic literature] has a literary biography been written on such a pattern. Nor, we believe, has any been written up to the present, which can be said to equal it"[3].

It is not the purpose here to enumerate the various and also numerous appraising studies and comments that have been written on *Gibran*[4]. Having supplied a brief account of the book, its background and the main driving motive for which it was written, our purpose now is to see on what grounds — so highly proclaimed as a great biography by such responsible

1. Saidah, George: *Adabuna Wa Udabāuna Fi al-Mahājir al-Amīrikiyyah* (Our Literature and Writers in the Americas, Cairo, 1956, pp. 179—180.
2. See Chapter 5 of his book *al-Nathr al-Mahjari* (The Emigrant Prose) Vol. II, Cairo, 1961.
3. Ibid. p. 234.
4. For further examples the reader is referred to the following articles: al-'Aqqād, A: "Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān" *al-Andalus al-Jadidah*, Sao Paulo, April 1935, pp. 11—13; Suleimān, F. : "Misha's Gibran" (جبران ميشا) *al-Ma'rad al-Usbū'i* (weekly), Beirut, Appril 15, 1935; 'Abd al-Masīh Haddād, op. cit; Hindāwi, K.: "Imagery, Criticism and Art in Naimy's *Gibran*" (التصوير والنقد والفن عند ميخائيل نعيمه في كتاب جبران خليل جبران) *Sawt al-Ahrār* (daily), Beirut, January 5, 1936, p. 6; Ni'mah, S.:Aleppo Whips and Naimy's Book, (كرابيج حلب وكتاب نعيمه) *al-Samir* (Magazine), NewYork, July 15, 1935, pp. 22—28.

scholars as the ones quoted above, *Gibran* as a biography, however, was not spared the utter condemnation of a few other writers.

It cannot be quite established whether it was Iliyya Abu Mādi's article or that of Amīn al-Rīhāni, both immigrant poets and writers, which was written first in bitter objection to Naimy's *Gibran*. Both wrote during the same year, 1935: Abu Mādi, "Gubrān Tahta Mabādi' al-Nu'aymi" (Gibran under the surgical instruments of Naimy)[1] and Rīhāni, "Min Amīn al-Rīhāni Ila Mikhail Nu'aymah" (An Open Letter from Rīhāni to Naimy)[2]. The theme followed by both, however, seems to be almost one and the same. Both feel that by revealing Gibran's secrets, his love affairs and various human weaknesses, Naimy had really intended to degrade him in the eyes of the world. Naimy, they felt, had availed himself of the novelistic form of writing in order to have a free hand in dramatising those failings, adding to them whatever his dramatic genius could help him to invent. His purpose behind all this, as is implicit in Rīhāni's letter and explicit in Abu Mādi's article, was to remove Gibran from his distinguished literary prominence so that he might step into his shoes. Abu Mādi goes further to explain that another main cause of what he calls Naimy's bitterness against Gibran goes back to the fact that Gibran was discovered to have made no mention of him in his Will.

Rīhāni's line was later picked up and dramatised in a rhetorical essay by Felix Fāris, a Lebanes-Egyptian lawyer and literary stylist, entitled "Gubrān: Bahth Fi Kitāb Nu'aymah 'Anh" (Gibran: a discussion on Naimy's book on him)[3]. Seeing Gibran through the lofty ideals expressed in his writings, Fāris engages throughout his article in taking up one incident after another which he deems degrading to Gibran in Naimy's book, and rejects them on the grounds that they are incompatible with those ideals, and must therefore be products of Naimy's resourceful imagination.

1. *al-Samīr*, No. 18, New York, 1935.
2. *al-Bilād* (daily), Beirut, January 5, 1935.
3. Fāris, F. *Risālat al-Minbar Ila al-Sharq al-'Arabi* (Message of the speaker's platform to the Arab world), Cairo 1936, pp. 153—225.

Abu Mādi's line, on the other hand, with special emphasis on the Will question, was picked up again as recently as 1956 by 'Issa al-Nā'ūry, a Jordanean journalist and writer. In a short article, "Baina Gubrān wa Nu'aymah" (Between Gibran and Naimy)[1], folowed by another, "Gubrān wa Nu'aymah Aydan"[2], he judges Naimy's mention of Gibran's human failings, and without any effort to prove the contrary, as inventions of the imagination, incited on the one hand by Naimy's bitterness against Gibran for not mentioning him in his Will, and on the other by his eagerness to divest Gibran of his glorious mantle so that he might put it on himself.

In a later book of his in which he gives sketch studies of thirty-eight immigrant writers in both North and South America, Nā'ūry returns to the same question of Naimy and the Will with a strange logic[3]. This time he brings to his support Barbara Young's *This Man From Lebanon*, a book on Gibran in which he is treated and worshipped as a true prophet, round whose head, Miss. Young, playing throughout the prophet worshipper, claims to have seen more than once a halo of light[4]. That Young's Gibran is free from any human failings and particularly those attributed to him by Naimy, proves to Nā'ūry Naimy's bias against both Gibran and Young, and all because Gibran had entrusted the latter and not him with his literary works after his death.

Taking Nā'ūry's argument on its face value, one finds that its logic is a strange one. Had he at all read Gibran's Will, he would have learned that not only does it make no mention of Young whatsoever, as he claims, but that it explicitly states concerning Gibran's literary material: "The royalties on my copyrights ... after my death are to go to my home town."

1. *al-Adīb* (monthly) XXIX, No. 10, Beirut 1956.
2. *al-Adīb* (monthly) XXXI, No. 4, 1957.
3. Nā'ūry, I., *Adab al-Mahjar* (Immigrant Literature), Cairo 1959, pp. 361—365.
4. Young, Barbara, *This Man From Lebanon*, 8th edition, New York, 1956, p. 102; See also K. Hāwi's dismissal of Young's book as a legendary account of Gibran's life, in his book *Kahlil Gibran* Beirut, 1963, pp. 77—79.

"Everything found in my studio after my death, pictures, books, objets d'art, etc. etc. to Mrs. Mary Haskell Mines, now living at..."[1]. Naimy's supposed bitterness therefore, judging by Nā'ūry's thesis, should have been directed against Mary Haskell and not Barbara Young, as he states. But, on the contrary, Naimy's treatment of Mary Haskell in his book together with her various relations with Gibran, betrays no such bitterness.

Another matter that should have been worth noting by Nā'ūry in relation to the question of bitterness, is that Young's book on Gibran appeared in 1945, years after the first Arabic edition of Naimy's *Gibran*. If there is any question of one of the two writers being embittered against the other, it is likely that that writer should be Young, who must have seen Gibran the prophet and the superhuman, in her belief, treated by Naimy within the human. What may give further support to this thesis is that, in writing her book, Miss Barbara Young has made no mention of Naimy and has treated his version of Gibran as though it were totally non-existent.

If our understanding of Naimy's critics, from Abu Mādi, Rīhāni to Nā'ūry is correct, it would seem that they have all followed the unscholarly course of rejecting the book, *Gibran*, through discrediting the author. they have all fallen, it seems, into the snare of disproving Naimy before examining the truth of what he says. Therefore have their claims, as al-Ashtar remarks[2], remained unfounded.

Taking the question of the Will first, there can be no evidence watsoever that Naimy was in the least embittered because he was not mentioned in Gibran's Will or, that not being mentioned, he ever blamed Gibran for it. After an exceedingly pathetic scene that took place between the two men, when Gibran had told Naimy that he had mentioned him in his Will[3], Naimy quotes himself as having then said: "I would not hear anything like that from

1. For the whole copy of Gibran's Will, see *Gibran*, p. 238.
2. *al-Nathr al-Mahjari* II, pp. 242–243.
3. *Gibran*, p. 227.

you, Gibran, today or ever. You cannot Will me anything more precious than yourself; and that I have without any Will. For you shall always be with me as I shall always be with you".

On the other hand, it is quite evident from his prefatory note to the Will[1], that Naimy had no doubt that Gibran did mention him, Nasseeb 'Arida and 'Abd al-Masih Haddad, as also confirmed by the latter[2], in a more recent Will than the one published, which must have been destroyed after Gibran's death. To accuse Naimy of having been embittered against Gibran when he is fully convinced that Gibran had really mentioned him in his last Will remains, therefore, totally unfounded. This is not to mention that Naimy had specially left New York and retired to his mystic seclusion in Mount Lebanon precisely because he was practically, intellectually and morally disinterested in the material benefits of the world.

To argue on the other hand that Naimy had intended in his book to degrade Gibran by magnifying his ills, is to forget, if magnifying is the right word, that Gibran's virtues in that book are equally magnified. "He is the greatest writer that has appeared in the East for generations", says Naimy in appreciation of Gibran. "He is unique in his art, not only in this East which has not yet produced distinguished artists, but also in the West which considers itself the master of art and the cradle of artists"[3]. It can hardly be convincing that such a tribute, coming after a highly appreciative analysis and study of Gibran's drawings and his mature works, particularly *The Prophet*, can issue from a man genuinely intent on degrading him so that he might step into his shoes. It is equally difficult to see how, trying to remove Gibran from the literary scene in an attempt to take his place, Naimy should later volunteer, in face of the alarmingly chaotic state of affairs to which Gibran's publications had reached in the Arab world, to edit a standerd collection of Gibran's works in Arabic, and to write an excellent extensive introduction to that collection in which those works are carefully

1. See p. 244 of the Arabic 4th edition, Beirut 1960.
2. See his article in *Sawt al-Ahrār*, op. cit.
3. *Gibran*, Arabic 4th edition, p. 279.

defined and classified[1]. Nor is it without great significance in this connection that Naimy should be prompted by the poor and inadequate translations into Arabic of *The Prophet* to come out in 1956 with a hitherto standard translation of that book[2]. Gibran's *The Prophet* remains until now the only book in a fereign language, apart from *The Book of Mirdad* by Naimy himself, that Naimy has ever cared to translate into Arabic. none of Naimy's critics seems to have been aware of the fact that by the time he wrote *Gibran* in 1934, Naimy was already a famous writer in his own right all over the Arab world and was hardly in need of destroying his friend so that he might take his place.

Naimy's critics were also unable to produce any convincing evidence that any of what they deemed degrading incidents related about Gibran, is a mere invention of the fancy. Many of these incidents which they have objected to, are contained in what Naimy recounts of Gibran's relations, especially the sexual, with Micheline, a teacher at Mary Haskell's High School, and with Mary Haskell[3]. Nā'ūry, drawing support from a book by Huwayyik, *Dhikrayāti Ma' Gubrān* (Reminiscences of my days with Gibran), goes to the extent of denying that Micheline ever existed as a person[4], while Micheline's picture, drawn by Gibran and dated 1908, is among the collection of drawings by Gibran kept at his Museum in Bisharri, Lebanon[5]. Particularly significant, is that Mary Haskell herself wrote a lengthy report on *Gibran* upon its appearance in English and, instead of condemning it, as she should have done had there been any truth in what Naimy's critics say, she speaks throughout with full admiration for the book's beauty, truthfulness and sincerity[6].

1. See *al-Majmū'ah al-Kāmilah Li-Mu'allafāt Gubrān Khalīl Gubrān*, 3 vols. edited with Introduction by Mikhail Naimy, Beirut, 1949.
2. See *al-Nabi* (*The Prophet*) translated with Introduction by Mikhail Naimy, Beirut, 1956.
3. See Fāris, op. cit.
4. *Adab al-Mahjar*, pp. 367—8.
5. We have personally seen the drawing, and so have others; see also 'Abbūd Mārūn, *Judod wa Qudamā'* (New and Old), Beirut, 1954, p. 129.
6. The Arabic traslation of Haskell's repert, already mentioned in this chapter, was published in *al-Sāyih* New York, January 8, 1951.

As to the question of the narrative novelistic style adopted by Naimy, it would seem that none of his critics has tried to appreciate *Gibran* in its natural context — in relation to the development of Naimy's literary career in his previous works, particularly *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul*, as we found it necessary to do towards the beginning of this chapter. Much less do they seem to have paid particular attention to his "Apologia", where he explicitly says that he does not intend to write the "history" of Gibran, but of Gibran as he had come to know him and "who shared with me his longings and his thoughts as I shared with him mine"[1]. Naimy's method of approach to his subject, therefore, was not that of a scholar or a historian but that of a creative writer and an artist. Apart from being in full conformity with the nature of his previous works, the malleable, quick-moving novelistic style could also best fit the task Naimy had set himself in *Gibran*, which is the unfolding of Gibran's "stubborn incessant struggle with himself to cleanse his soul from all impurities, and to make it as beautiful as the beauty he glimpsed with his imagination and so generously spread in his books and drawings"[2].

It can be safely concluded, therefore, that Naimy's intention in adopting the novelistic approach was not to transform Gibran's life-story into fiction, as claimed by his aforementioned critics, but as aptly understood by Kratchkowsky, 'Abbās, Saidah, al-Ashtar and a host of others[3], to make that story come alive for the reader.

We would have left the issues in relation to *Gibran*'s critics at this point, had we not discovered that their erroneous approach of rejecting the book by way of discrediting the author, was again adopted, and with strange results, in what is in many ways a successfully executed study of Kahlil Gibran. The author is Dr. Khalīl Hāwi, and the study is *Kahlil Gibran*, written in English as recently as 1959 and published in Beirut 1963.

1. *Gibran*, p. viii.
2. *Gibran*, p. ix.
3. See above, p. 288.

The part of Hāwi's work now chiefly in question is that in which he tries to assess the value of Naimy's *Gibran* in relation to his study[1]. What is at once conspicuous and also regrettable in that part is that of all the literature written on Naimy's *Gibran*, it was almost exclusively through that of Naimy's condemners, specifically Abu Mādi, Rīhāni, Fāris and Nā'ūry, that Hāwi tries to assess the value of that book. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the light of such partial, and already disproved evidence, Hāwi should accordingly dismiss Naimy as a wounded ego trying to avenge himself on Gibran, who had disinherited him, by divesting him of his glorious robe in order to wear it himself. What is surprising indeed is that Dr. Hāwi should go further to confirm from personal knowledge Naimy's intent purpose to wear Gibran's legendary robe himself. We very much regret that Dr. Hāwi has not elaborated further on his statement, to say in what capacity and since when he has come to know Naimy. In the absence of such elaboration, we remain entitled to say that we have for thirty years lived with Naimy under the same roof, and have not so far noticed him wearing any "legendary" robe in his everyday life; much less a Gibranean one. We would further add that had Dr. Hāwi known Naimy enough to judge, he would have realised that Naimy's hermitical life and devotion to the prophetic are not in imitation of Gibran but belong to the very nature of his character ever since he was a student in Nazareth and Poltava, years before any conceivable contact between him and Gibran.

It is against this background of discrediting Naimy, the author, that Dr. Hāwi easily dismisses *Gibran*, the book, as utterly unreliable. Summing up, he says: "We then examined Mr. Naimy's motives in, and technical approach to, the writing of his biography, and concluded that the latter was mainly fictional in construction and intended to counterbalance the idealizing legend with an equally unfounded but degrading one[2]. We cannot help noting how much more scholarly it whould have been of Dr. Hāwi had

1. Hāwi, pp. 73—77.
2. Hāwi, p. 81.

he first approached the biography itself before stopping to pass judgement on the motives behind it.

That Dr. Hāwi's undue dismissal of *Gibran* was unscholarly is proved by the remaining body of his book, where he engages in the independent study of Gibran's life, character and literary works. Nowhere in Chapter Four, for instance, where he discusses Gibran's life and character[1], does Hawi produce a single instance which really disproves what Naimy had to say on the subject. Hāwi's Gibran and Naimy's Gibran too often almost coincide. At times when a serious attempt at disproving Naimy is made, such as his discussion of Naimy's report on Gibran's relations with Mary Haskell and Micheline[2] and with the girl who left Gibran disillusioned about his lofty ideals on love[3], Hāwi either leaves the case undecided either for or against Naimy[4] or concludes by throwing "doubt on the story in the light of Mr. Naimy's known bias against Gibran"[5]. It would have certainly helped Dr. Hāwi to emerge from his doubts and perhaps also to judge for Naimy, rather than against him, if he had made his area of reference on Naimy's *Gibran* wide enough to include others besides Naimy's condemners, particularly Mary Haskell herself on whom the major part of the whole issue turns.

Dr. Hāwi's true attempt, on the other hand, in disproving the established belief that Gibran was a personal acquaintance or a pupil of Rodin in Paris, does not contradict Naimy's version, as he indicates[6]. On the contrary, what Naimy says on the subject[7] is that Gibran admired Rodin from what works of his he saw in Paris, and had once joined a group of students on an hour's visit to Rodin's studio where they were able to see the great artist. Nowhere does Naimy say or imply that Gibran was a personal acquaintance or, much less, a pupil of Rodin.

1. Hāwi, pp. 82—118.
2. Hāwi, pp. 90—96.
3. *Gibran*, pp. 219—221.
4. Hāwi, p. 100.
5. Hāwi, p. 117.
6. Hāwi, pp. 98—9.
7. *Gibran*, pp. 87—88.

In the succeeding three chapters where Gibran's works are discussed, Hāwi is again found to be walking in tracks already outlined by Naimy, such as the study of those works in the light of the profound influence they betray of Christ and The Bible, Blake, Nietzsche, Rodin and Eastern mysticism. Hāwi's unjustified suspicion of Naimy, however, does not fail to make occasional appearance. Specially conspicuous in this direction is when he holds a long comparison between the philosophy of Gibran and that of Nietzsche[1], trying to refute Naimy's thesis that Gibran in his later works, and particularly *Jesus The Son of Man*, was a Nietzschean in thought, at a time when Naimy's thesis is not to this effect. Part of the reason for which Naimy calls the last part of his book, in which he discusses Gibran's later works including *The Prophet* and *Jesus The Son of Man*, "Dawn", as we have pointed out earlier[2], is to emphasise Gibran's intellectual and spiritual emancipation from his previous Nietzschean darkness in *The Tempests*. Naimy's argument concerning *The Prophet* and *Jesus*, far from what Hāwi understands it to be, is that they retain some of the Nietzschean form and style but none of the Nietzschean philosophic content. Naimy's precise words in this connection and in relation to *The Prophet* are: "Though close and striking is the kinship in form and style between *The Prophet* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the two books are far apart in substance"[3].

It is not within the scope of this work to carry a full study comparing Naimy's version of Gibran with that of Hāwi. Nor is it in the least intended here and by the few remarks we have recorded, either to idealise Naimy's biography or to underestimate the amount of work put into Dr. Hāwi's study. That Naimy's biography is not complete is made evident by the very fact that Dr. Hāwi and many others like him were still able to feel that there is room enough in Gibran as a subject for their further study, research and appreciation. Naimy himself even hints at the inescapable

1. Hāwi, pp. 204—210.
2. See above, pp. 282—86.
3. *Gibran*, p. 189.

insufficiency, not only of his biography of Gibran, but also of any possible biography, when he says in the "Apologia"[1]: "For I believe that no man can faithfully, accurately and fully describe a simple instance of his own life in all its intricate meanings and its infinite connections with the Universal Life. How, then, is one, no matter what his talents, to put between the two covers of a book the life of another man, be he an idiot or a genius!"

The conclusion that we would like to draw here is that all the accusations discussed above thrown at Naimy's person remain not only totally unfounded, but also indicate an obvious lack of scholarly integrity on the part of the critics who sustain them. Busy trying to discredit Naimy's personal sincerity in *Gibran*, those critics, and particularly in Dr. Hāwi's case, have lost, both to their work and to scholarship, the full benefit of the truth of what he had to say.

1. *Gibran*, p. vii.

CHAPTER X

THE FLINT SLOPE

(concluded)

"Accept a theory and you will by-pass the creative process".

Peter Hall

Facing the Mediterranean to the West and rising to a height of over nine thousand feet, stands the majestic Mount Sannīn, Lebanon. From the summit down, and to a distance of nearly four miles, extends the smooth-faced "al-Bahsa Slope", at places almost perpendicular and not exceeding a quarter of a mile in width. Al-Bahsa (the stony) is so called by local mountaineers because its face from top to bottom consists of small flint and lime stones varying from the size of a football down to that of a walnut or a marble. To reach the summit via al-Bahsa Slope is almost impossible, for the stones, hard and whetted, cripple the feet.

Almost at the foot of al-Bahsa lies al-Shakhroob, the secluded farm[1] where Naimy spends the summer with his younger brother's family, consisting of Najeeb, his wife, and their two sons and daughter. Baskinta[2], the family's winter home, lies five miles further down towards the sea.

It was in the Summer of 1946, and in a natural grotto near al-Shakhroob facing al-Bahsa Slope, that Naimy conceived and wrote *The Book of Mirdad*, almost thirteen years after *Gibran* and only a few months after "Till We Meet"

1. See *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 45—51.
2. Ibid., pp. 42—51.

(*Liqā'*). The book, unlike the rest of Naimy's works, and for no obvious reasons, was first conceived and written in English. "The only thing I was decided on", says Naimy, describing how he came to write *Mirdad*[1], "was that the book should be written in English. If you ask me: why? I would be at a loss with an answer. So had it simply come to me"[2]. *Mirdad's* first edition came out in Beirut, 1948; a second edition followed in Bombay, 1954, and a third in London, 1962. Another edition in Dutch came out in Haarlem 1960. Not until 1952 did the book appear in its Arabic edition, translated by the author and published in Beirut.

The Book of Mirdad falls into two main parts: the first, entitled "The Story of the Book", is an introduction to Mirdad's Book; the second, entitled "The Book", contains the teachings of Mirdad, the prophet-hero and his life story. Whether it is Sannīn and the al-Bahsa Slope, al-Shakhroob and the grotto in which he worked, that inspired Naimy with the setting of the mystical allegory in *Mirdad*, or that Naimy, inspired with the allegory, availed himself of those places in providing it with a natural setting, is difficult and perhaps fruitless to conjecture. What is evident is that those regions, though presented under different names in the story, are unmistakably recognisable, even more so because the author is also the narrator and a central figure, speaking throughout in the first person singular. The story itself derives in its basic conception from the legend of the Flood in the Book of Genesis.

II

Happening to be staying one Summer among local mountaineers living in the shade of Altar Peak, the highest and most desolate in "The Milky Mountains", the narrator is robbed of his rest by a current legend

1. We shall henceforth refer to the book, only as *Mirdad*. Unless otherwise stated, all reference shall be to the British edition, London, 1962.
2. *Sab'ūn* III, p. 214.

about the ruins of a monastery, "The Ark", still standing atop of that mountain. The story of "The Ark", the legend says, goes back to the days of Noah who, fearing in his old age "that men shall in time forget the Flood and the lusts and wickednesses that brought it on"[1], bade "his son, Sam, who was a dreamer and a man of vision like himself, ... build an altar upon the highest peak in these mountains, which peak shall henceforth be known as Altar Peak" and a sanctuary around it "which shall correspond in all details to the ark ... and shall be known as The Ark". Noah's instructions were that The Ark should always have nine men recluses, no more, no less, who are to keep the "fire of faith burning" for generations to come. "Their bodily needs shall be provided them by the charity of the faithful"[2]. Upon the death of any of them, God will immediately provide another in his stead. Their being nine only is to correspond to the number of people (Noah and his family) who originally sailed the mother-Ark, the ninth, Noah is reported to have explained to his son, having been an invisible stowaway whose presence and guidance all along had been felt by him alone.

Sam, the legend goes on, had fulfilled his father's bidding. However, generations later, the Ark became exceedingly rich, accepting donations from the faithful in excess of its needs. Totally immersed in the concerns and riches of the world, it forgot all about the divine truth for which it originally stood. This continued until once, upon the death of a recluse, a beggar appeared at the Monastery door. Instead of being taken in immediately as one provided by God and as tradition required, he was first refused entry by the worldly-minded and hard-hearted Senior for his utter shabbiness and poverty. Upon the stranger's persuasive insistence, he was at last admitted, not as a member of the group but as a servant. After a time, however, the servant unsealed his lips. His elevated and penetrating teachings took the monks by surprise. The phosphorescence of his prophetic character enslaved the hearts of the companions. Together with him they divested The Ark of all its worldly riches, distributing them among the poor tenants and,

1. *Mirdad*, p. 9.
2. Ibid, p. 10.

in the light of his divine teachings, descended the mountain into the world to spread the message of salvation. As to the wholly worldly-minded Senior who tried to hold his ground until the last, a curse was laid upon him by the servant whereby, the legend says, "he is bound to the grounds of the Monastery and made dumb until this day"[1].

His curiosity inflamed by the legend and by the prospects of seeing the old ruins and the mysteriously bound Abbot, the narrator decides to climb the mountain. Against all advice, and ignoring all easier paths, he sets off for Altar Peak through the impossible Flint Slope, and with only seven loaves of bread and a staff. Soon his feet are almost crippled. "To make any headway I had to dig my hands and knees, as well as my toes, in the mobile flint"[2]. As hunger bites him and he reaches for the bread, a weird goatherd and a shepherd surround him. "No bread-eating creatures have passed here in many moons", says the shepherd to his goats, throwing to them the seven loaves and telling the anger-torn climber, "The way that provides not for the wayfarer is no way to fare upon"[3].

By nightfall, hungry, cold, exhausted and bleeding all over, but still persistent, the narrator seeks shelter in a nearby grotto. But an eerie, tattered old woman walks in with a naked, beautiful young maiden. She strips him naked and clothes the maiden with his garments. Her answer to his pleas is:

Less possessing — less possessed.
More possessing — more possessed.
More possessed — less assessed.
Less assessed — more assessed[4].

No sooner does she go out, announcing to him that he has now arrived at the brink of the Black Pit, than a fiendish, old and haggard couple

1. *Mirdad*, p. 11.
2. Ibid. p. 14.
3. Ibid. p. 15.
4. Ibid. p. 17.

enter, accompanied by a fierce dog. They rob him of his staff, and chase him out so that they may use the grotto as a nuptial chamber. Of the song they sing:

> Happy are the staffless,
> They stumble not.
> Happy are the homeless,
> They are at home...[1]

concluding the song with

> "Die to live or live to die"[2]

As he goes out all naked, he falls unconscious and is tossed "down — down, down" into the pitch darkness of the Black Pit. He only comes to at the touch of a helping hand and a voice telling him, "Arise, O happy stranger. You have attained your goal"[3]. He is at the summit. The voice and the hand are those of the bound Abbot. The Abbot tells the narrator his story, which confirms the legend. His name is Shamadam. The curse laid on him, he explains, goes back one hundred and fifty years to the time when the prophet-servant, Mirdad by name, making ready to descend with his seven other disciples into the world, had charged him [Shamadam] as a punishment for his earth-bound soul with the guarding of his [Mirdad's] holy Book, "locked within an iron chest beneath the altar"[4] in the grotto, until such time as he should send his messenger to relieve him.

Soon after Shamadam hands The Book over to the naked narrator and retires into the grotto to undress and hand over to him his clothes as well, the narrator looks back to find the clothes but not the Abbot. Shamadam, he sees transformed at the entrance of the grotto into a huge rock with the appearance of a crouching beast. Putting on Shamadam's garb,

1. Ibid. p. 18.
2. Ibid. p. 20.
3. Ibid. p. 21.
4. Ibid. p. 27.

the narrator retraces his steps down Flint Slope to publish *The Book of Mirdad: A Lighthouse and a Haven*, to the world.

The second part of *Mirdad*, "The Book", supposedly The Book of Mirdad handed over to the narrator on Altar Peak by Shamadam, is difficult, if not impossible, to summarise. Like the Gospels or the Koran, it takes the form of a universal divinely inspired message of salvation, communicated through Mirdad in place of Christ or Mohammad. Less like Mohammad and more like Christ, Mirdad himself figures throughout as the incarnate divine cosmic truth — as the Messiah in his second coming. It is his second coming, because in the first part, "The Story of the Book", he is reported to have first made himself manifest to Noah in The Ark inspiring him with the divine guidance and faith which were to lead him and the generations after him to salvation. That Mirdad had to make a second coming, as "The Book" testifies, and restate his message to the monks in The Ark is because The Ark, entrusted from the days of Noah "to keep the fire of faith burning", has in the leadership of Shamadam, the Senior monk, plunged once again into the Flood of worldly passions and extinguished the fire. The essence of Mirdad's message in "The Book" is that man is a God in swaddling bands. Not until man, through spiritual sublimation, outgrows his narrow egotism, firmly attached to the lower world of physical existence, can he finally emancipate from suffering, evil and death and realise his Godhood.

Like the Gospels, "The Book" is divided into short chapters — thirty-seven in all — of two to five pages each, in which the deeds and utterings of Mirdad during the last two of his nine years' stay among the monks of The Ark are carefully recorded by one of the Companions, Naronda. The thirty-seven chapters are tied each to each by a thin, and at times dwindling, story line, which, together with a poetic Biblical style, are meant to impart movement and life to what otherwise remains a series of theosophically condensed and highly didactic sermons. On each occasion the story would furnish a natural setting that provides Mirdad with the opportunity to come out with a sermon on one aspect or another of life and death and human

destiny. The monks, for instance, engage among themselves in a heated argument in which they make excessive use of the word "I", and Mirdad breaks his seven years of silence among them to give a sermon of three chapters on "I" the microcosm and "I" the macrocosm, teaching how man's only salvation lies in his dissolving the first into the latter[1]. The sermon, while alienating the worldly-minded Shamadam, the Senior, filling him with a life-long hatred of Mirdad, convinces the other seven monks that Mirdad is truly the promised Deliverer and drives them to become his devoted disciples. The cleft between Mirdad and Shamadam, reminiscent of that between Christ and the Scribes and Pharisees, is exploited by the story until the end.

On one occasion Shamadam attempts to insult Mirdad by calling him a servant, and Mirdad comes out with a sermon on master and slave, teaching that the world is a unity whereby "Nothing can serve save it be served by serving. And nothing can be served except it serve the serving ... Crush out the deadly masters' pride. Root out the shameful servants' shame"[2]. On other occasions Shamadam would resort to bribery and intrigue to oust Mirdad from The Ark and get him imprisoned by the prince of the district. But each occasion would give the all-knowing Mirdad, who proves mightier than all the obstacles put before him, an opportunity to preach, now on prisons and prison walls and that man's only prison is his lower passions and physical attachments, and now on meeting evil with good and with divine understanding: "Pray for the good of all the creatures. For every good of every creature is your good as well. Likewise, the ill of every creature is your ill as well."[3] "A muddy brook can easily muddy another brook. But can a muddy brook muddy the sea? The sea shall gladly take the mud and spread it in its bed, and give the brook clean water again."[4]

1. *Mirdad*, pp. 35—42.
2. Ibid. p. 48.
3. Ibid. p. 81.
4. Ibid. p. 82.

An estrangement between Naronda and Abimar, two of the seven monk-disciples, provides Mirdad with the opportunity to preach on love as the Law of God and the only means through which man can pass from his contingent self to his real self, which is the universe as a whole[1]. "And what is it to love but for the lover to absorb forever the beloved so that the twain be one?"

"And whom, or what, is one to love? Is one to choose a certain leaf upon the Tree of Life and pour upon it all one's heart? What of the branch that bears the leaf? What of the bark that shields the stem? What of the roots that feed the bark, the stem, the branches and the leaves? What of the soil embosoming the roots? What of the sun, and sea and air that fertilise the soil"[2]?

Naronda sees an impure dream concerning a woman, and Mirdad answers the second morning with a sermon on sex[3] and how it is another physical bondage from which God-seeking men and women ought to be liberated. "Let men and women, who are yet not far from the stallion and the mare, and from the buck and the doe, seek each other in the dark seclusions of the flesh ... Let them take joy in the fertility of their backs and the fecundity of their wombs ...

"But men and women yearners must realise their unity even while in the flesh; not by communion of the flesh, but by the Will to Freedom from the flesh and all the impediments it places in their way to perfect Unity..."[4]

Sim-Sim, the oldest cow in the stables of The Ark, falls ill and Shamadam sends for the butcher to slaughter her. Mirdad touches Sim-Sim caressingly and restores her health. Turning to the disciples, he lectures them on whether it is lawful to kill to eat[5]. "To feed on Death is to become

1. *Mirdad*, pp. 62—67.
2. Ibid. p.62.
3. Ibid. pp. 103—108.
4. Ibid. p. 106.
5. Ibid. pp. 109—116.

food for Death. To live by others' pain is to become a prey for pain. So has decreed the Omniwill... Believe, Micayon[1], that the day is coming in which men shall live by the aroma of things, which is their spirit, and not by their flesh and blood. And that day is not far off for the yearners"[2].

The father of Himbal, one of the seven disciples, dies, and Mirdad speaks on life and death and the wheel of time[3]. Man shall continue to revolve with the wheel of time, life after life and death after death, until he purges himself from the contingent in his nature and unites with God. Death is only a process but never a final stop. "Your father is not dead, Himbal. Nor dead are yet his form and shadow. But dead, indeed, are your senses to your father's altered form and shadow. For there be forms so delicate, with shadows so attenuated that the coarse eye of man cannot detect"[4].

After his two years of preaching, covering such other subjects as "The Way to Painless Life", "On Judgement and Judgement Day", "On Prayer", "On Sin and the Shedding of the Fig-Leaf Aprons" and kindred topics, Mirdad avails himself of the opportunity at the Day of The Ark, an annual festival celebrated in the monastery by all the people of the vicinity, to conclude his mission by announcing to the crowds that humanity, highly entangled by its complicated needs and wholly devoted to the material in man to the utter neglect of the divine, is heading for unavoidable disaster. "The flood that overwhelmed the Earth in Noah's days was not the first nor last humanity has known. It only set a high mark in the long succession of devastating floods. The flood of fire and blood which is about to break upon the Earth shall surely pass the mark...

Except you heed Mirdad, the Earth shall never be to you more than a tomb, the sky more than a shroud: whereas the one was fitted out to serve you for a cradle, the other for a throne"[5].

1. One of the monk disciples.
2. *Mirdad.* p. 113.
3. Ibid. pp. 89—93.
4. Ibid. p. 90.
5. Ibid. pp. 180—181.

III

What should particularly strike a student of Naimy in *Mirdad*, we believe, is the author's attempt through symbolism and fiction to establish a necessary relation between a certain premise and a certain conclusion, which he had all his life been laboriously trying, and with qualified success, to prove in actual fact. From this aspect *Mirdad* can, to a considerable extent, be seen as a summary of and a suitable conclusion to Naimy's intellectual and spiritual autobiography.

The premise, we believe, had first been established in Naimy's mind as early as his student days in Nazareth, Christ's home town. The figure of Christ, the God who took a human form in order to usher humanity, doomed to destruction by its own folly, into the path of eternal salvation, had then filled Naimy's young mind with awe and admiration and led him to shape his life and thinking in the light of the Master's character and teachings[1]. The premise firmly established in Naimy, the Nazarene, is that human society, entangled in its artificial multiplication of needs, is doomed and that the only way to the good life and to final salvation is through the God-man, Jesus Christ.

In Russia, Naimy's thesis concerning the futility of modern civilisation and society was not only given further confirmation and finally stamped for life by post-1876 Tolstoy, but was also broadened under Tolstoy's influence to include the Church, the very custodian of Christ's message. It is probably in this early Tolstoyan era of Naimy's life that the idea of The Ark in *Mirdad* as the extinguisher of the very "fire of faith", for the propagation of which it was originally founded,[2] first began to take root. The idea of Mirdad (Christ in his second coming), on the other hand, who is

1. For the deep impression that Christ left on Naimy's life and conduct in Nazareth, see *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 125—130; also above p. 80—83.
2. *Mirdad*, p.10.

disowned and imprisoned by the very people (Shamadam) whose sole occupation and duty, it is understood, is to keep alive his name and the truths which he taught during his first coming, can possibly also be traced back to Naimy's reminiscences of Dostoyevsky's "The Grand Inquisitor" in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Equally strengthened and broadened under Tolstoy in Russia was the second part of Naimy's premise, that Christ is the only way to the good life and final salvation[1]. But, while confirming Naimy's thesis regarding Christ, Tolstoy through his Karmic interpretation of the moral law must have also and at the same time presented him with an antithesis. For Tolstoy also believed that there is no God except the moral law at work both inside man and in the whole universe without, and that this law operates mechanically and without any intervention of Divine Grace, whereby evil is automatically answered with evil, and good mechanically invites good[2].

Unable to part with Christ, the God-man, and yet incapable of rejecting the forceful logic of Karma, Naimy, it seems, had to draw a conclusion, a synthesis in which the two are made compatible. To this conclusion, which was later to constitute the core of Naimy's whole post-American literary career, Theosophy, with which he came in contact in Seattle[3], must have pointed out the way. If there is no God except the moral law, Naimy must have reasoned out in the light of Theosophy, and if this law operates inside man through the medium of conscience as well as in the rest of things in the infinite universe without, then each man can achieve Godhood once he co-ordinates his conscience — the living "I" within him — with the "I" of the universe, the "I" absolute or God[4]. "Man", therefore, as Mirdad

1. For Tolstoy's spiritual impact on Naimy in Russia, see *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 187, 235, 269—71, also above pp. 101—105.
2. See Naimy's bewilderment concerning the apparent incompatibility of the two theses towards the end of his sojourn in Russia in *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 274—279.
3. *Sab'ūn* pp. 45—50.
5. See "I is the Source and Centre of All Things" and seq. in *Mirdad*, pp. 38—47.

teaches his disciples, "is a God in swaddling-bands"[1]. His "swaddling-bands" are everything in his nature which ties him to the particular, the physical and the spatiotemporal and consequently stands between the "I" in him and the "I" universal and absolute.

In the light of this reasoning and of his Tolstoyan anti-clericalism, Naimy found it exceedingly easy to retain and accommodate his Jesus. He could now understand Christ, not as a God who has taken a human form in order that he may redeem with his blood the evil of mankind, as the Church teaches, but as a man who has through spiritual sublimation, self-negation and "swaddling-bands" breaking, the last band of which was broken on the cross, released the God in him and made it one with the God Universal. Christ was not a God who had descended to man but a man who had elevated himself to Godhood. This is how he was able to do what he did during his lifetime and later to resurrect after death. Christ, therefore, remains the only way to salvation, not as a God-redeemer, but as a human being who has set the example and the final proof that man *can* climb "the Flint Slope" within him from the human to the divine[2].

So completely taken by his theosophically established theory that human society as it is, is doomed and that the only way to salvation is for man, like Christ, to rise through self-negation or self co-ordination with the Self Universal, from the human in him to the divine, Naimy has ever since his theosophic conversion devoted himself almost entirely to its propagation and to seeing it worked out in practice. While tirelessly engaged, as witnessed by his essay works from *Stages*, through *Food For The Godward Journey* up to *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, including *A Vineyard By The Road* (*Karm 'Ala Darb*)[3], in preaching his theory in the hope that it would be

1. *Mirdad*, Chapter IV.
2. See the complete theosophic twist that Naimy's Christ had taken in "Three Faces: The Face of Buddha, The Face of Laotzu and The Face of Jesus" *Stages*, pp. 5—52, written in 1921 only five years after Naimy's graduation from Seattle.
3. *A Vineyard by The Road*, first published in Cairo, 1946, is a small book of collected aphorisms, which would easily pass for one of those chapters in *Mirdad* consisting of a series of terse sayings soaked with Eastern wisdom.

heeded, his main purpose behind *The Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul, Gibran, Till We Meet* and *Mirdad* was to see that theory actualized in a living character.

Though successfully and masterly launched on the man-God ascent, on "the Flint Slope", pitted Face, however, was not able to fulfill Naimy's theory of climbing that slope to the end. Finally frustrated by the overwhelming task set before him, he commits suicide. Gibran in *Gibran* lives and dies pulled apart within himself, with head and heart clamouring for the heights of the summit and feet immersed deep in the mire of physical passions and of everyday existence. Leonardo in "Till We Meet", on the other hand, is reported to have reached the summit — to have achieved Godhood. But Leonardo's feet were never in the human in the first place. He emerged from the start in the story as a semi-God, and would have indeed passed for a full God had it not been for "Just a trace — a very faint one — of bestiality in Leonardo's soul"[1], which he easily removed during a drawn-out period of mystical seclusion in The Virgins' Valley.

Under the impact of his theory, Naimy therefore still had to produce for himself and for the world the particular human being, the second Christ, who would climb the slope to the end. This he tried to work out with the help of symbols in *Mirdad*, utilizing, of course, his own experiences in his life-long struggle to realise in himself what he so clearly conceived in thought and intuition.

The Grotto on Altar Peak treasuring *The Book of Mirdad* is no other than the secluded natural grotto (الكهف) near al-Shakhroob which has witnessed the birth of the greater number of Naimy's post-American writings, including *Gibran*, "Till We Meet" and *Mirdad*. *The Book of Mirdad*: *A Lighthouse and a Haven*, handed over to the narrator on Altar Peak and said to have been locked within an iron chest beneath the altar on that summit, symbolises the absolute transcendental mystical truth, concealed to many by the external world of sense perception, as unsealed and

1. *Till We Meet*, p. 62.

wholly captured by Naimy's imagination and vision, made specially sharp and penetrating by the quiet, peace and serenity of his seclusion in the al-Shakhroob Grotto. That the book is said to have been deposited under the altar of a ruined monastery traceable in history as far back as Noah, is to emphasise that the message it brings is not new in essence, but is only a rejuvenation of the age-old spiritual message of the East which the world of modern civilisation has, to its detriment, forgotten. "The Flint Slope", corresponds in all external descriptions to al-Bahsa Slope on Mount Sannin, leading from al-Shakhroob right up to the summit. It symbolises man's ascent through self-discipline and self deprivation — experiences with which Naimy's life is particularly rich—from the carnal and the human to the spiritual and divine. The slope is described as consisting of mobile "broken flint of various sizes and shapes, the smallest chip a sharp needle or a whetted blade"[1] because the way to spiritual emancipation, as Naimy sees it, "is strewn with aches, furrowed with pitfalls and shadowed with snarling passions"[2]. The climber is described as "tracing his path with blood"[3] because it is only by divesting oneself of oneself, by breaking off one's attachments to the earthly, that one can realise oneself in the spiritual.

The various weird encounters that harass the narrator on his solitary climb to caputre the absolute truth symbolised by *The Book* of *Mirdad*, derive a good deal from the different trying experiences of self-divesting and self-deprivation which Naimy had actually gone through in life in his attempt to extricate himself from the world and to live up to the ideals of his spiritual quest in his Lebanese mountainous retreat.

The loaves of bread, the narrator's only food supply on his journey to the summit, taken from him and thrown to the goats, may be understood in the light of Naimy's first testing experience of uprooting himself in the name of his convictions, and at any cost, from the world of modern civilisation

1. *Mirdad*, p. 14.
2. *Gibran*, p. 263.
3. *Mirdad*, p. 146.

and society. It was for no other motive save the realisation of his mystic dream that Naimy, after twenty years of active life in America, made his decisive Cuckoo Clock retirement on April 19, 1932, from New York to al-Shakhroob with barely enough money in his pocket to last him for the journey[1]. He knew he could rely on no-one at home for financial support. His two elder brothers in America had their own families and could send no help. One of his two younger brothers staying at home, a graduate in agriculture from France, died only a few months after his (Mikhail's) arrival. His other brother, Najeeb, working on the soil in al-Shakhroob and supporting his aged parents together with his wife and three children, was more in a position to need financial assistance than to offer it.

Alone in his quest, provisionless, and at times literally penniless[2], Naimy nevertheless resisted the temptation of practising law, to which he was entitled by his degree from America, and which would have relieved him and his brother's family, among whom he lived and still lives, from their financial crisis. Sticking almost exclusively to Baskinta in winter and to al-Shakhroob in Summer, he devoted himself entirely to writing and to the life of the spirit, or what in *Mirdad* is termed the climbing of the Flint Slope, refusing to take any other occupation, even high government posts which were readily offered to him[3].

He was relentlessly determined and still is to live by his writings and on them. Therefore does the weird goatherd tell the slope climber in *Mirdad*, as he divests him of all the bread he carries, "The way that provides not for the wayfarer is no way to fare upon"[4]: therefore has Naimy lived exclusively since 1932 on his publications in the Arab world, which up to

1. See *Sab'ūn* III, p. 8.
2. For more details about Naimy's life since 1932 in Lebanon, see *Sab'ūn* III.
3. He was asked at one time, for instance, to take over one of the Ministries in the Lebanese Government; see *Sab'ūn* III, pp. 96—97. We can also confirm from personal knowledge that he was more than once approached to serve as Lebanese ambassador to various European countries.
4. *Mirdad*, p. 15.

the Second World War yielded an income barely sufficient to cover the author's elementary needs.

Complementary to his struggle against the temptation of modern civilisation and of wealth, was his equally bitter struggle in life against the flesh, symbolised in *Mirdad* by the climber's incident, further up "Flint Slope", with the eerie old woman who divests him of his clothes to cover the utterly naked beautiful maiden in her company. The ugly old woman represents sexual desire which, to the yearner for self-realisation in the emancipated world of the spirit, is the pulling force that brings him back to the bondage of the flesh. The naked, beautiful maiden, on the other hand, stands for the various women in Naimy's life with whom his higher aspirations and his lower desires were brought to clash, and where he was put in the trying situation of either indulging their naked sexual beauties or of covering their nudity, as does the climber of Flint Slope, with his own clothes — his chastity.

Naimy had his first tempting experience with the other sex as he records, with Varia, ten years his senior, in Russia at the age of nineteen[1]. The end of what he reports as having all the time been an acute struggle between the platonic in him and the sensual in relation to Varia, came about three years later when he left for Lebanon and then for the United States[2].

His self-same struggle continued in America in relation to various other women, chief among whom were Bella[3] and Neonia[4], until the Platonic in him arrived at its final victory in his relations with Hilda[5], the last woman, according to *Sab'ūn* II, who passionately entered his life in America, but who was also made to leave as chaste as she had entered. In recognition of his Platonic victory with her, Hilda left him a farewell bouquet of white roses

1. For the full account of Naimy's love relations with Varia, see *Sab'ūn* I, pp. 199—201, 225—228, 264—267.
2. *Sab'ūn* II, p. 20.
3. See *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 158—168; 188—193; 233—240.
4. *Sab'ūn* II, pp. 259—299; 317—321; 331—333.
5. *Sab'un* II, pp. 31—316; 333.

in his room on the boat in which he was sailing on April 19, 1932 from New York to Lebanon. "Those white farewell roses from Hilda were the best opening for a new stage in my life in which sexual desire would have no power over my blood. And in which all power would be of the soul, yearning to rise with men and women to where they would constitute the perfect man, the unified, and the stronger than any lust"[1]. By this new stage of his life, Naimy meant the Lebanese one, characterised by his devoted spiritual ascent up Flint Slope in al-Shakhroob for self realisation in Mirdad.

That Naimy's victory over the flesh, as he conceived that victory to be, was really final is testified not only by the fact that he chose, as well as succeeded, to stay unmarried, but also by having managed until the present, and ever since he made his Tolstoyan retirement from New York at the age of forty-three, to keep himself utterly chaste, allowing no woman to enter his life and sticking in theory as well as in practice to Mirdad's warning to the monks: "The Overcomer do I preach — Man unified and master of himself. Man made prisoner by the love of woman, and woman made a prisoner by the love of man are equally unfit for Freedom's precious crown"[2].

The climber's incident with the haggard couple in *Mirdad*, the third in the series[3], can therefore be understood in the light of Naimy's worldly loneliness in his Lebanese seclusion. The couple cheat him of his only staff and of his grotto, which they intend to use as a nuptial chamber, just as he had by sheer will cheated himself of matrimonial life, the one answer to man's primordial yearning for self-propagation; the other answer being faith in life after death — in mystical unity with God. Between the first and the second alternatives is the Black Pit; the problem of Death, in the face of which man either loses faith and confidence and falls back on the physical world in an attempt to drown his fears in the pleasures therein, or prophetically sees the eternal life beyond and boldly accepts death as a passage thereto.

1. *Sab'ūn* II, p. 333.
2. *Mirdad*, p. 105.
3. Ibid. pp. 17—20.

The climber in *Mirdad* who finally faces the Black Pit does not retrace his steps down the slope to the world but rather lends himself to it, mumbling all along, "Die to live, or live to die"[1]. In this he symbolises Naimy himself, whose mystic vision had actually saved his faith in the face of his many trying experiences with death during the last thirty years of his life.

Gibran, his life companion in America, died in his arms in St Vincent's Hospital, 1931[2], yet Naimy was able, when painting that pathetic scene in his biography, to consider it Gibran's Dawn[3]. In the spring of 1933 and only a year after Naimy's arrival in Lebanon, his brother, twenty-six-year old Nasseeb, also died in his arms in Baskinta. Nasseeb, newly married and a graduate in agricultural sciences from Nancy, France, was Naimy's youngest brother as well as his protégé. Naimy had subsidised his education throughout with the few dollars he could save in New York from his meagre monthly salary. Coming from New York for the realisation of his mystical dreams in al-Shakhroob, Naimy was mainly counting on Nasseeb to relieve him of his financial obligations towards the rest of the family at home and to provide him with companionship and moral support[4]. Far from shaking Naimy's faith in the perpetuity of life after death, Nasseeb's lamentable death gave it even more reason to wax strong and firm.

Years later, Naimy's father died peacefully in al-Shakhroob, 1937, at the age of eighty-three[5]. Naimy himself closed the eyes of his dead father, as calmly and soberly as he closed Nasseeb's and Gibran's a few years earlier. The present writer still remembers him, though vaguely, saying in all serenity to his younger brother, Najeeb, bitterly crying over the dead body: "Think of it this way. Imagine us all walking among those hills. If one of us is lost to our eyes it is because he has only disappeared behind the next

1. *Mirdad*, p.20.
2. See *Gibran*, pp. 3—12.
3. See above p. 286.
4. For details concerning the impact of Nasseeb's tragic death on Naimy, see *Sab'ūn* III, pp. 22—23; 38—39; 55—57; 84—89.
5. *Sab'ūn* III, pp. 131—134.

hill. It is only a matter of time and a few steps before we would be able to see him again." On August 14, 1944, Naimy's eighty-three-year old mother, probably the dearest person he ever loved, died[1]. Again, he closed her eyes with his own hands, and with the serenity and spiritual confidence of a man whose unshakeable belief is that she was only temporarily screened from his own eyes by the "next hill".

By the time he set out to write *Mirdad* in al-Shakhroob grotto, therefore, and throgh the help of that seclusion in particular and of his self-imposed hermitical life in general, Naimy felt that he had covered a good deel of the "Flint Slope" ascent. His feeling was that he had already learnt how to free his soul from earthly bondage — bondage to the doomed world of modern society and civilisation, to sex, marriage, riches, worldly power, fame, etc., and, above all, bondage to fear of death — "The Black Pit" —

With the human in him subdued, and the "Swaddling-Bands" broken off his inner vision, Naimy, therefore, felt himself entitled, in the writing of *Mirdad*, to pass from a Flint Slope climber, in the introductory part, to the recipient at the summit, of "The Book of Mirdad", the divine message of salvation, which he takes down the slope and publishes to the world.

IV

Judging *Mirdad* in the light of Naimy's previous attempt in "Till We Meet", it would seam that Mirdad the character in the book again falls short of standing as a living substantiation of Naimy's philosophic Theory. As in the *Memoirs*, *Gibran* and "Till We Meet", so also is the case in *Mirdad*. The gap between the human aspirant as he is and the Godhood to which he aspires, remains realistically unbridged or unbridgeable.

1. *Sab'ūn* III, pp. 164—169.

The Mirdad that we meet throughout the Book, is a ready-made emancipated God, an already resurrected Christ, so to speak, the process of whose passage through the human to the divine we do not see. He enigmatically appears from the start at the gates of the monastery as somebody out of the world, and preaches his message of thirty-seven sermons to the monks who, as recluses in the Ark, high up on Altar Peak, are equally out of the world. Yet, it is for the world at the foot of Flint Slope, at the top of which Mirdad preaches, that his message of salvation is intended.

Judged through Naimy's theory itself concerning the man-God ascent, therefore, Mirdad, the emancipated God, whose actual passage to Godhood through the human is not revealed, remains a conclusion without a premise. As such, he is therefore not a concrete reality but a general abstraction. Consequently, in passing from a slope climber seeking the absolute truth to a Mirdad providing that truth on the summit,Naimy as thinker and artist does not in actual fact pass from the human to the divine, nor artstically provide the realistic missing link in his literature between the man-premise and the God-conclusion, but merely shifts from the concrete in him to the abstract — from a giant human being to a shadow - God.

There can be no doubt that Naimy's life-long struggle from Nazareth to Poltava to Washington and New York to its final successful conclusion in al-Shakhroob, to curb his physical desires, bridle his passions and put his whole being in full tune with his own mystical philosophy of life, is something that inspires awe and admiration. In the short introductory part of *Mirdad*, an imaginative, poetic and symbolic masterpiece, where Naimy, the narrator, is depicted as a Flint Slope climber, he figures, and quite deservedly, as one of those great epic characters in world literature such as Dante in Dante's *Inferno* and Virgil's Aeneas in the Land of Shadows. But no sooner does the slope climber take over the role of a Mirdad on the summit, than words take the place of action and the human giant gives way to the shadow - God. This is so because Naimy, the artist, is overcome by his own preconceived philosophic theory. Under the impact of that preconceived theory, he is forced to bring the "God in process", which is man

in his slope climb, to his logical conclusion as a "God in act" — to a Mirdad. But no sooner does Naimy, the artist, attempt this in *Mirdad* than he falls into the predicament of his own philosophy. By this predicament we mean that in order to arrive at a God in act, man should first accomplish the Flint Slope ascent, he should first complete the process. But the moment the process is ended, he is left with a "God in act", who really no longer has anything to act for or upon, and is therefore, by nature, inactive and lifeless. Such a God is Mirdad.

Faced with the predicament of having to present as the active hero in the novel a Mirdad, who, by nature and definition, is inert, Naimy, the artist and the hero "slope climber", gives way to Naimy, the preacher, who readily resolves the difficulty by substituting words for action and authoritative sermons for heroic accomplishments. Mirdad, the emancipated God, is turned in Naimy's hands into a mouth-piece, through which elements of his Messianic teachings, scattered in his earlier essay works down to *Stages* and *Food For The Godward Journey*, are concentrated in thirty-seven sermons (the number of discourses Mirdad holds with his disciples) and given, as utterings of an emancipated God, a marked prophetic authority.

Mirdad's utterings, with their prophetic authority, and their main central theme of urging man to emerge through self-knowledge, and consequently self-negation, from the microcosm which he is to the macrocosm which is the Soul Universal or God, are described, and quite justly, as "a new Scripture for humanity", comparable to the Upanishad[1]. William Katsiflis, a former colleague of Naimy (Mischa, as he was called among his friends) in the "Pen Bond", calls *Mirdad*, in an extensive summary of the book, the "Gospel of Mischa", and quite justifiably finds it resembling in literary style Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*[2]. A similar opinion is expressed

1. See "The Book of Mirdad" a short report by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *The Aryan Path*, November issue, Bombay, 1955, p. 505.
2. The report of Katsiflis, "Kitāb Mirdad" (The Book of Mirdad) is published piecemeal in *al-Sâyih*, March 7, 10 and 14, New York, 1949.

in another report on *Mirdad* by 'Abbās al-'Aqqād[1], and reiterated by al-Ashtar[2].

That Naimy succeeds in putting in the mouth of Mirdad a new gospel in which the spiritual teachings of the East, and particularly the Gospels, The Bhagavad Gita and The Tao-Teh-King, are intermingled and impregnated with a new spirit and an extremely captivating dinamism that issue in a mast powerful and distilled form, certainly gives credit to Naimy the saturated theosophist and place him among the greatest spiritual poet-thinkers the East has ever produced[3]. But this in no way turns Mirdad the character in the book into a success, nor changes the fact that, aiming for a God in act in *Mirdad*, Naimy has come back with only a God in theory[4]. If it were for the message alone that *Mirdad* bears, there would have hardly been sufficient reason for the book to be written. For, so far as content is concerned, Mirdad's thirty-seven sermons have basically little to add to Naimy's philosophic theory contained in his earlier writings, particularly *Food For The Godward Journey*, and already examined in previous chapters of the present work[5].

Seen in the light of his previous attempt in "Till We Meet", therefore, Naimy in *Mirdad*, once more, does not seem to have succeeded in offering a realistic demonstration in his literature of his theory that the passage from the human to the divine is possible in act and, once more, his demonstration has only revealed that such passage can solely be achieved in abstract thought and mystical fantasy[6].

1. See *al-Kitāb* (Monthly), Februry issue, Cairo, 1949, pp. 274—278.
2. al-Ashtar, 'Abd al-Karîm, *al-Nathr al-Mahjari* Vol. II, p. 119.
3. It should be noted here that a whole book, *Radd 'Ala Kitāb Mirdad* (In Refutation of The Book of Mirdad) was written by a certain Catholic clergyman, Père Yuhanna al-Khoury, in which he goes to the unnecessary length of proving that *Mirdad* is a departure from the orthodox teachings of the Catholic Church and concludes, as a consequence, that it shold be burnt. The book was published in Sidon, Lebanon, 1956.
4. It is worth mentioning in this connection that Naimy's original plan for *Mirdad* was to write it as a play — see *Sab'ûn* III, p. 215. He even went further, to write the first two scenes of the play.
5. Special reference is to Chapters VII and VIII above.
6. See above pp. 264—266.

CONCLUSION

Of all his works, Naimy considers *Mirdad* as the book in which his literary career arrived at its summit[1]. In the light of the present study, however, *Mirdad*, seems far from constituting the summit of Naimy's career; the climax having been achieved, we believe, earlier, in *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul* and *Gibran*. To explain our difference in evaluation with the author, we shall now attempt to give a final, overall statement concerning the light in which we have tried to see his works, and thereby bring the present study to a conclusion.

Speaking of summits, it is true to say, we believe, that no two persons can disagree, all other things being equal, on which is the highest peak on a mountain, once they both resort to a fixed criterion, to a fixed standard of measurement. The criterion which we have chosen to adopt in assessing Naimy's literary achievement is his own literary theory in *al-Ghirbāl*, with which he opened his career and in answer to which he made his entry into the world of letters[2]. The gist of that theory[3] is that true literature is the expression of life as it is made conscious in man, that it is subject to no other laws but the laws of life and that the criterion of a great writer is the extent to which he succeeds, while reflecting the everyday and the contingent in life, in keeping a finger pointing, so to speak, at the universal underlying pattern, the permanent and the absolute.

In *Fathers and Sons* and *Once Upon a Time*, Naimy attains, in the light of his literary theory, the distinction of being the first in modern Arabic

1. See *Sab'ūn* III, p. 213.
2. See above p. 141.
3. See above pp. 137—38.

literature to have introduced the really Arabic drama and the really Arabic short story in their most perfect artistic forms[1]. In so far as he was able to present a vivid depiction in those two works of the existing Arab society as he had genuinely experienced it in Lebanon, he has reflected life; and in so far as he was able to mould the language, drawing at times on the colloquial, as in *Fathers and Sons*, so that it might lend itself to the purposes of dramatic art and the creation of living characters, he has actually subjected his literature to the laws of life, irrespective of any traditional superimposed laws of Arabic literary orthodoxy.

Though meeting the requirements of true literature, as defined in *al-Ghirbāl*, in that they genuinely reflect life and are subject to no other laws outside their set artistic purpose, neither *Fathers and Sons* nor *Once Upon a Time* can, however, pass for great literature. They successfully depict life, but in depicting it they scarcely give it meaning. The characters live their particular situations but they rarely grow enough in stature to become also symbolic, as in great literature, of a greater universal truth. This is so because Naimy, the artist behind them, at the time himself still lacked a fully developed philosophy of life and was, therefore, still in no position, though capable of producing the *true* literature, to satisfy *al-Ghirbāl*'s criterion of a great writer.

Not until *The Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul*, *Eyelid Whisperings* and *Gibran*, all written between 1917 and 1934, does Naimy, the "vagrant soul" yearning to arrive at a final conviction regarding the meaning of life, begin to reflect in his literature a fully developed philosophic theory. The gist of this theory, a combination of Taoism, Buddhism, Platonism and Christianity, all moulded within an overall theosophic framework, is that all the world of contingent existence is a manifestation of an all-pervading World Soul or transcendental reality, or God, conceivable only through inner vision; that the human soul is an eternal spark of God entrapped by the lower world of spatiotemporal phenomena; and that the meaning of life

1. See Chapter IV above.

is to realise one's divine origin and, through spiritual sublimation and self-negation, which may continue over several life-times, to break loose from one's earthly bondage and finally reunite with the absolute.

In *Eyelid Whisperings*, Naimy successfully particularizes his acquired universal theory on life, or, more precisely, universalizes his inner life experience through his highly lyrical poems, in which he gives vent to the agony of his own soul shattered between its lower attachments, on the one hand, and its heavenly longings, on the other. The poems, with their simplicity of form, unfettered by the rigid laws of traditional Arabic prosody, their distilled inner music and their fusion of the romantic and the realistic, not only remain unsurpassed in modern Arabic literature, but also stand fair comparison with the successful of their kind in Western literature[1].

Memoirs of a Vargant Soul[2] stands as Naimy's first remarkable attempt as a story writer to achieve a happy fusion of the particular and the universal, to provide his philosophic theory concerning the ultimate meaning of human life with a living demonstrative instance. *Gibran*, a biography[3], constitutes his second attempt, conducted on lines similar to those followed in the first and achieving almost the same result.

Both Pitted Face, in the *Memoirs*, and Gibran, in the biography, try to realise themselves in the world of higher reality which their inner vision vividly conceives, yet both are ruthlessly held by their lower attachment to the physical world in which they live. Unwilling to resign to the human in them and yet unable to break free from bondage and realise themselves in the divine, they both live a life-long crucifixion. Pitted Face finally commits suicide, and Gibran dies of spiritual and physical exhaustion, as the biography makes us understand, at the premature age of forty-eight, with a full hope, as one of his earlier letters explains, that through death, his heart,

1. See our detailed study and appreciation of Naimy's poetry in Chapter VI above.
2. See the detailed study of the book in Chapter V above.
3. See the detailed study of *Gibran* in Chapter IX above.

"this lump of flesh within my chest should harmonise with that trembling mist in the space which is myself — my I"[1].

Neither Pitted Face nor Gibran does justice to Naimy's philosophic theory. Neither serves as a realistic demonstration that the passage from the human to the divine, eagerly cherished as it is, is possible in act. But it remains true to say that in his realistic, vivid and all-in-all masterly depiction of both characters in their life-long struggle to achieve spiritual perfection, Naimy has done full justice to his criterion of a great writer in his *al-Ghirbāl* literary theory. He has succeeded in painting in his literature characters that are individually alive, like those in *Fathers and Sons* and *Once Upon a Time*, and yet universally symbolic. Both Gibran and Pitted Face are individually alive, in that each is presented as living his particular issue, his singular, private life story. Both stand as universal, on the other hand, in that their life stories unfold a certain issue which, though personal and private, is also symbolic of the very nature of man as such — man the two - poled Sphinx, who is neither pure intelligence so that he may realise himself in God, nor wholly a beast so that he may live as animal. Strained between the two poles of his nature, he is destined to live a life-long crucifixion.

Judging by the fact that the more a theory is substantiated, is made genuinely alive in the concrete, the more universally striking it becomes, it would seem that *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul* and *Gibran* are the two works by Naimy through which his *al-Ghirbāl* literary theory arrives at its highest and most striking manifestation, and in which Naimy ranks as a great writer. What follows in Naimy's post-Gibran works is a struggle between Naimy, the realist writer, and Naimy, the idealist thinker, in which the latter gradually gains the upper hand, arriving at his final victory in *Mirdad*.

The clash is explainable on the following grounds. Pursuing his literary theory, that the great writer is he who can artistically depict human life in its everyday process and thereby also reflect its universal underlying meaning

1. *Gibran*, p. 250.

and pattern, Naimy finds himself left, in the characters of Pirtted Face and Gibran, with the result that man is at best a tragic being, a victim of his own divided nature, through which he is neither at home in the world below nor at peace in the world above, but perpetually strained between the two.

Viewing man from the standpoint of his own idealistic philosophic theory, on the other hand[1], Naimy finds him not a tragic being, but a God in human bondage. Not only is he firmly convinced that man's passage from the human to the divine is possible in act, but that the realisation of such passage constitutes the very end of human life as well as its only possible meaning.

Naimy was therefore bound in his post *Gibran* literature either to stick to his literary realism — the depiction of life in process, so forcefully commended in *al-Ghirbāl* and so masterly observed in the *Memoirs* — and thereby falsify his philosophic theory, or to hold onto his philosophic theory about life and thereby ignore life as it is in process.

Naimy, in his post-*Gibran* literature, has chosen the second alternative. His essay works from *Food For The Godward Journey*, through *Threshing Floors* up to *Beyond Moscow and Washington*, feverishly calling on man to rise through self-negation from the bounds of his limited existence to the boundlessness of life sbsolute, and on human society to rid itself of its existing systems, laws and practices, the cause of its doom, and live in co-ordination with the all-pervading "Universal Law" seated beyond capitalism, communism, democracy and the rest — "beyond Moscow and Washington" — remain, spiritually lofty and prophetic as they are, only conclusions without premises. As such they may be regarded not as philosophic facts but as abstract theories. Nowhere do Naimy's post-*Gibran* works, so highly emphatic on what man and society ought to do, go into a detailed study of the nature of man, as he is, in an attempt to find out whether he is really capable of doing it. The farthest that Naimy goes in this direction is to insist that man is a God in human bondage and ought to

1. See Chapters VII and VIII above.

release himself, which, even if granted, says nothing as to whether this human bondage is of a nature to be broken.

Naimy's insistence that society's only way to salvation is that it should put into practice the age-old spiritual message of the East, often reflected in the teachings of such great visionaries as Laotzu, Buddha and Christ, says nothing as to whether it is within the nature of human society, as such, to transform itself into a society of Buddhas, Laotzus and Christs, highly desirable and cherished as that transformation may be. His expressed confidence that he "can see the vision of the East dawning upon the world anew" in the person of "a prophet who shall have the strength of the earth in his legs, the might of heaven in his arms, the glow of truth in his eyes, the tranquillity of understanding in his tongue and the sweetness of love in his heart", and who shall lead human society to salvation[1], cannot imply, taken as it stands, that human society is of a nature to achieve that state of ideal perfection to which Naimy repeatedly urges it to rise, but that it can be brought to such a state only through a miracle.

The main force behind the insistence of Naimy that the human bondage is breakable, that the Flint Slope is climbable, is, it might be said, the person of Jesus who, in his belief, is the human being who succeeded in breaking his earthly bonds and in achieving emancipation. In his post-*Gibran* fictional works, chief among which are "Till We Meet" and *Mirdad*, Naimy tries to create the human characters who would, like Christ, substantiate his philosophic theory by accomplishing the ascent from the human to the divine. To convinced Christians, however, whose orthodoxy Naimy does not share, Christ is believed to have been from the start an accomplished God and not an imperfect human being seeking divine perfection. Without such belief, Jesus would instantly lapse into the fantastic, or, believed to have been human, he would make another Pitted Face, who, instead of committing suicide, dies on the cross.

Working under the impact of his philosophic theory which he is fully

1. See *Voice of the World*, pp. 58—59.

eager to justify, Naimy feels no more capable of allowing his Christmodelled human heroes to lead their own private lives and to meet their natural and inescapable Pitted Face or Gibranian destinies. Therefore, these heroes invariably lapse instead, into the fantastic and the grotesque.

The "Belt-maker" and Yellow Teeth (the beggar) in *Abu Battah* become prophetic seers and preachers of divine truth. Leonardo in "Till We Meet" emerges from the human in him to the divine at the expense of ignoring his earthly fetters and not of resolving them. To overcome his physical desire, aroused by Baha, he charms her through the mystic tunes of his violin into a swoon that lasts long enough for him to retire to the mystical seclusion of the Virgins' Valley purify his soul through ascetic Yoga practices from "the last trace of bestiality" left in it and then return to Baha, bring her back to consciousness for a while and then sink with her into a final death swoon that marks the union of both their human souls with the Universal Spirit. Mirdad, on the other hand, appears as a beggar at the gates of the Ark at the top of a desolate mountain, but soon turns out to be an emancipated God, a Messiah in his second coming. He does not live in the world he has come to save, but lectures men from the top of Flint Slope on how to break their human fetters, of which he, himself, has none to break, and emerge into the divine. As such, Mirdad remains a Gospel without the Christ, a theory without the actual practice.

Judging Naimy by his own literary theory in *al-Ghirbāl*, which defines a great writer as he who can manage, through a masterly depiction of the everyday and the particular in life, to come out with its universal underlying pattern, it would seem that his post-*Gibran* works do not constitute the climax in his career; the climax, a great one, indeed, having been reached in *Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul*, *Eyelid Whisperings* and *Gibran*. Having become too much preoccupied after his "cuckoo clock" retirement from New York to al-Shakhroob with depicting the universal in life, Naimy by-passed the everyday and the particular. As a consequence, his philosophic theory verged on the abstract, and the characters created to provide it with particular embodiment remained on the whole equally abstract. As

compared with Pitted Face and Gibran, Leonardo and Mirdad have no individuality of their own, nor, for that reason, can they be claimed to have a marked universal significance. They have no individuality of their own because they both are out of the ordinary and the human, and are there, not to live on their own, but to answer for a universal theory. They have no universal significance, on the other hand, because they fail, out of the human that they are, to give that theory a concrete human embodiment.

It remains to be said, however, that the remarkably concrete implemental instance with which Naimy has been able to provide his philosophic theory after his "cuckoo clock" retirement is neither Leonardo, nor Mirdad, nor any other character in his post-*Gibran* literature. It is his own person. The great sincerity and awe-inspiring will, with which he has been able to co-ordinate his private life in his Lebanese retreat with the spiritually exacting requirements of his philosophy, dwarfs anything that his pen has yet been able to impart to his characters. Perhaps the closest to him in stature among his characters is Pitted Face. But Naimy, the man, is even greater than Pitted Face. The latter was not able to bear his torturing struggle after spiritual perfection until the last, but Naimy still persists in his Flint Slope ascent and is determined to climb it until the end. It will perhaps be some time before it is fully realized that in Naimy, the East has actually produced not only a leading contemporary literary figure, but also another of those rare landmarks across the ages in its unique spiritual history.

Undoubtedly the greatest by far among Naimy's works in Lebanon is *Sab'ūn*, his own life story. Though we have drawn extensively on *Sab'ūn*, we have not found it suitable to include it in this study. As a story of Naimy's life, it is still incomplete and should better be assessed in relation to what is yet to follow. The present study covering Naimy's life and works up to *Sab'ūn* will, it is hoped, constitute an introduction to a subsequent and more comprehensive work that will cover Naimy's life in full and assess his impact on modern Arabic literature.

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