

A HISTORY OF OTTOMAN POETRY. By the late E. J. W. GIBB, M.R.A.S. Edited by EDWARD G. BROWNE, M.A., M.B., Professor of Arabic in the University of Cambridge. Volumes II, III, and IV. (Luzac.)

Among the notable achievements of modern Oriental scholarship none have surpassed the late E. J. W. Gibb's *History of Ottoman Poetry*, of which the fourth volume has recently been published. Although the work is not yet complete, two more volumes having still to appear, it has now reached the point to which the author brought it down before his death in December, 1901. As Professor Browne states in his preface to the fourth volume, "for the period which remains, the period, that is to say, of the New School, who deserted Persian for French models, and almost recreated the Turkish language, so greatly did they change its structure and the literary ideals of their countrymen, only three chapters were to be discovered amongst my friend's papers. Of these, the first, entitled 'The Dawn of a New Era,' treats of the character and inception of the movement, and, in a general way, of its chief representatives, viz., Shinásí Efendi, Ziyá Pasha, Kemál Bey, 'Abdu'l-Ḥaqq Ḥamíd Bey, Ahmed Midḥat Efendi, Ahmed Vefiq Pasha and Ebu'z-Ziyá Tevfik Bey; the second discusses the life and work of Shinásí Efendi (A.D. 1826-1871); and the third is devoted to Ziyá Pasha (A.D. 1830-1880)." This gap will indeed be hard to fill, for Gibb's knowledge of, and sympathy with, the work of these writers was such as no European, probably, ever approached; but we are glad to learn that Professor Browne has secured the co-operation of several distinguished Turkish literati in close touch with the Modern School, so that the conclusion of the *History* bids fair to be worthy of the rest, and will, at any rate, form a valuable supplement to that portion which was completed by the master's hand.

Of these four volumes the first, comprising the Archaic Period of Turkish poetry, together with a most excellent general introduction to the whole subject, has already been

reviewed in this Journal (January, 1901, p. 154 sqq.); the following three, of which I have now to speak, cover the so-called Classical Period (1450–1700) and the Transition Period (1700–1850), and include, therefore, nearly all the great Turkish poets who drew their inspiration either directly from Persian models or from native resources: Nejâtî, Hamdî, Mesîhî, Fuzûlî, Bâqî, Nef'î, Nedîm, Ghâlib, Fâzîl, to name only some of the best known. Here we find the same astonishing erudition, the same thoroughness of treatment and delicacy of discrimination, the same insight and understanding, which caused the first volume of Gibb's History to be hailed, alike by Turkish and European scholars, as a monumental and epoch-making book. Since my own knowledge of Ottoman literature amounts to little more than what I have learned from the present work, it is obviously out of my power to attempt any detailed criticism, while as regards one or two questions of taste which everyone must decide for himself, e.g. the author's 'photographic' method of translation, I need not repeat the views which I have expressed elsewhere, and to which, in spite of the arguments set forth in his preface to vol. ii, I must still adhere. Nor is it necessary, I think, to dwell further on the unique merits of the History in respect of the rich store of information which it supplies, not only to the student of Ottoman poetry and literature, but to those who would rather read Nizâmî, Hafîz, and Jâmî in the liquid and melodious language of Persia than in the comparatively rude and crabbed dialect of their Turkish imitators. It may be useful, however, to summarise very briefly what the author has to say concerning the main tendencies and aims of Ottoman poetry during the four hundred years (1450–1850) covered by the volumes under notice. He points out in the first place that, although the Renaissance had no effect whatever on Turkish poetry, which remains entirely medieval in spirit, its character was considerably modified through the influence of Jâmî and Mîr 'Alî Shîr, the leading representatives of the artificial school of lyric and romantic poetry which "reached its meridian in the latter half of the fifteenth century at the

brilliant court of the scholarly and accomplished Sultan Huseyn Bayqará of Herat." The salient feature of this school is mysticism, almost always presented allegorically and combined with a passion for rhetorical display. Hence the Turkish poets of the Classical Period "seem to move in an enchanted land full of blooming roses and singing birds and beauties fair beyond all telling. And we too, when we enter this fairyland, seem to pass beneath the influence of some magic spell. We wander on as in a dream, knowing not whether the lovely forms that arise on every hand are realities or shadows." How absolute was the tyranny of Persianism is shown by the endless succession of *mesnevis* adapted from the works of contemporary Persian writers, as well as by the fact that down to 1700 or thereabouts the sole original and national type of poem that Turkish literature had produced was the *Shehr-engiz* ("City-thriller")—a humorous legend, not of fair women, but of pretty boys, which falls under the head of what is nowadays called *vers de société*. The revolt against Persianism and the gradual emancipation of the native Turkish spirit—a development which culminated, however, in "the intellectual alliance of the Ottoman poets with the West"—is ascribed by Gibb to the decadence which overtook Persian poetry towards the end of the seventeenth century, and to the circumstance that Arabic poetry, whither the Turks might conceivably have turned for inspiration, "was at this moment in a yet more atrophied condition than that of Persia." One may perhaps doubt whether the true cause does not lie deeper. It is probable that, as Professor Browne believes, the decadence referred to has been in both cases unduly exaggerated, and there is much force in his contention that a different face might be put on the matter if Qa'ání and other modern Persian poets were studied with the same diligence and appreciation as Gibb devoted to their Turkish contemporaries.

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