

XXXIV. *On the Dialects of the Arabic Language, by the late Professor CARLYLE. Communicated by WILLIAM MARSDEN, Esq., M.R.A.S., in the following Letter to the Secretary.*

Read March 3, 1827.

February 27, 1827.

SIR :

WHEN that accomplished Oriental scholar, the late Professor Carlyle, was proceeding on his travels to the Levant, I suggested some inquiries respecting the differences he might have opportunities of remarking amongst the spoken dialects of the Arabic language ; and as his answer contains some curious information on the subject, I have thought it not unworthy of being communicated to the Royal Asiatic Society.

“ Buyukdere, near Constantinople, September 10, 1801.

“ MY DEAR SIR :

“ Accept my best thanks for your very kind letter, which I did not receive until my return to Constantinople from my tour in Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor. I did myself the honour of writing to Lady S. from Jaffa, just before I performed a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, at which place I spent a fortnight most interestingly. As I had seen the interior part of Asia Minor in going, I wished to return by the coast, for which purpose I embarked on board a Greek vessel at Jaffa, and occasionally touched at the different islands of the Archipelago, as well as at several places of the continent, which I judged would be best worth visiting ; and I need scarcely say that I had a most interesting voyage.

“ During my tour I had much opportunity of comparing the different Arabian dialects. My own instructor, and the families with whom I speak and read Arabic here, are from Aleppo. I passed six weeks (at Cyprus and on board the Tigre) in company with the prince of the mountains and fifteen of his attendants from different parts of the east as well as Africa. We had on board, at the same time, persons from Cairo ; and in my journey through Palestine, I had sufficient opportunities of remarking the dialects of that country. The discrepancies found to exist in some dialects

of Arabic, may undoubtedly be referred in some degree to the different mode of pronouncing several of the letters—a difference more considerable, I believe, than in any other language. Thus, while a native of Baghdad can discriminate completely between the *د dal*, the *ذ dzal*, the *ض dhad*, and the *ظ dha*, the Aleppine makes little distinction between the sound of the *ذ dzal*, the *ظ dha*, and the *ز za*, while he pronounces *ض dhad*, like a *د dal*. On the other hand, the Syrian gives the sound of the *د dal* to all these letters. Again, *ق* in the mouth of an inhabitant of Baghdad, is a guttural *k*, but at Aleppo it is formed by a previous click with the tongue.\* *ج* with an Egyptian, is generally hard as *g* in *go*. *ك*, in some parts of Syria, is sounded like our *sh*; thus *مركب* is pronounced as if it were *مرشب*. The sound of the *ع ain*, as affected with vowels, is only discriminated, as far as I have observed, by the Aleppines, and with them its several sounds, when united to the *kesra*, *dhamma*, and *fatha*, can only be conveyed to the ear. When joined to the first it is not indeed very different from the sound of the French *œi* in their word *œil*. Thus, in the word which you adduce, *عدة*, the Aleppines pronounce as if it were *œiddat*, but rather more in the throat. The discrepancies, however, amongst the Arabian dialects, I apprehend to be chiefly occasioned by two other causes: the first, an admixture of different foreign idioms, and the second an adoption of different synonymes to express the same idea, by the different nations amongst whom this far-spreading language is spoken. Thus, from the first of these causes, we must expect to find a considerable number of Turkish words in the dialect of Aleppo; of Persian in that of Baghdad; and perhaps of Malayan in that of the Arabic which prevails in the vicinity of the Indian ocean. From the second of these causes it happens (to take an instance) that a *horse* is expressed in Egypt by the word *حصان*, and in Asia by *خيل*; both of which terms are pure Arabic; both of them expressing a *species* of horse. Now as the *خيل* was probably more common in Asia, and the *حصان* in Egypt, each of these terms lost, in the mouths of the vulgar, its *specific* acceptation, and assumed a *generic* one; and thus it is with various other words, which at the first view appear totally dissimilar,

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\* It would seem that in some parts of Africa, occupied by Arab tribes, the *ق* has the sound of *g*, as in the names of *دنگله*, *Dongola*; *شقر*, *Shigre*; *ونقاره*, *Wangárah*, and others.—*W. M.*

and which in fact are so to those who are only acquainted with the vernacular Arabic. If therefore we make allowance for these three causes: *pronunciation, admixture, and synonymes*, I apprehend there will be found little real difference amongst the dialects of Arabic; none of which, I will venture to assert (whatever Niebuhr and others may have thought), varies materially from the language of the *Koran*. As you have led me into this philological discussion, I make no apologies for it."

The untimely death of the Professor, in the year 1804, at the age of forty-five, when he was engaged in editing the Arabic version of the Bible, with the types newly designed by Mr. Wilkins, and executed under his superintendence, was a severe, though, we may hope, not an irreparable loss, to the interests of Asiatic literature in this country.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

(Signed)      WM. MARSDEN.

To the Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society.