

**THE QUR'AN HAS EQUATED** uneducated persons with dead bodies while the educated ones have been accepted as living beings. The Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) has declared the superiority of the ink of scholar to the blood of a martyr. A road to an educational institution has been called by the Prophet (peace be on him) a road to Heaven. When Allah wants to do favour to a man He bestows the knowledge of religion upon him.

These and similar other teachings of Islam (which can be multiplied times without number) left such a deep impression on the minds of its followers that within a short span of time it produced scholars like Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, and a host of others. The great scholar, al-Zuhri, of the early Umayyad period, was so deeply absorbed in his books that one day his newly married wife entered his study room and remarked 'By Allah' these books are more my eyesores than three crows put together.'

The great historian and a commentator of the Quran, Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari of whom Nicholson says, 'For forty years, he wrote forty pages a day, started writing his history from the time of the early creation till his day. When the book was completed it was so voluminous that people refused to read it. He then made an abridgement of the book which is now known as Tarikh-i-Tabari or Tarikh al-Rusul wal-Muluk. "It is said that this encyclopaedic savant used to write his history with reed-pen which he required to mend from time to time. The cuttings of his reed-pen were collected in the corner of his big library. Before his death, this savant advised his people to use those cuttings as fuel which would be required to boil the water needed for washing the dead-body".

The love for learning and education of the early Muslims necessitated the establishment of libraries and in the second century of they Hijra, hundreds and thousands of public and private libraries were established all over the Muslim empire.

The first Muslim who founded a library and managed to get all available sources of knowledge to be translated into Arabic, was Khalid b. Yazid (704 A.D.), the son of Muawiyah. He was the first chemist in Islam. He learnt alchemy from a Greek monk Miryanus and wrote three books on chemistry. Ibn Nadi (987 AD) personally

visited this library and found many books of great value on medicine, surgery, astronomy and chemistry. The royal library of the caliphate of Caliph Umar b. Abdul Aziz might have had its origin in the library of Khalid b. Yazid (704 A.D.).

Since then, collection of books became a continuous process among the Muslims. Poems of the pre-Islamic days, descriptions of their conquests and their genealogy, were collected and put in book-form. New books were written by the Muslim scholars on Tafsir, Hadith, Jurisprudence, history, biography and Kalam. In 87 A.H. Ad-dullah b. Malik translated the official record of Egypt into Arabic at the instance of Walid-I (705-15 A.D.). At the time of Hisham b. Abdul Malik (105-125 A.H. 723-742 A.D.), the official Syrian records were translated into Arabic. He also asked his Head Clerk Salem to translate the history of Persian Kings in 113 A.H./731 A.D. The portraits of the Persian Kings were also given in it.

During the Abbasid period, the Muslims made tremendous improvements in the field of intellectual activities. Big libraries were established in large numbers; new branches of science and humanities were cultivated; inventions were made in the field of geography, chemistry, medicine etc.

Caliph al-Mamun (754-75 A.D.) was a great patron of learning. At his command, the literary and scientific works in foreign languages were collected and translated into Arabic. During his Caliphate, Hadith literature was collected in book form. Books on Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) were also written at this time. An ancient history of the Iranians, Sakiki, a sacred book to the Persians, was translated into Arabic. A large number of scholars including the Christian ones were engaged in translating Persian books into Arabic for further research. Man's (215 A.D.) seven books were also translated into Arabic. Ibn Nadi in his Fihrist mentions the names of many reputed translators.

In addition, letters, circulars and ordinances of the Persian Kings-Nawshirawan, Hormuz, Ardashir and others, were collected

and translated. Though the Muslims of those days were not interested in novels, yet they did not leave this field of literature untouched. Hindu scholars from India flocked to the court of the Abbasid Caliphs, in Baghdad. With their encouragement, several Sanskrit books were collected and translated into Arabic for the library.

Caliph Harun Al-Rashid (786 A.D.) made remarkable improvement in the field of library. He also established in Baghdad his famous library named, 'Bayt al-Hikmah' (House of wisdom) — a library, academy and a translation bureau, and gathered eminent scholars such as Asmyee, the grammarian, Shafeyee, Isa Ibn Yunus, Sufian b. Tauri, Ibrahim Mosuli, the musician, and Gabriel, son of Bakhtishu, the physician. Caliph Harun al-Rashid also collected many Greek manuscripts and oriental literature and got them translated into Arabic.

His Prime Minister, Yahya b. Khalid Barmeki, deputed ambassadors to India to invited distinguished scholars, well-known physicians and philosophers to the court of Harun al-Rashid. Thus the city of Baghdad became the seat of learning. In appointing the translators, the Caliph made no distinction of creed and colour, race and religion. Harun al-Rashid appointed T'lan Shou'ubi to his library as an Officer even though he was an anti-Arab. During this time, an Arabian historian, Omar alWaqidi (736-811 A.D.), had in his library one hundred and twenty camels-load of books.

Caliph al-Mamun (813-847 A.D.) whose reign is known as the golden age of Islam, enlarged the 'Bayt al-Hikmah' founded by his father. His court was crowded with reputed scholars, poets, physicians and philosophers of diverse creeds and nationalities from every part of the civilised world. He extended, without any racial differences, a lavish patronage to the historians, philosophers, grammarians and collectors of traditions who were assembled in his capital. He treasured many records of the 'Days of

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'Ignorance' of the Arabs and enriched 'the Bayt al-Hikmah' to a great extent. Besides poems of the Arabs, he collected letters, documents and materials on archives. One of the pioneer translators of this institution, was Aby Yahya bin Batriq (796-706 A.D.) — a Greek. This period witnessed the most momentous intellectual awakening in the history of Islam. This awakening was marked by translations into Arabic.

Mamun appointed Hunayn b. Ishaque (809-877 A.D.), Superintendent of his Library-Academy. He was a great translator and Mamun paid him in gold equal to the weight of the books he translated from, Persian, Sanskrit, Coptic and Greek.

Another remarkable translator of this great institution was Yuhanna. He was a great philosopher, translator and Hunayn's teacher who translated 121 (one hundred twenty one) books of Galenus (100-200 A.D.). The great Philosopher, Al-Kindi (813-874 A.D.), was also a member of this institution.

In addition to the translation works, an impetus was also given to original research and contribution by establishing special departments under qualified professors. Authorship was encouraged by generous allowances. Innumerable works on arithmetic, geometry, philosophy, astronomy, meteorology, optics, mechanics, medicine etc. were compiled and issued to the public. Al-Razi (d. 925 A.D.) — the great physician — wrote over two hundred books for 'Baytul Hikmah'. Ibn Abu Harith — a well-known book-binder — was appointed for binding books in this library. The vastness of Mamun's Library and its vast number of books, can easily be imagined by the fact that though the city of Baghdad was devastated many a time along with its stock of literature, yet the number of books that survived up to the Seventh Century A.H. was colossal. Luckily, Ibn Abu Asiba got these books and mentioned them in Hussain b. Ishaq's translation.

From Mamun's time the practice of collection and compila-

tion of books became a common feature throughout the length and breadth of Baghdad. Most of the ministers, courtiers and even the generals had their individual big libraries and they spent much wealth in their collection. Fatah b. Khaqan, the Minister of Mutawakil (847-61 A.D.) who had built a vast library, had appointed Ali b. Yahya Munajjim (d. 388) as its librarian. This library was considered unique during those days. Muhammad b. Abdul Malik Zayyat, the Minister of Wasiq Billah (841-844 A.D.) spent ten thousand rupees monthly for translation and copying of books. Al-Waqidi (d. 822 A.D.) had six hundred almirahs of books. A few days before his death he sold a portion of his library at a cost of two thousand gold coins.

Darul I'im at Musil was a public library founded by Abdul Qasim Jafar b. Muhammad b. Hamadan al-Musili (854-934 A.D.).

Hamanid Saifuddowlah (944-67 A.D.) was both a scholar and a soldier. He was an ardent lover of education and there were many poets and scholars in his court. Saifudowlah had a great taste for literary activities and as such he was more inclined to collect books on literature for his library. Ibn Hashem and his brother — the two renowned poets of the day — were appointed manager and officer of his library respectively.

Adud al-Dowlah (977-82 A.D.) the Buwayhid Sultan, was a great poet and scholar and founded a magnificent library in Shiraz. He ordered for collection of all books on various subjects beginning from the advent of Islam till his time.

Allama Bashshari described it as a paradise on earth. There was a wonderful library in a vast building where almirahs was three yards broad and a man's height in length. The woods of the almirahs were very skilfully designed, decorated and illuminated with gold. Separate rooms and catalogues were maintained for each subject. One manager, one treasurer and a few clerks were appointed for running the administration of this library. General entrance into it was forbidden. He had another library at Basra which remained open for

the study of it there was arrangements for the re Calligraphers.

A library known as 'Bayt al-Waqf' at founded by Ali b. Khathib, who was in the service of Adud Al-Dowlah (9d. 982 A.D.). His library which contained some rare books remained intact until the time of Al-Hariri.

Probably in 922 A.D., Shapur b. Ardashir, a Buwayhid Governor, founded a Public Library in Baghdad named 'Darul I'im (House of Knowledge), and donated huge number of books for public use. This is the first Public Library of the Muslims, so far known in the medieval world.

In 1004 A.D. Hakim A'mr Billah, the ruler of Egypt, built a big library for the general public. Its opening ceremony was performed with great pomp and grandeur. Papers, pen, ink-pots and other things were supplied to the readers from this library. This library was also known as 'Dar-al-Ilm'. In 1009 A.D., many buildings and shops were bequeathed to it for recurring expenditure.

From this time onward, establishment of public library became a common practice, and innumerable libraries were established throughout the whole Muslim world. During the eleventh century there grew up a tendency for the establishment of the colleges and universities in the Muslim world and a library was unavoidably attached to each college and university. Nizamul Mulk (d. 1092), the world-renowned Prime Minister and a patron of learning, gathered round him a galaxy of scholars consisting of, astronomers, poets and historians. He also founded the Nizamia University in Baghdad and a library was attached to it. He issued general orders all over the Islamic world to establish a library adjacent to each academy. As a result of this royal order there sprang up hundreds of libraries throughout the country. Every mosque and even a small primary institution where there was a single teacher had a library attached to it.

A library known as 'Khizanah al-Kutub fi Mashhad-e-Abu Hanifa', was attached to a Madrasah founded by Mansur al-Hamid al-Khawarizmi in 1066 A.D. This library was still in the same place three miles north of Baghdad, near the tomb of Imam Abu Hanifa. It contained a huge collection.