

with, are questions at all—they are but muddle.

I share this philosophical position, of course. But I am afraid that its popular expression does not quite present its positive achievements, nor its attitude to life which seems to me puritanical and stoical, highly serious and deeply moral. Although there is every evidence that our philosophers are actively involved in worthy public causes, the total effect, for better or worse, of their work seems to be a sort of nihilistic blandness; and as a consequence, there appears to be nothing for literature to be “about.”

I do not subscribe to Henry Fairlie's optimism about America. I do not deny its vitality, its inventiveness and the earnestness of its public preoccupations—especially with three great recent questions, Viet Nam, and the Presidency, and the racial crisis. What I do not think Fairlie would accept is that this is all do and no think. In so far as the American intellectual is concerned, the common form of discourse about these sorts of issues is the social sciences; and, from criminology to economics, the social sciences are intellectually bankrupt. Keynes'

followers here have conceded as much but it is a perception which is forcibly denied by vested academic interests in America. It is this bankruptcy that lies at the heart of the British inability to seize the magnitude of their own problem; they are using the tools that will not finish the job. In other words, I believe that the earlier Fairlie was far nearer the truth when he denied the possibility of effective social engineering. I would go less far and yet further; some social engineering manifestly works, but we have no idea why.

The attraction of Marxism is its spiritual earnestness: its acceptance of contradiction and conflict as the inner stuff of life; its apocalyptic largeness. The weakness of our Anglo-American social philosophy is its bland and often ineffective pragmatism. Our neighbours have often succeeded, and do not know why; we have repeatedly failed, and do not know why. We can only try without knowing. Our social sciences do not allow us powerfully to perceive, only helplessly to observe, the problems. The reinvention of a language of discourse for the Great Debate is probably our most urgent intellectual duty.

Elie Kedourie's Achievement

By David Pryce-Jones

TWO VOLUMES of essays, *The Chatham House Version* and *Arabic Political Memoirs*,¹ have proved that on the topic of the Middle East, there is one man at least who does not seek simply to reassure his friends. Great interests are at stake in the area, and naturally myth has been pressed into the service of those interests. To put myth to the scrutiny of truth is to realise its vulgarity, and also how original and lonely Professor Elie Kedourie is. His impact smashes the *idée reçue* of contemporary Arab evolution which is fanciful—to use a Kedourie key-word—and which he has distilled in this way:

Fifty or a hundred years ago an author who felt drawn to middle-eastern subjects had a tremendous variety from which to choose: Barbary corsairs, belly dancers, fanatical Mussulmans, sultans, pashas, Moors, muezzins, harems. Now, in a decidedly poor exchange, it has to be the Arabs.

By Arabs of course we do not mean the lively and interesting denizens of Cairo, Beirut, Damascus or Baghdad. We mean rather the collective entity

which writers of books manufacture and in which they manage to smother the charm and variety of this ancient and sophisticated society. This collective entity is a category of European romantic historiography, and judged by its results, it is not a felicitous invention; for as they are described by their inventors the Arabs are a decidedly pitiable and unattractive lot; they erupt from the Arabian desert; they topple two empires, while making grandiloquent speeches in their rich and sonorous language; but all too soon the rot sets in, materialism and greed erode their spirit, and their caliphs change from lean puritans into fat voluptuaries. After that, it is all up with them: they are engulfed and enslaved by the Turks, hoodwinked by the British, colonised by the French, humiliated by the Jews, until at last they rise up again to struggle valiantly against Imperialism and Zionism under the banner of Nationalism and Socialism.

Note the confident rhythm of the language, how it carries its ironies with an almost dangerous patience; pointed, in the manner of a lightning conductor, straight to the storm; and obviously indifferent to popularity. Professor Kedourie will be heard for what he is saying, and not because he is the one to be saying it. About himself, he drops only chance remarks in the essays, that he grew up in Baghdad, went to the Alliance

¹ *The Chatham House Version & other Middle-Eastern Studies*. By ELIE KEDOURIE. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £3.75. *Arabic Political Memoirs & other Studies*. By ELIE KEDOURIE. Frank Cass, £5.95.

Israelite school there, and so benefited from the rigours of a French-based education. His several accounts of the spoliation of Iraq have a compressed passion which may result from experience, but he is not standing upon a soap-box of personal suffering. Unlike refugees and émigrés the world over who posit from the particular to the general, he looks to the archives first, for the records of governments against which the actions of citizens are to be measured.

Perhaps only a pessimist would do such a thing, perhaps only a pessimist has the stomach for the facts, when the fancies are so much easier to deal in. Professor Kedourie does not fall into the mundane style of journalistic abasement before some "problem" which has its "solution", after which the Upwards and Onwards of mankind will be resumed until the nations shall bask in light perpetual. He believes that human beings make mistakes, repeatedly, that out of the best intentions as often as not spring calamities, and that since description of complex events is so hard, moral judgments on them are not likely to be well-founded, or even valuable. I mean to say!

It is a truism now to observe that the Ottoman Empire was deprived of the joys of 18th-century enlightenment. Confronted by European powers able and willing to express their dynamism by means of commerce and war, the Ottoman Empire held to custom. No Ottoman Hume or Watts or Voltaire analysed what had gone wrong, nor what was to be done about it. Therefore Ottomans bad, Europeans good. The trick was to make the poor people themselves believe that in so far as this proposition was true, it was the whole truth.

It is the common fashion today to denounce the imperialism of western powers in Asia and Africa. Charges of economic exploitation are made, and the tyranny and arrogance of the Europeans are arraigned. Yet it is a simple and obvious fact that these areas which are said to suffer from imperialism today have known nothing but alien rule throughout most of their history and that, until the coming of the Western powers, their experience of government was the insolence and greed of unchecked arbitrary rule. It is not on these grounds therefore that the appearance of the West in Asia and Africa is to be deplored. A curse the West has indeed brought to the East, but—and here lies the tragedy—not intentionally; indeed the curse was considered—and still is by many—a precious boon, the most precious that the West could confer on the East in expiation of its supposed sins; and the curse itself is as potent in its maleficence in the West as it is in the East. A rash, a malady, an infection spreading from western Europe through the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, India, the Far East and Africa, eating up the fabric of settled society to leave it weakened and defenceless before ignorant and unscrupulous adventurers, for further horror and atrocity: such are the terms to describe what the West has done to the rest of the world, not wilfully, not knowingly, but mostly out of

excellent intentions and by example of its prestige and prosperity.

These volumes of diverse essays may be considered doctor's reports upon this fifty- or hundred-year-old malady, which has proved irresistible from its first unlikely symptoms; the Ambassadors and envoys plenipotentiary, the cocked-hat party, who came urging upon sultan, khedive, and bey the need for reforms, without which assistance would have to be declined, regretfully. In a trice the talk was of constitutional government, public opinion, the intellectual classes, self-determination: all of which resumed the self-evident values on which the majesty of the West rested, and which in the East might one day take as transplants, but for the time being had as much real-life substance there as a magic carpet. In the Arab Middle East to this day, only Lebanon has what can be called a constitution. Parliaments elsewhere, if they exist, are and always have been arranged to express the power of the rulers, not the wishes of the ruled.

HERE AMONG THE RULED, as Professor Kedourie says, "a robust and uncomplicated approach to power has always existed." Tyranny they had expected, and had learnt, sadly but wisely, how to temper it by a variety of well-proved methods. A happy man, to their way of thinking, was one with a beautiful wife, a comfortable house, a secure job, and who did not know government, and was not known by it. The spread of Western notions was incompatible with such luxuriously private ends. In these essays are some absorbing biographical sketches of the small number of men quickest off the mark in adopting and then spreading Western notions, renegades from Islam and Christianity, the go-betweens of chancelleries, men driven off their heads by the Future and its possibilities, but whose practical significance lay in the openings they offered the great powers in the widening competition of their interests. Missionaries, notably at the American University of Beirut, must take their share of the initial blame.

"Three with a new song's measure may trample an empire down." So it proved. The Young Turks had little support, and in describing the onset of their revolution Professor Kedourie shows in a wide-sweeping *tour d'horizon* how baffled and suspicious the Arab provinces were when Abd al-Hamid, supposedly the Damned, fell into the hands of Westernisers—who in the event were to lead their fellow-citizens into the catastrophe of 1918.

Had the conquering British and French taken over where the Ottomans stopped, confusion would still have arisen; but the relation of ruler to ruled might have remained comparable, and

the fabric of settled society not been utterly shredded. But accustomed to their own power politics elsewhere, the British and the French primarily sought advantage over one another, although the general interest of all concerned would have dictated a common policy. Professor Kedourie's energies have gone into establishing what exactly was happening behind the scenes in the time between the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the capture of Damascus (1918). In his view the people who were double-crossed in this high play of World War I politics were neither the Sharifians nor the Zionists, but the French, and that would be only normal, nothing for the romantic historiographers (who do seem dumbfounded into silence on the matter, especially now that *The Times Literary Supplement* is no longer a public alleyway for nameless muggers).

The inability of the British and the French to imagine that the Arabs might have standards of their own to be judged by, and were not simply lingering at a historical fancy-dress ball, is the Original Sin from which so many monsters were spawned. But had not a whole lot of new countries for them just been specially run up? How to proceed with them was a genuine dilemma, with no easy way out, though it had been met before not too badly (in India, for instance). Now numbers of the ruled were encouraged to believe that to have been satisfied with a beautiful wife and a comfortable house was a proof of backwardness, which they must set about rectifying. The hour of the chancellery go-betweens was at hand. Anyone who could turn his tongue to the approved political lingo of the West was sure of a career. Sa'ad Zaghlul, the kings of Iraq, and lesser nationalists too, are examples to Professor Kedourie of agitators who have brilliantly turned the tables on the West by words alone. They represented neither force nor tradition, nor the public, not even when grievances were articulated through them. They were "little officers."

There was also always the waiting mob. All that had to be done was to repeat certain slogans loudly enough, those slogans which the Western powers were expecting to hear because they had gone to the trouble of educating and philosophising around them. Constitutions were therefore improvised, self-determination encouraged, nationalism blessed, for were these not the rewards of catching up with modernity at last? The curse was at hand. The Armenians or the Assyrians might be put to the sword, the Kurds dispersed, ancient Jewish communities and the Palestinians alike ruined, settled society altogether dispossessed—but was it not possible for "foolish academics and excitable journalists" to claim that in spite of these temporary manifestations all was for the best in the best of all

possible worlds, as laid down by the believers in the sovereign rights of majorities whoever and wherever they are, and further guaranteed by fatuous diplomats sodden with emotion, the host of Arabian star-gazers in the train of T. E. Lawrence? It was, and is.

THE CONQUEST OF ONE COUNTRY by another is a neutral fact of history to Professor Kedourie, to do with the nature of man, and therefore futile as a basis of reproach. To knock the Turks out of the ring was all very well, there was nothing else for it, but it imposed the duty of dealing with a settled fabric of society as it had been found. After years of committees and conferences and White Papers, after a succession of institutions devised by famous generals and pro-consuls, the ordinary citizen of the Middle East found himself abandoned by the great powers who had brought him up to date in their own image, without any of the accustomed fabric at all, at the mercy of wars and *coups d'état* and internal terror as never before. When today there are calls for a state in the Middle East in which Moslems, Jews and Christians may live together, one has to ask whether in their imperfect way the Turks did not provide such a state?

To have pursued their own interests would have been one way for the British to proceed, and there would have been nothing new or illegitimate about that. To have pretended that British interests were pursued for the sake of bringing Civilisation, or Independence, or Happiness, to the natives was ignorant, confused, sentimental:

the outcome not so much of intellectual debility, as of that failure of nerve, that weakening of the will to rule, which became manifest among the British ruling classes in the aftermath of the first World War, and which was to make the dissolution of the British Empire so ugly, and vicious, to subjects and rulers alike.

The heirs of Hume, Watts and Voltaire ought to have realised that their consciences were of less moment than the fate of faraway peoples for whom they were responsible. What sort of principles are they when other people die of them? It was quite impossible for the faraway subjects (Professor Kedourie is actually speaking here of the Jews of Iraq, but as representatives of a wider range of victims) to discern "the prodigious spectacle that appeared, of deliquescent Liberals and *Tancred* Tories banding together in London to utilise the might and authority of a victorious empire in order to bring about in the Middle East, consciously and willingly, such conditions as had hitherto been seen only with the decay of authority and the decline of empire."

And banding together as they did, our deliquescent intellectuals and statesmen, men of principle without doubt, were able to work

the older syllogism into a newer form, just as suitable and jolly: Ottomans bad, Europeans as bad, all rulers bad, ruled good, therefore Arabs good. Those who have put their shoulder to this endeavour inspire Professor Kedourie. The title essay of *The Chatham House Version*, in which he goes over the work of Arnold Toynbee, the most venerable of romantic historiographers, with a whole school in tow, and discovers in it "the shrill and clamant voice of English radicalism, thrilling with self-accusatory and joyful lamentation", may claim to be the most powerful and damaging polemic to have appeared in recent years. Professor Kedourie also moves quickly to the bedside of expiring autobiographies, for instance Albert Memmi's *Portrait of a Jew* and Lord Caradon's *A Start in Freedom*. Nobody has done more than he to bring out the feelings of Western guilt and shame and inadequacy which have been twisted inside out to emblazon the banners of Arab Nationalism and Socialism. Nobody has done more to show what it is like to

be on the receiving end of these feelings. There is a classic to be written about guilt as a colonising and de-colonising motive, and these essays are indispensable studies for it.

As for the Arab-Israeli conflict, which some think the dominant issue of the region, it should be obvious that Professor Kedourie will see it as quite secondary, a by-product of the greater upheaval occasioned by the West. To him, the Zionists suffer from many of the same afflictions as the Arabs. At the hour of their supreme trial at the hands of a nationalist ideology, Zionists were able only to draw in under their own version of a nationalist ideology.

Professor Kedourie is fastidious to the end, but those who dislike such a temperament and call it morbid, or clinically dispiriting, are still left blocked by his scholarship. The city may be saved for the one just man in it, though that consolation is fragile and literary. Meanwhile we know that human beings, in both East and West, cannot bear very much reality.

Moonbeast in Sunshine

Talonheaded with obsidian glances
He threw his tangles through the long grass
Showed me a way this side that
Stabbed his white snout into his misdirections
Switched through a yellow flower into secrecy
Dived through a flowerstem and was gone

The slowworm confused me and was gone
He looked this way and then that way
A yellow flower outstared me the grass empty

Moonlight streaking along choppy waters
The foil creases as the astronaut beckons;
This wizard pointed the wrong way and it beat me.

Cross between electricity and melting snow
Hybrid of a moonbeam and a waterfall
Son of a lizard and a white explosion
Glittering dewcloud pierced by rifle-fire
Child of a speedboat and its splitknot wake

I look this way that—I fall between your pauses, unravelling
Stairs I may not descend, not yet—
Who is the slow worm?

Maze-tracer ripping up your clews in one swift gesture
One swift backward strike so I no longer understand
No longer see the way, like a wound closing,
Like a sudden change of waveband

Quartz-sand pouring into mercury
Self-made torrent of metal milk.

Peter Redgrove