

“Ḳatádeh says that the tribe of Ḳureysh used to cull what was most excellent in the dialects of the Arabs, so that their dialect became the most excellent of all.” (Táj el-'Aroos, in article *عرب*: and the like is said in the 9th Section of the Muzhir.) This assertion, however, is not altogether correct: for many of the children of the tribe of Ḳureysh, in the time of Moḥammad, were sent into the desert to be there nursed in order to their acquiring the utmost chasteness of speech. Moḥammad himself was sent to be nursed among the tribe of Saād Ibn-Bekr Ibn-Hawázín, descendants of Mudar, but not in the line of Ḳureysh: and he is said to have urged the facts of his being of Ḳureysh and having grown up among the tribe of Saād as the grounds of his claim to be the most chaste in speech of the Arabs. It is evident, therefore, that Ḳureysh, in his time, were less chaste in speech than some other tribes; though the truth of this asserted saying of his rests, I believe, only on the authority of a Saādee, who may have forged it in order to raise the reputation of his own tribe for purity of speech. From distant tribes, Ḳureysh probably borrowed little. The dialect of Ḥimyer, confined mainly to El-Yemen, and allied much more to the Ethiopic and the Hebrew than to the language of Ma'add, contributed to this last language little more than a small proportion of words. For our knowledge of it, which is very scanty, we are chiefly indebted to the researches of M. Fresnel, who discovered a surviving idiom of it, spoken chiefly in the district of Mahreh, between Ḥadramowt and 'Omán: hence it has been termed “Mahree;” and from the name of the tribe who speak it, M. Fresnel gave it the appellation of “Ehhkili,” or “Ehkili.” The author of the “Miṣbáh” (El-Feiyoomee) says, in article *مهري*, “The language of the people of Mahreh, which is a district of 'Omán, is quick, and scarcely, or not at all, intelligible [to other Arabs], and is of the ancient Ḥimyeree.”

The language of Ma'add was characterized by its highest degree of perfection, copiousness, and uniformity, in the time of Moḥammad; but it soon after declined, and at length lost almost all that constituted its superiority over the other branches of the Semitic stock in the states in which these are known to us. It is evident that all the Semitic languages diverged from one form of speech: and the known history of the Arabic is sufficient, I think, to show that the mixture of the several branches of the Shemites, in different degrees, with different foreign races, was the main cause, if not of the divergence, at least of the decay, of their languages, as exemplified by the Biblical Hebrew and Chaldee, and the Christian Syriac. That their divergence also was thus mainly caused, we cannot prove; but that this was the case I do not doubt, judging from the differences in their vocabularies, more especially from the differences of this kind in the Hebrew and Phœnician from the other Semitic languages. The existence of at least one language widely differing from the Semitic very long before the age of Moses is proved by the remains of the ancient Egyptian, from the time of the Pyramids; a language predominantly Semitic in its grammar, but predominantly Non-Semitic in its vocabulary; and evidently a compound of two heterogeneous forms of speech. The opinion, common among the learned of the Arabs, that the Arabic is the offspring of the Syriac, apparently suggested by a comparison of their vocabularies and by false notions of development, is simply absurd, unless by “the Syriac” we understand a lost language very different from that which is known to us by this appellation.* Every language without a written literature tends to decay more than to development by reason of foreign influences; and the history of the Arabic exhibits an instance of decay remarkably rapid, and extraordinary in degree. An immediate consequence of the foreign conquests achieved by the Arabs under Moḥammad's first four successors was an extensive corruption of their language: for the nations that they subdued were naturally obliged to adopt in a great measure the speech of the conquerors, a speech which few persons have ever acquired in such a degree as to be secure from the commission of frequent errors in grammar without learning it from infancy. These nations, therefore, and the Arabs dwelling among them, concurred in forming a simplified dialect, chiefly by neglecting to observe those inflections and grammatical rules which constitute the greatest difficulty of the classical Arabic: in the latter half of the first century of the Flight, this simplified dialect became generally spoken in the foreign towns and villages inhabited by the Arabs; and it gradually became the general language throughout the deserts, as well as the towns and villages, of Arabia itself. That such a change took place, in the language of the Arabs inhabiting foreign towns and villages, at this period, is shown by several anecdotes interspersed in Arabic works, and amply confirmed in

* Many among the Jews, the Syrians, and the Fathers of the Christian Church, held that the Aramaic or the Syriac was the language of Adam.