

**STUDIES IN EARLY HADITH LITERATURE
(AND THE HISTORY OF ITS CODIFICATION) TOGETHER
WITH A CRITICAL EDITION OF SOME EARLY TEXTS**

by Mohammad Mustafa A'zmi,
[Beirut 1968, XX + 348 + 164 pages of Arabic Text
Price £5.50.]

This book is based on the thesis submitted to the University of Cambridge, England in 1967. The late Professor A.J. Arberry was so much impressed by it that he says: "it is in my opinion one of the most exciting and original investigations in this field of modern times."

Hadith Literature is something unique in the religious and historical history of the world. It concerns what a single individual, the founder of the world's latest religion said, did or tacitly approved among his disciples — a biography, if one likes, by first hand witnesses — yet so rich and so enormous that volumes of thousands of pages contain it and yet one must confess that the material is far from being exhausted and that these volumes represent but a selection of the data. It concerns both private and even conjugal life and the public life of a person who founded a religion (and saw at least half a million converts before he breathed his last) and founded a state in a place where none had ever existed, beginning with a part of a tiny town just a few villages and extending over three millions of square kilometers, when he was recalled to his Lord, ten years later. In the "conquest" of these vast lands was not shed the blood in the battlefields, of even two individuals of the enemy side every month at an average, in the course of ten years, the Muslim losses being much less! He inaugurated a new legal system which cedes to none other, even after 14 centuries of its existence in a rapidly changing world.

No other religion, no other civilization, past or present, has produced such an enormous material on the biography of a single individual. According to a classical Muslim writer, the number of those companions of the Prophet who have transmitted at least one single report on the master — and there are among them who have narrated as much as ten thousand reports — is more than one hundred thousand.

It began, of course, with the companions of the Prophet, first hand witnesses, and has been preserved from generation to generation with a care that is unparalleled in the history of human science, even up to our

contemporary twentieth century.

Another not less stupefying fact is that the language he spoke, Arabic, was till then only a spoken language; the first book ever written down in that language is what he himself dictated on divine revelation, The Quran. It is awe-inspiring to recall that the very first passage of the Quran revealed to the unlettered Prophet was the order to "read" and a praise of the "pen" as the custodian of human civilization and culture. It was he who gave impetus to reading and writing in his country with the result that the language which possessed one single book, all told, at the death of the Prophet, became only two centuries later the richest language of the world for all sciences, Muslim and non-Muslim, spiritual and material. Languages change rapidly. An author of five hundred years ago, as Chaucer for instance, is unintelligible to modern Englishmen. The language of the Quran has, during the last fourteen centuries changed neither in grammar, nor in vocabulary, not even in spelling and pronunciation. It occurs to me that for a lasting teaching any language less stable would not have been suitable.

The ancient Muslims have always taken much interest in the study of Hadith transmitting, commenting, classifying alphabetically, subject-wise, according to narrators, etc. Since it was to be transmitted by trustworthy narrators from generation to generation, they have also produced a unique literature of the biographies of hundreds of thousands of narrators of all the succeeding generations, telling in particular who were teachers and who were students of each and every one of these narrators, along with the data on his reputation regarding his character, his intelligence, his memory and habit, etc. It does not suffice to have a written document. How to know if its contents are authentic and if there are no mistakes due to even inadvertence, if not that the author himself reads the document to his pupils or recites from memory what he has learnt by heart and his pupils collate and correct the written copies of the same documents which they possess? The same procedure is followed in each generation and each succeeding reporter says: "I have heard this text from my master X, who had told having heard exactly in the same wording from his master Y, who in his turn from his master Z, and so on and so forth up to the first hand eye-witness or ear-witness of the report". Such exhaustive references, not of the book, but of each individual report of a few lines in each book was a reality, which has not even become an ideal up to our present day in any other civilization. Proof was the monopoly of law courts only in other communities, Muslims were the first to apply it to history also. Nothing was to be accepted unless it is proved to be authentic.

Mr. A'zmi, who hails from an Indian family of renowned muhaddiths, has studied in the religious Madrasas and then universities of India, then in Egypt and lastly in Cambridge. He was in between the librarian of the petrol state of Qatar, and procured photographs of thousands of rare

Arabic manuscripts from all parts of the world. He was well suited to undertake a task not only to complete what his predecessors have been doing in the Muslim world, but also to face with dignity and sure knowledge the hostile west which was toiling under the sceptical and ill-founded traditions of Goldziher, Snouck-Hugronje and their imitators including Schacht. Some of the most sceptical English professors formed part of the jury which examined the thesis and its author and accepted it as a brilliant study.

We wish the author had begun his study with a chapter on Hadith, its meaning, its contents, its importance, its uniqueness, etc. He has begun with its writing down. There are people, even among Muslims, who say the Quran is enough, the Hadith is not important, it is not even worthy of confidence. One of their arguments has been the parrot-like repetition that it was written down only in the third century after the Prophet.

As a digression, it may be permitted to say that the Hadith, along with the Quran, is the first and principal source of Muslim law. Imam Shafii was perfectly right when he maintained that the Quran and the Hadith have both exactly the same value. How can it be otherwise? An ambassador's communications is as if the sending Ruler talks personally. If a "Muslim" could say to the Prophet: "This is the Quran, word of God, I accept it; yet this is the Hadith, your word, I am not bound by that"; what would have happened if it were not that such a person would have at once been excluded from the community? If at all there is difference between the two, it is a question of proof, the histories of the codification and the conservation of the Quran and the Hadith not having been fully alike: the Quran was compiled "officially", under the supervision of the Prophet, and the Hadith "privately" at the initiative of thousands of individuals each one of whom having different capacities in matters intellectual and scientific.

Mr. A'zmi proves that the Hadith began to be collected and codified in the very lifetime of the Prophet; the death of the Master prompted many others of his companions to note down their memoirs. A'zmi gives references of as many as fifty companions who wrote books or dictated their knowledge to their pupils. A few of these earliest compilations have even come down to us, as the tracts of Abu Hurairah and of Anas ibn Malik.

Then he describes the books of Hadith written down in the first century of the Hijra by the Tabi'un, those who had studied with companions of the Prophet; and has found reference of 48 authors. Of the late first century and early second century he lists works of as much as 86, and for the early second century, ending with 158H, as much as 256 names of authors. Note that all these impressive figures concern a period before the very birth of Ibn Hanbal, Bukhari, Muslim and all the other

giants. These latter have their merits but cannot deserve the suspicion that they have invented the Hadith, since some four hundred authors had already preceded them with written collections of Hadith.

There are chapters on the early work of the collection of knowledge from individual companions and those who knew Hadith. An interesting chapter is on "book", "Arabic script" and "writing material" (paper, ink, etc.). A good chapter is on *isnad*, or exhaustive references of all the succeeding narrators of each and every report (with dilation on western scepticism). Graphic tables leave one in awe before the excessive number of corroborative proofs of each single hadith. A not very exhaustive chapter concludes and gives analysis of the western approach to the Hadith. Thereafter the author describes the three Arabic manuscripts which have been appended. They are (1) Suhail (d. 138) from Abu Salih, from Abu Hurairah the Companion; (2) 'Ubaidallah b 'Umar b. Hafz (d. 145) from Nafi', from Ibn 'Umar the Companion; (3) Abu'l-Yaman al-Hakam b. Nafi' (d. 222), from Shu'aib, from Az-Zuhri, who from various Tabi'is, who from various Companions.

And for each and every Hadith in these opuscles he cites other parallel sources, other narrators, which tends to further justify our confidence in them. If half a dozen and more Companions, living in different countries, report exactly the same thing on the Prophet, one cannot reasonably imagine that there was a conspiracy or collusion to forgery among them.

A'zmi says, he has a dozen more manuscripts of the authors, who died before the year 163H, (and the writer of this review can add to the list several more, some by the Companions of the Prophet themselves).

In the presence of these earlier sources it is no more possible to presume that al-Bukhari and his fellow Muhaddiths had "invented hadith, or collected them from mere folklore, and invented the chains of successive narrators falsely attributing wishful things to the Prophet". We still possess the books of the teachers of Bukhari (ibn Hanbal, Tayalisi, Hamaidi, Ibn Abi Shaibah, etc.; and also of Sa'id b. Mansur, teacher of the Imam Muslim). We possess the work of 'Abdur-Razzaq teacher of Ibn Hanbal, the work of Ma'mar teacher of 'Abdur-Razzaq, the work of Hamam teacher of Ma'mar handed down by a Companion, Abu Hurairah. If a hadith is repeated in all these successive books in exactly the same words without an iota of difference — (as I myself have verified as to the work of Hammam down to Bukhari), there remains no possibility of slightest doubt about the fact that these transmitters were honest and very careful people. Had the millions of Arabic manuscripts not been destroyed at the fall of Baghdad, Granada, Delhi and other centres at the hands of Tatars and Europeans, there would have been possibility of proving the authenticity of each single line of these hadith books. Yet what remains is sufficient to mirror what has been lost to humanity in fratricidal wars.

Thesis-writing is done in exciting times for a student. No wonder there are a few mistakes of hurried judgments too, not to speak of errors committed regarding quotations (names and titles of books) of languages which the author does not know. But these should not detract the reader. Let us hope that the book is soon exhausted, so that the author is "obliged" to re-edit it, which would give him occasion to revise and improve with a calmer and more matured mind. He is now a respected professor in the University of Riyadh.

The book is really welcome, since it dispels many a misconception, and opens new perspectives.

M. Hamidullah

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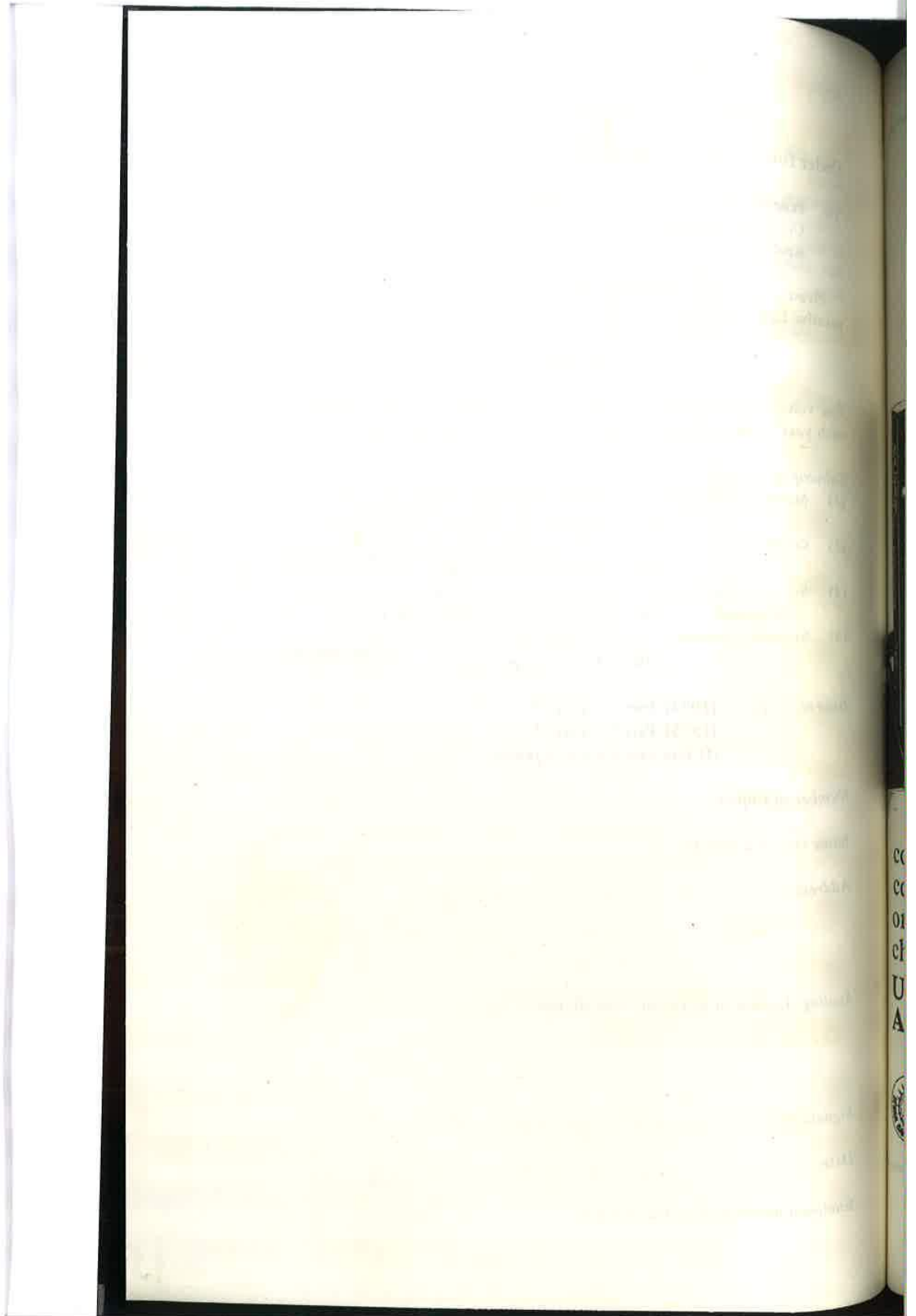
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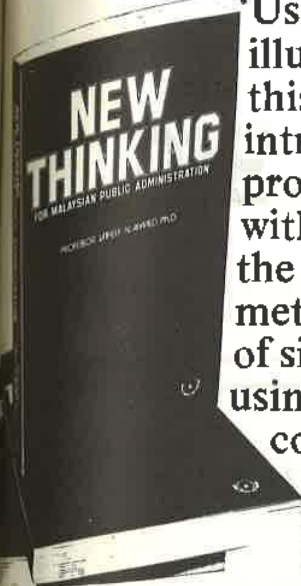
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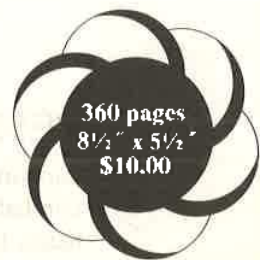


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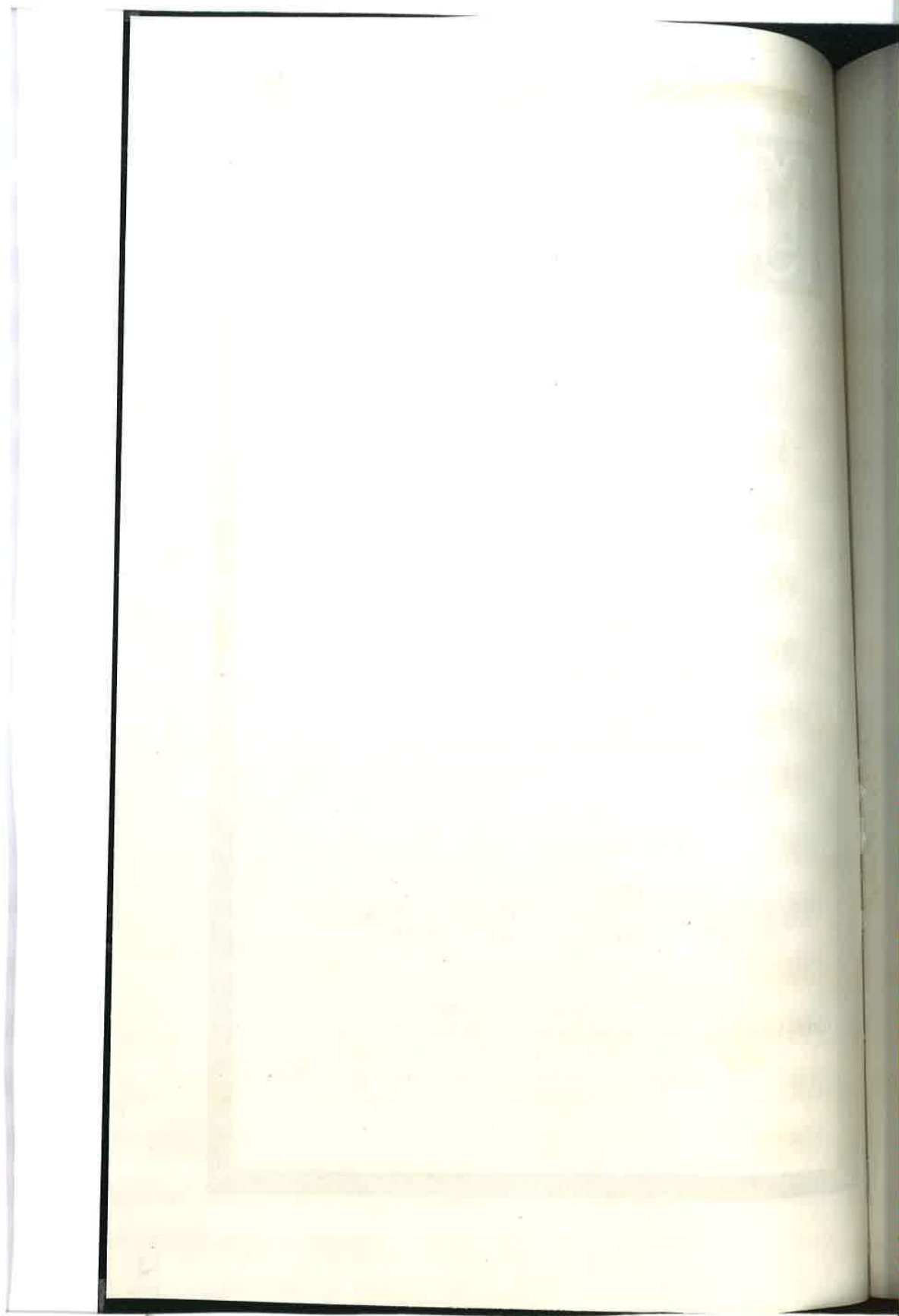
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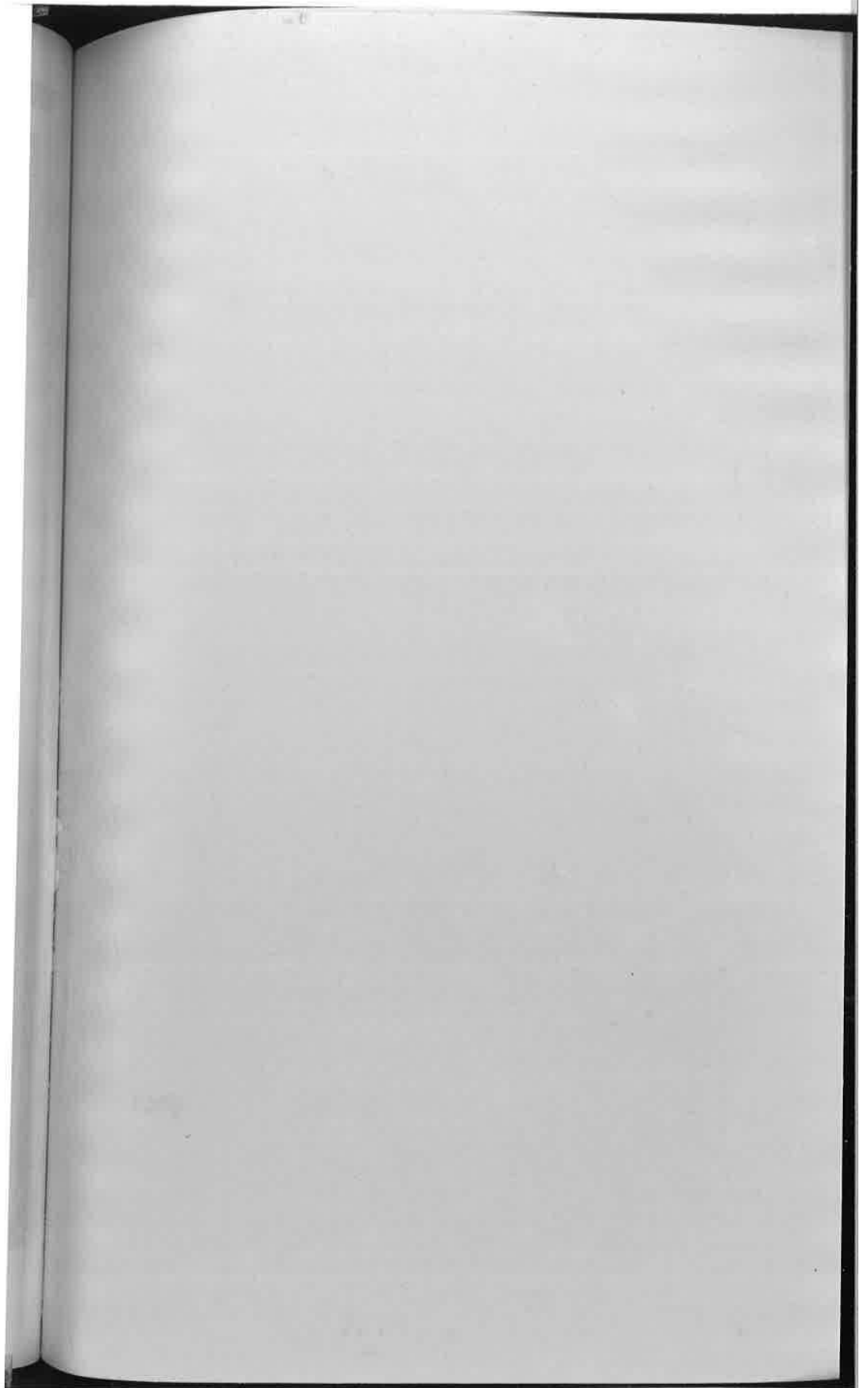
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THE OFFICE OF LORD CHANCELLOR*

It is a great privilege to be invited to address this great university and particularly to do so under the chairmanship of my old friend the Attorney General. In England the Attorney General used to be called the bulldog of the Crown. When I was the Attorney General I was called the corgi of the community. The corgi, as you know, is a Welsh dog. You, Mr. Attorney, have already explained that, as Lord Chancellor, I wear three hats. You said "caps" I think, but that makes no difference. The important point is that I do not wear them all at the same time. But it is the case that I combine in my office the office of being the head of the judiciary, speaker of the House of Lords and a member of the Cabinet, the heart of the Government of the country. So you see, I defy in my post every honourable and reasonable principle of constitutional propriety. The office, of course, and its functions are a product of history, of the evolution of our constitution rather than any neat and tidy constitutional principles. And I will give you a brief account of the historical processes which led to the present functions of the Lord Chancellor being what they are.

First of all as to the judicial function and that really dates way back in history. The first Lord Chancellor of whom we are really aware was a monk called Ogmundus and he came over to England in the year 596 with St. Augustine to convert the English barbarians and I suppose Lord Chancellors have been busy trying to do it ever since. There have been four saints among my predecessors and those saints begin with St. Swithin who as you who have resided in England will well know is responsible for all the bad weather we have had in England in every summer, except this one, and I hope therefore that the new Lord Chancellor is establishing a new climatic tradition. Then there was Thomas a Becket and Thomas de Canterlupe and Thomas More. They were all assassinated. It used to be a very tricky and bloody business to get rid of the Lord Chancellor in those days. I am not quite clear from the Attorney's speech how they get rid of an Attorney General in Malaysia. But nowadays, of course, the Lord Chancellor can lose his post any day by the drop of a ballot paper or any night by telephone call from No. 10, of the Prime Minister saying thank you very much for the services you have so signally rendered to the nation.

For the ladies who are present, you may care to know that women's lib struck early in the history of my office. There was a woman Lord Chancellor

*Speech delivered on 14th August, 1975 at the Faculty of Law, University of Malaya.