



Arabian Society in the Middle Ages

Edward Lane

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When Mr. Lane translated the “Thousand and One Nights,” he was not content with producing a mere rendering of the Arabic text: he saw that the manners and ideas there described required a commentary if they were to become intelligible to an unlearned reader. At the end of each chapter of his translation, therefore, he appended a series of explanatory notes, which often reached the proportions of elaborate essays on the main characteristics of Mohammadan life.

These notes have long been recognized by Orientalists as the most complete picture in existence of Arabian society—or rather of those Arab, Persian, or Greek, but still Mohammadan, conditions of life and boundaries of the mental horizon which are generally distinguished by the name of Arabian. Their position and arrangement, however, scattered as they were through three large volumes, and inserted in the order required not by their subjects but by the tales they illustrated, rendered them difficult to consult, and cumbrous, if not impossible, to read consecutively. It has often been suggested that a reprint of the principal notes, in a convenient form and in natural sequence, would be a welcome addition to the scholar’s as well as to the general library. The publication of a new impression of the “Thousand and One Nights” presented an opportunity for discussing the project; and the result is the present volume.

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