

Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 86 dated July 18, 1944 from Donal F. McGonigal, American Consul at Aden, Arabia, on the subject of "Transmitting Printed Material for Library of Congress."

CORRECT COPY: CM.

for Mr. Clapp

HISTORY OF PRINTING AND JOURNALISM IN ADEN, ARABIA.

(BY A. Y. KHAN.)

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PRINTING

This is an attempt to give a short history of printing and journalism in Aden, which, it is hoped, will prove of interest to the reader.

Before the capture of Aden in 1839, and several years thereafter the art of printing was almost unknown in this place. Calligraphers were in constant demand both by officials and merchants. Bamakrama who wrote his "HISTORY OF THE FORTRESS OF ADEN" in the early part of the 19th century would never have dreamt to have seen his work in types. It was in 1938 that the book was printed in Denmark. Why not in Egypt? So hundreds of manuscripts in Arabic, ranging from the science of medicine to anatomy, still await to see the light of the day.

After the capture of Aden by the British the trade of Aden began to develop, and there was a steady flux in the population. The Government felt the want of a printing plant. In 1853(?) the Government imported a small press, and to overcome the difficulty of compositors, sent a handful of convicts with long terms of sentences that looked like Kaera's Persian contingent of malefactors sent to oust the Abyssinians from Aden and Yemen. The convicts sent from Bombay in turn trained the local prisoners. The press mainly executed official works on a small scale both in English and Arabic. The only Anglo-Arabic work, worth mentioning, printed in 1917 in this press, was Major Norbury's AN ABRIDGED ARABIC GRAMMAR WITH VOCABULARY, which took more than a year to come out. The Arabic types were crude and unimposing. It was closed in 1936.

Cowasjee Dinshaw & Bros., opened their press in 1874 but in the beginning it was entirely utilized for the firm's requirements. Now it is the largest press in the whole of Aden, and can undertake printing in English and Gujarati, and to a certain extent in Arabic. The work of note which the press published was THE COWASJEE DINSHAW CENTENARY MEMORIAL VOLUME being a record of important events in the growth of the Parsi Community in Aden. Howard & Co., followed suit in 1889. The types in this press were English, Arabic and Hebrew, as the firm was a Jewish concern. From the very beginning the aim of this press was to meet the demand of the general public.

In spite of these presses the demand of the growing trade could not be coped with. Both the English and Arabic types were not only crude and antiquated, but were insufficient for the execution of work on a moderate scale. Men of science were still labouring to invent better types in Arabic. Germany and Egypt were competing to capture the trade.

By 1924 presses rapidly began to multiply in numbers and in this year the Roman Catholic Mission opened a small press, meant primarily as a vocational side for training the Somali converts of its school. Pallonjee & Co. followed the example in 1925 by opening a small press at Crater but chiefly catered for masonic requirements. The Roman Catholic Mission press did not prove a success and was taken up by the Caxton in 1925.

In spite of all these mushrooms of presses none could answer the clarion call of the place — an Arabic Printing press. The Arabic types in the Jail, Cowasjee, Howard, Caxton, as already hinted, were all crude and out of date, and although some years back, Cowasjee and Caxton imported Arabic types from Germany and Egypt, they were not equal to the demand of the market. Merchants were compelled to send their things for printing to Egypt. El-Amir Ahmed bin Fadhl Ali printed his HISTORY OF ADEN, the Education Department its GEOGRAPHY OF ADEN AND ARABIA; Mr. Mohamed Ali Ibrahim Luqman his PROGRESS OF THE WESTERN WORLD; Mr. Ahmed Mohamed Saeed El-asnag, his Miscellany entitled THE MODERN AWAKENING IN ADEN, and the present writer his Dictionary of Aden Proverbs, in Egypt. These steps were, what I should say, an open revolt against Aden Printing presses. Some people took up the hint. The first to take it was the Al-Hilal press, which established in

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1932 a printing plant at Crater, and under the energetic management of Mr. Ibrahim Rasem, a well educated intelligent young Turk, the press infused a new life in the art of printing in Aden. The result was salutary. Several works were produced, the best specimen of which are the poems of El-Amir Ahmed Fadhl, entitled "LAHEJI SONGS" and the Aden recorded songs of Mr. Husain Ahmed Taha As-Safi. The get-up was so elegant and artistic, the types so clear and impressive, that the people were convinced that the best part of the problem of printing in Aden was at last solved once for all. Printing in Egypt abruptly ceased.

Another press called the "STAR PRINTING PRESS," took its birth with the Al-Hilal, but without Arabic types. It had a short life and passed off unmourned. It was taken up by the Aden Printing Press, an Arab concern. Here again Ibrahim Rasem was instrumental for the uplift of the Arabic printing. He laboured incessantly and hard as if determined to set the Thames on fire. Now he went a step further, and undertook to print the first Arabic weekly of Mr. Mohamed Ali Luqman, entitled FATAT-UL-JAZIRAH, Mr. Luqman's first Arabic novel "SAEED" was also published in this press in 1939.

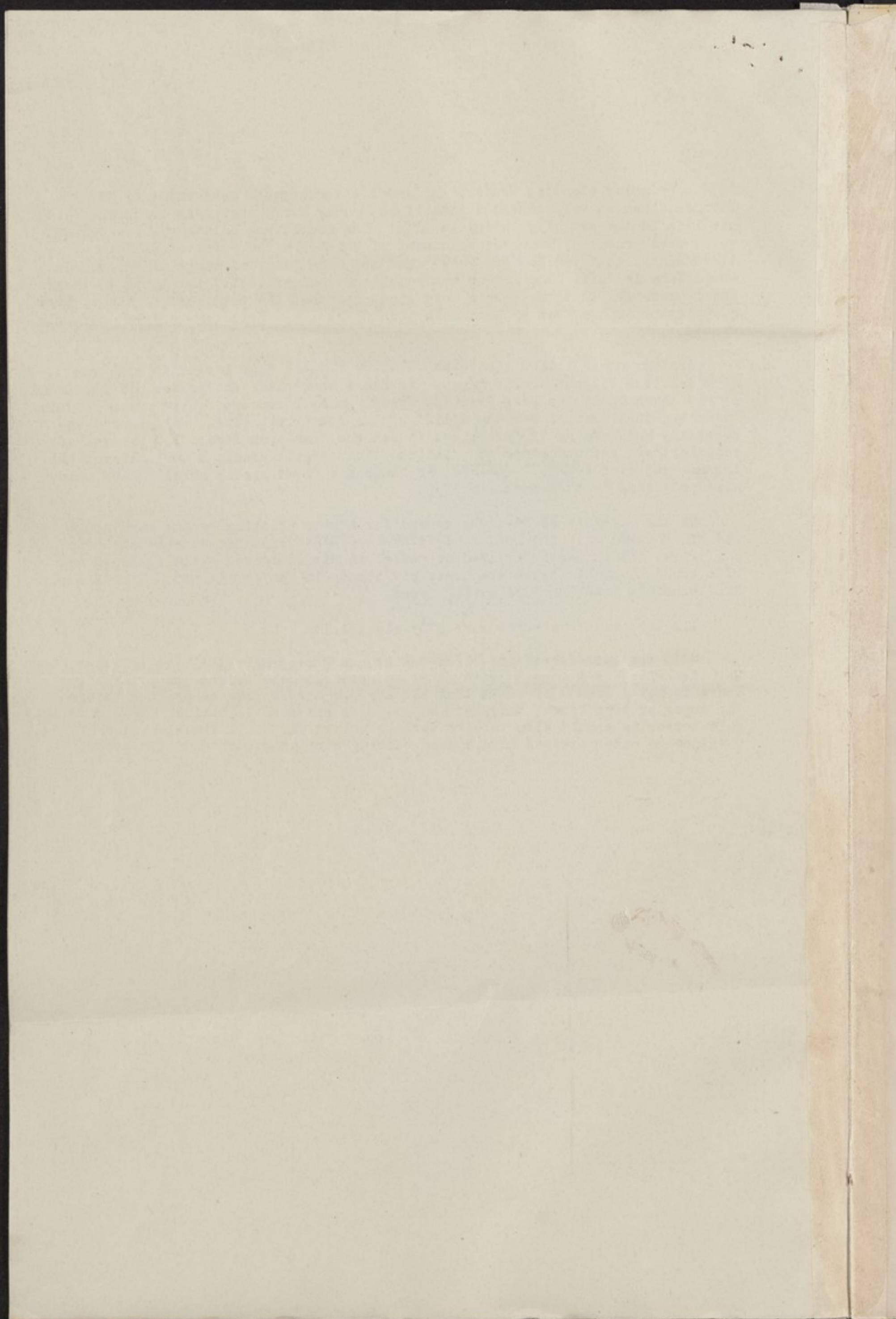
On the outbreak of War, the demand for Arabic printing became more acute, and Mr. Mohamed Ali, the Editor of FATAT-UL-JEZIRAH, decided to establish his own press, and in September 1940 succeeded in his ambition. Well equipped and with abundant Arabic types the press now stands in the fore-front. Here again Mr. Ibrahim's hands are the moving force.

All the presses are now worked by electricity.

With the introduction of block-making and photography there is no reason why Aden should not compete with other countries in the science of printing. There is not a shadow of doubt that already the Arabic presses produce things far superior than Yemen, Hadramaut, H&Jaz, Java and even Palestine. Book binding, gold-lettering should also receive serious attention. With the exception of Cowasjee no other presses have a good binding section attached to the press.

JOURNALISM.

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JOURNALISM.

I shall now proceed to narrate the more important subject of journalism in Aden.

Thomas Jeffersen once said that he would rather live in a country with newspapers and no laws, than in a country with laws and no newspapers. Well, we lived with laws and no newspapers for over half a century. It was only in the beginning of the 20th century that the mist of the Dark Age could be dispelled, and the man to do it was Captain W. Beale. This gentleman, was performing the duties of Assistant Political Resident, and despite the multifarious duties devolving on him, he took upon himself the responsible work of editing a weekly newspaper which he called THE ADEN WEEKLY GAZETTE, inaugurated in October 1900. It was printed in the Howard's press, and consisted of 8 foolscap pages, bristling with news, literary articles, news from Yemen, Hadramaut, and other parts of Arabia, sports items, humour, etc. Politics, of course, of the desert and oasis were not discussed.

The circulation was limited and the cost of printing prohibitive. Captain Beale after conducting the paper for about 6 months had to leave Aden and transferred the charge of the paper to no less a person than Mr. Murray of the Aden Coal Co. The new editor struggled hard for a further period of six months, but could not bear the financial strain any longer discontinued the Gazette.

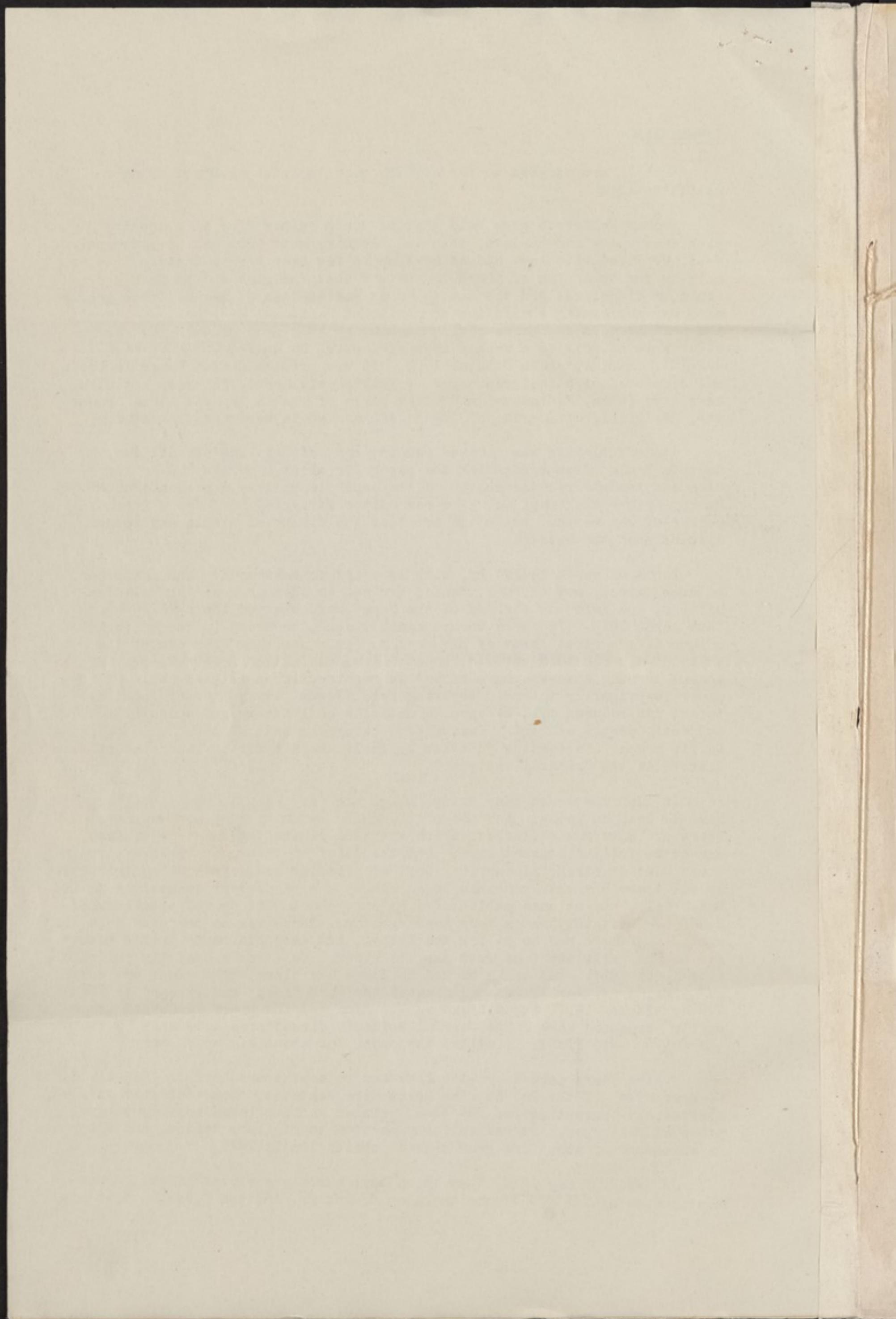
Fourteen years rolled by, with laws and no newspapers, and again our veteran friend, now Lt. Col. Beale, arrived in Aden as a senior Political Officer, and amid the horrors of the Great War, started the ADEN FOCUS on 14th April 1915. "So here we are again risen", he wrote in the editorial column of the first issue of his weekly, "in a new body from out of the ashes of the old ADEN GAZETTE Phoenix-like and full of fresh vigour; Our thanks to all those who have made this resurrection possible. While this paper is primarily intended to bring into 'Focus' every item of local interest its columns will be open to articles on literary and scientific subjects, poetry and art. Humour too, being the salt of life, will be found in its pages. As regards politics we shall abstain for obvious reasons from discussing the Oriental variety."

In Aden there are many things which are very easy to start but very hard to keep on going. And one of these is the editing of a newspaper. There are numerous obstacles, which with the limited space at my command, cannot be fully discussed here. But the chief of them are: Limited circulation; Want of financial support; Cost of printing and dearth of contributors. So all these elements combined began one by one to present themselves to Lt. Col. Beale, who at once published a balance sheet that showed a balance of Rs.8/- — certainly not a very good symptom. There was no response from the public and there was no go for the Editor, but deep his hands in his pocket, for he who calls the tune must pay the piper. Col. Beale manfully pulled on till April 1917, when again he had to leave the place. The paper was taken up by Mr. J. Fitzgerald, who eliminated the work "Aden" and renamed it THE FOCUS. In May 1917 plague broke out in Aden and the press of Howard temporarily suspended work. The fearful epidemic disappeared and, alas, with it the FOCUS. Mr. Fitzgerald edited the paper for about six weeks only.

Twelve years passed by with laws and no newspapers, and in 1925 Lt. J. W. Borradile, of the 2nd Bn. the Devonshire Regiment, then stationed in Aden, started his journal called THE STAR, printed and published monthly in the press of Pollanjee. It was entirely devoted to military topics, and after an existence of about one year ceased publication in 1926.

On the 22nd May 1918, that is to say, exactly one year after the discontinuance of THE FOCUS, the American Consul Mr. Addison E. Southard in his

report



report published in the Supplement to the Commerce Report, remarked:-
"The Port of Aden has no newspaper either daily, weekly, or monthly. There are some printing establishments which do work on a limited scale. A comparatively small printing plant with facilities for doing in an up-to-date manner ordinary commercial and news printing should do well, and the establishment of a newspaper in connection therewith would be possibly profitable venture."

It seems that this hint was taken up by the Executive Committee of the Aden Branch of the Oversea Club, who, on the 24th September 1918 discussed among other topics the feasibility of publishing a monthly journal containing local items, commercial intelligence, notes from Aden Patriotic League, etc., Unhappily the scheme did not materialise for want of a good press.

Immediately after the transfer of Aden to the Colonial Government in 1932 the official Aden Gazette came into existence followed immediately by the ADEN PROTECTORATE GAZETTE. Both these are Government concerns and are still functioning. They are being printed in Cowasjee press.

*Aden Gazette
1937*

*Aden Colony
Gazette
April, 1937*

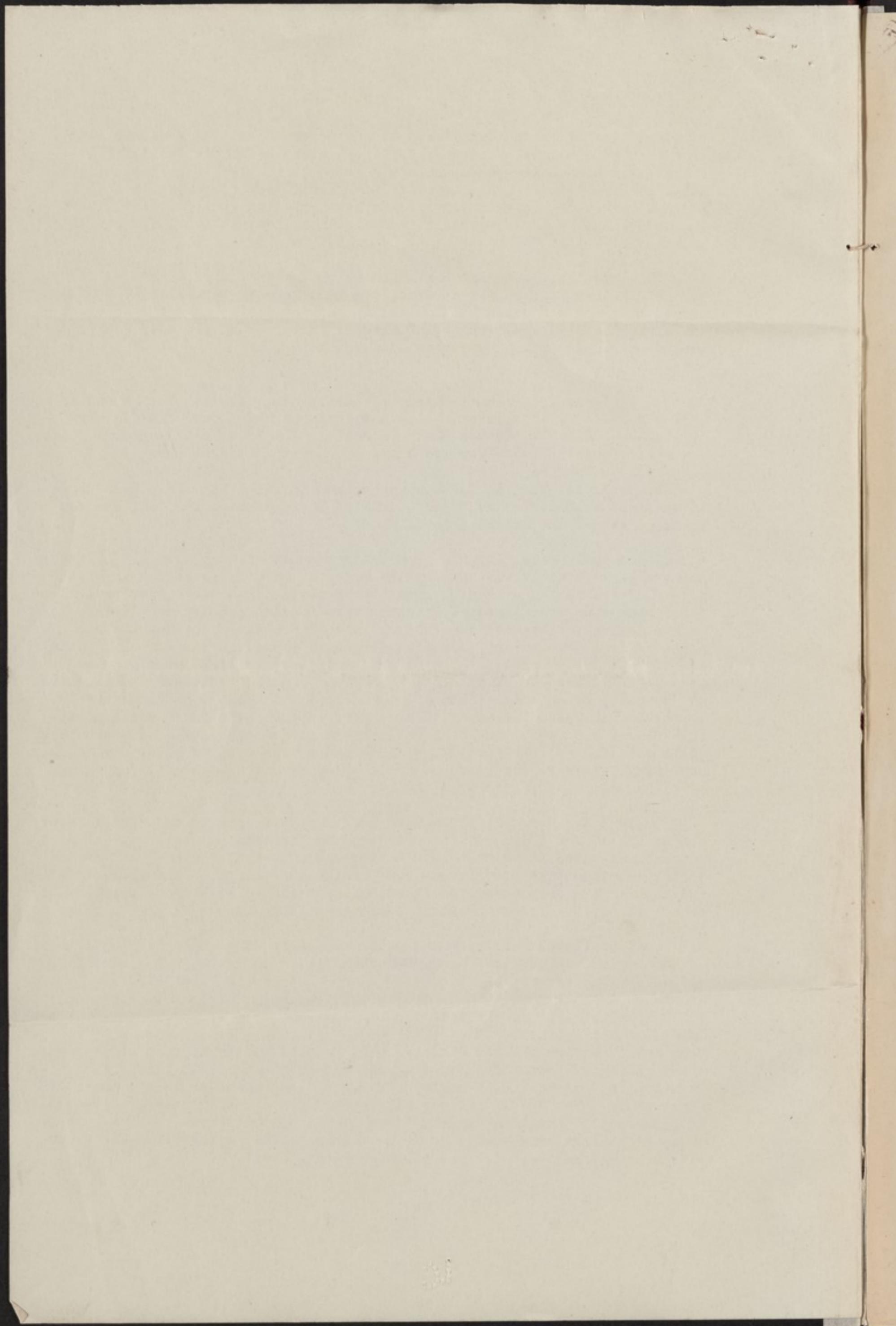
You will see that so far I have essayed to show that there had been in the past sporadic attempts to establish newspapers in English, and now I shall discuss the oriental variety.

For exactly a century from the British annexation of Aden (1839-1939) not the least attempt was made by the Arabs of Aden to establish an Arabic paper. There was an awakening among the Arabs of this place some twelve years back when some Arab reform clubs were founded and the people felt so keen a desire for reading and instruction. There was no newspaper, but articles from the pens of Aden Arabs began to appear in numbers of Egyptian, Iraqi and Syrian papers. The majority of these writings were vituperations, grievances and displacency. The papers which published them had no journalistic principles and did that simply to eke out an existence by increasing the circulation of their papers in Aden. It is no wonder that such papers did not pay or that belated example of that style of journalism still existing in some part of the Arab and Indian country districts do not pay today. This is the reason why all these second rate Arabic journals have long ago disappeared from the ken.

In 1933 Mr. Mohamed Ali Ibrahim Lugman, who is really responsible for the uplift of the Arabs in Aden, started from Berbera a unique kind of journal and named it SHAMSAN ADEN. It reminded one of the NEWS-LETTERS of the Elizabethan time, for it was not printed but entirely done in handwriting, and copies were circulated from hand to hand, each person reading it paid 1 pice. It existed for few months. Well, something is better than nothing.

What really was wanted was a paper edited by an Aden Arab and printed in Aden. But the question was, "WHO shall bell the cat." The fate meted out to the English contemporaries in Aden, made people waver and think twice. Mr. Mohamed Ali Lugman took up the enterprise, and in 1939 determined to serve his birth place, obtained permission from the Aden Government to start an Arabic weekly, called the FATAT-UL-JAZIRAH. The first issue of this paper came out on Monday the 1st January 1940, printed in the Aden Printing press by Mr. Ibrahim Rasem. The printing and get-up exceeded all expectation. It gave information on a wide variety of topics that appealed to the taste of Aden people. The opening editorial from the pen of that great Arabic scholar Mr. Mohamed Ali Ibrahim, explained and discussed the necessity of an Arabic organ in a place like Aden. He is certainly right. Sechelles with a population almost half of Aden has numbers of newspapers.

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With the present special number the paper completes its first year. During this one year the paper has rendered a unique service to the place. It has within its pages a mass of literature of permanent value. The poems from the pens of Messrs. Abdul Majid show that after all Aden does not lack men with poetical bent of mind. These are the budding poets of the place. Personally I admire the beauty of their verses that reflects the faultless taste of the poets in regard to an intricate and elaborate thought. Who I wonder, will not like to encourage such promising young poets — the pride of the place, the Mutanabbi, the Ibr Arroumi, the Showkibay of the future. The paper at present has a meagre circulation in Aden, the place for which it came into existence. Imagine out of the 2000 copies printed 260 are being subscribed by the people of Aden, and the rest are sent to Lahej, Yemen, Hadramaut, Dar-es-Salam, Mascat, Java, and Egypt.

Simultaneously with the FATAT-UL-JAZIRAH an English weekly was started by Mr. D.P.J. Lean, of Aden Headquarters and printed at the Caxton Press. It was called ECHO and unlike the STAR it was a service organ and ceased publication in June 1940.

I cannot close this brief survey of printing and journalism in Aden without expressing my great admiration for the fortitude and perseverance shown by Mr. Mohamed Ali Luqman, the Editor in conducting the FATAT-UL-JAZIRAH for a year and congratulate him for this anniversary. The zeal and promptness exhibited by Mr. Ibrahim Rasem, deserve the commendation of all, and I join in this encomium.

Aden, Arabia, 12th April, 1940.

