PART III

LEARNING IN MEKKA
Along with the religion Muhammed gave his Arabs the beginnings of a learning. Before him the poets had, it is true, been called men of knowledge (ṣhāʿir), and, besides accomplishments required for certain trades, there were certain branches of knowledge which were handed down by tradition in small circles of people, as magic, soothsaying, healing, the decision of the paternity of a new-born child, and so forth. In the opinion of the believers, the unlearned Prophet put an end to the time of “ignorance” (jāhiliyyah), and the knowledge of those pagans was called a trick of the Devil. Only by the revelation was divine wisdom in some sort made accessible to men, and the last, the Arabic, Book of God was brought by the messenger who prided himself upon his ignorance of letters. The word of Allah was henceforth for all who believed in Muhammed the source of true knowledge, which however in many respects only became accessible through the instruction of the Prophet.

God and His messenger however have imparted no sort of systematic instruction in any domain of knowledge. Neither the culture nor the character of Muhammed was suited thereto. Also he did not aim at completeness, as his task was only to communicate to his ignorant people that instruction which other people had long since known and followed as the norm of life. So long as the Prophet was addressing the word chiefly to unbelievers, that is until the Hijrah, his oracles imparted threats, promises, pictures of the day of judgment, and exemplary stories from Holy Writ. Detailed rules of living were not needed by the little community. After the Hijrah Muhammed stands forth as God’s organ in the midst of his ever increasing adherents who have recourse to him in every difficulty. He is leader and lawgiver, but performs the latter function sparingly, as he sees the danger of committing himself by laying down divine decisions, or bringing the heavenly word into discredit by frequent changes. Most of the legislative parts of the Qur’an have evidently been issued after long deliberation and as the only means of ending quarrels in the community or opposition to the