

Heralds of Muslim Nationalism: A Brief Review

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During the past hundred years, in every Muslim country there have been numerous leading exponents of modernity, but most of them look to the writings of the nineteenth century intellectuals like Rifa'i al-Tahtawi,¹ Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi,² and Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakebi,³ for guidance and inspiration. We have seen earlier all the three of them were not secularists in the commonly accepted meaning of the term. All of them had been brought up according to the religious tradition of Islam. In fact, al-Tahtawi started his career as an *Imam* in a mosque, but during his five-year stay in Paris as an *Imam* of the Educational Mission in Europe, he was totally fascinated by the remarkable progress of Europe in every branch of human knowledge. Most of their ideas were laid down in works that later on became a beacon light for the rest of

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1. Rifa'i al-Tahtawi was born in 1801. In 1826 he went to Europe as *Imam* of the Educational Mission sent by Muhamad Ali from Egypt, and returned to Egypt in 1831. After serving in several government positions he acted as editor-in-chief of the journal *Official*. He died in 1873. *Takhlis al-Ibriz* and *Manahij al-Albab al-Misreyya* are considered his greatest works.
2. Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi died in 1889 at the age of seventy. From a humble status in a slum through his remarkable talents and energy, he rose to occupy the highest offices of the Tunisian Baylic and the Ottoman Empire. Most of his ideas are found in a book entitled *Aqwam al-Masalik fi Ma'rifat Ahwal al-Mamalik*.
3. Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakebi was born in 1854 in Aleppo in a prominent Arab family. In 1875, he started his career as a journalist. After a chequered and stormy career in government, he suddenly died in Cairo in 1902. *Tabai al-Istibdad* (The Nature of Despotism) and *Umm al-Qura* (The mother of cities, Makkah) are best of his known works.

