

SOCIAL TRENDS IN EGYPT

BY HABIB I. KATIBAH

AN Islamic tradition says that "when Allah created the world Murder said, 'I am going to Syria,' and Dissension said, 'I shall go with you'; and Fertility said, 'I am going to Egypt,' and Servility said, 'I shall go with you'; and Misery said, 'I am going to the Desert,' and Health said, 'I shall go with you.'" The tradition is, of course, but an allegorical epitome of broad social truths recognized by the Arabs hundreds of years ago, and which, to a considerable extent, are still applicable today.

There is little doubt that the submissive and servile nature of the great majority of Egypt's population has been one of its most characteristic points. That the great run of its fellahin, who have always constituted the bulk of its population, never successfully revolted against their Pharaonic masters, or their Greek and Arab successors, is matter deserving consideration. Such brief uprisings as have been recorded made no material change in their mode of existence, nor did they eradicate that servile and submissive nature, and inject in its place a virile, self-reliant and independent spirit.

Only in the times whose happenings and events fall within memory of most readers of this journal are we witnessing a wide political, economic, and social upheaval among the common people all over the world, and the Egyptians have shared in the change. Only in the last decade or two are we beginning to see the man with the hoe in Egypt, as in many other countries, raise his head a little to rest from his labors and ponder over the mystery of his existence, the meaning of his destiny, and to enjoy ever so little, some of the comforts that are certainly his due in this vale of tears. The majestic Nile, the enchanting moon, the wonderfully clear and blue sky of Egypt, set off with slender and graceful palm-trees, are all beginning to have some meaning to him. And beyond them, beyond the magnificent Pyramids of Giza, symbols in eternal stone of his own slavery and oppression, beyond the Mediterranean Sea, the world outside opens to him a panorama of such vast significance that life is beginning to be to him more than arduous drudgery and slavery to the soil from sunrise to sunset each day of the year. The



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THE BEGINNING OF THE DELTA

Egyptian fellah has begun to feel and to think, and a portentous sign it is.

Some two years ago the editor of a leading Arabic newspaper in Cairo ventured an explanation of the fact that the Egyptian people shows an infinite capacity to absorb punishment, a seeming insensibility to subjection, oppression, and exploitation from whatever source they come. Egypt, he said, is a flat country, a narrow strip of fertility flanked on either side by the desert, invitingly exposed to the open sea in the north and hemmed in by the wilds of Sudan to the south. The Nile, he expounded, which has been the life-giver of Egypt, has been also the enslaver of the receivers of its bounty. Whoever controlled it controlled their very destiny and subsistence. The Egyptian fellah is literally chained to the soil, the source of his livelihood. When he is oppressed he has no other refuge to run to; no "rock of salvation." All the country before him lies flat, and the lash of the tax-gatherer and feudal lord can reach him wherever he goes. The Egyptian fellah, therefore, is submissive and servile not so much by nature or choice, but by the compulsion of his physical environment.

Today, however, physical environment plays less and less in-

portant a rôle in the social adaptations and progress of peoples and nations of the world. Psychological, social, and economic forces that seem to spring from man's determined efforts to better his state and force even environment to conform, have affected almost every nook and corner of the habitable globe. The Egyptian fellahin and their equally unfortunate and oppressed brethren in the cities, had little to do with the historic movements and catastrophes which finally are bringing them redemption from their social bondage, but they, nevertheless, have awakened to their supreme opportunities and are manipulating them to their own ends. At last they are becoming insistent that, since they are entitled to a franchise which nominally puts the reins of government in their hands, some benefits of this government should accrue to them. Consequently, political masters, foreign and native, conform to the outward rules, at least, of the political game, and seek the vote of the Egyptian common man with promises of reform and social amelioration. The result has been that considerable progress has been made in economic and social reforms which promise to be lasting and which presage the dawn of a new and better day for Egypt.

On Egyptian social life as it exists today and has existed for generations we need not dwell. It has not changed much in its fundamental aspects, yet just enough to show the trend of modern influences. Lane's "Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians," written almost a century ago, or Stanley Lane-Poole's "The Story of Cairo," written a generation ago, with little modification still suffice as guides to the colorful life of present-day Egyptians, described recently and intimately by such modern Egyptian writers as Mohammed Haykal, Dr. Taha Hussein or Ibrahim al-Mazini. The superstitious and fetishistic customs that cast their evil spell on the life of the ignorant Egyptians still have a strong hold, as one may see in the wretched crowds that throng the Hasanain Mosque or the Masjid of My Lady Zainab in Cairo, or the Mosque of Sidi Ahmed al-Badawi in Tanta, and hundreds of local shrines or *mazars* throughout the Valley of the Nile. The *walis*, living and dead, still exercise their sway over the masses. From the moment he sees the light of day, through his childhood, manhood, and on to tottering age and death, the average ignorant fellah or poor city dweller is governed by strange superstitions and ceremonies, some of which are perhaps as old as the First Egyptian Dynasty and may be even vestigial remnants of the animism of the

Stone Age. The *zar* (magic) which has been described by many writers on Egypt, is still commonly practised by Egyptians, and sometimes by well-to-do and supposedly enlightened ones among them. Except for the intensity and prevalence of these superstitions and customs, they are not essentially different from others existing elsewhere, as one may learn who peruses the pages of the "Golden Bough." Nor has Egypt emancipated itself as yet from the thral-



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THE OLD PERSISTS IN CAIRO

dom of ignorance in matters of personal and social hygiene, an ignorance which claims annually a heavy toll of victims. Even educated and cultured Egyptians sometimes have retained habits which were based on the age-old conception that infection is from Allah, and that microbes are figments of the imagination. Ophthalmia, bilharzia and ankylostomiasis are still devastating curses of Egypt, as they were in the days of Moses and Aaron. Added to these is the more recent yet terrible curse of addiction to drugs which, it is claimed on high authority, has laid its withering hand on no less than half-a-million of Egypt's population, perhaps the highest ratio (3.9%) of drug addiction in the world.

No student of Egyptian life can ignore these matters. They are the first things that command his notice when he steps from

a boat to the Egyptian shore and is pressed upon by pitiful crowds of dirty, ragged, blear-eyed beggars, or is pestered by bare-footed peddlers of cheap trinkets. But no fair student of Egyptian life would stop there. No realistic study of any people in the East today is complete which fails to take into consideration social tendencies and latent forces which are slowly but determinedly sweeping the old order before them, and which are gradually modernizing social life. It is these modern tendencies which should be examined particularly.

Beginning with the Egyptian child, we find that great steps have been taken by the Egyptian Government to infuse notions of modern hygiene and child care among the masses of fellahin and poorer city dwellers. Due to Sir Mohammed Shahin Pasha, Under-Secretary of State for Public Health, a child welfare section was created in the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior in 1927. Simultaneously a number of ante-natal and post-natal clinics were distributed in the various towns of Egypt in addition to children's dispensaries and maternity schools. Permanent and travelling child welfare clinics now number forty, each in charge of a doctor, assisted by a qualified nurse.

How great the response has been among the common population of Egypt to these modern agencies of health may be judged from the following table based on one in a recent issue of the journal *al-Hilal*, which gives comparisons in numbers of clinics established and children and mothers served by them during the first year of the child welfare section and three years later.

	1927	1930
Number of clinics.....	8	27
Number of pregnant women.....	35,759	29,451
Number of deliveries under clinical care	1,730	17,758
Number of visits to women in travail....	286	1,718
Number of visits by qualified midwives	7,917	65,249
Number of visits to mothers		
by clinical nurses.....	8,735	70,136
Number of children taken care of		
by clinics.....		277,060

The ratio in these figures must have risen correspondingly since; as we have seen in Mohammed Shahin Pasha's report, the number of those clinics has jumped to forty, an increase of thirteen in

one year. And it is clearly apparent from the above figures also that the response by the Egyptian mothers kept pace with the increase in number and facilities of those clinics.

It is interesting from the social point of view to learn further from the statistics in *al-Hilal* that in 1930 no less than 24,416 lectures were delivered before women groups at the clinics themselves and at individual homes. This latter aspect of the child welfare crusade by the Egyptian Ministry is of incalculable benefit, for it is the most effective direct weapon against the evil influences of superstition and ignorance, and in time will lighten considerably the burden of the welfare corps. Popular education in this direct and simple manner is still in the embryonic stage in the Near East, but its potentiality is stupendous.

What becomes of the Egyptian child after it has passed the critical infant stage? It is estimated that more than fifty per cent of the death rate in Egypt is that of infants between the ages of one and five. The fate of the Egyptian child is not a happy one. Usually it is born in ignorant and unsanitary surroundings, and its bringing up is inferior, sometimes even debasing. There is no law, so far, against child labor in Egypt, although a move in that direction is under contemplation. It is almost a superhuman task to change this environment through the education of the parents, most of whom are illiterate and have no time to attend to the cultural side of life. Indirectly a great deal has been accomplished by the government, but aside from infusing some valuable hygienic and social information not much could be expected.

With the growing generation it is different, and here is where the Egyptian Government can hold its trump card against the odds of ignorance and the inertia of old customs and traditions. This it has done by an ambitious program to promulgate free and compulsory elementary education throughout the whole length and breadth of Egypt. According to this program, formulated in 1925, it is the aim of the Ministry of Education to give a school seat to every Egyptian boy and girl by the year 1947-8. Through a system of *mudiriyyah* (a section roughly corresponding to our state) grants and federal coöperation, free elementary schools are being rapidly instituted all over Upper and Lower Egypt. Thus from a total of 776 elementary schools in 1925 attended by 71,000 pupils the number increased in 1931 to 1,557 schools with a total attendance of 178,012. All these are government compulsory schools and do not



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FELLAHIN BOYS AT PLAY

include private institutions, mosque schools or *maktabs*, or missionary and foreign establishments. And in all these schools children study half the day and are released for work in the fields or factories the other half. A recent experiment in outdoor education has also been tried. Medical inspection is carried on in these schools with gratifying results. Thus among 11,717 school children inspected, ninety-two per cent were found to be infected with trachoma in various stages, and twenty-five per cent in the acute stages (one and two). But after proper treatment the latter ratio dropped to eight per cent.

Institutions for the care of children outside the schools are, however, still few and far between. There are, according to official reports, only three homes for foundlings under governmental control, with a capacity of 327 beds. There is a reformatory school for boys and girls at Giza, Cairo, and another at Marj (for boys). But as yet child vagrancy has not been adequately attended to. Here, probably, is a rich field for philanthropic activity. Here is a typical instance. A little street urchin, hardly seven years of age, was walking down Fnuad Street, in Cairo, barefooted and ragged, holding in hand a cigar box full of chewing gum and candies which he was peddling. Suddenly the boy spotted a little toy balloon sail-

ing away in the sky. The boy forgot for the nonce that he was a little business man struggling against the heavy odds of making a living while still at the threshold of life. He looked up with a beaming, innocent smile and a strange gleam in his eyes; a sudden light of cheer suffused his sallow face. He was a boy again, oblivious to the cruel buffets and knocks of a heartless world, insensible to the cold indifference of the throngs in the street who spurned his wares as they hurried by. He was following the toy balloon and sailing with it in imagination to lands of distant dreams. For a few seconds he, too, was at play, even though only in imagination, until the balloon was wafted out of sight.

Such children, and one comes across hundreds of them in the cities of Egypt, sometimes huddle in corridors and doorways to sleep in their ordinary clothes. The only mitigation of their hard lot is the consoling consideration that Egypt usually has such a clement winter that hardly do those gamins suffer from cold, and their brown little bodies that peep through their torn rags get a plentiful share of the actinic rays of the sun.

More fortunate children find in the Boy Scout and Girl Scout movement a happy release for their playful instinct, as well as an opportunity for the development of those splendid traits and habits of coöperation, fair play, loyalty and altruism that are associated with that movement. The rapid growth of the Scout movement in the Near East is one of the more promising signs of development since the War. In Egypt, it is asserted, every government elementary and secondary school has its Boy or Girl Scout organization, with a central bureau in the Ministry of the Interior.

Female education, more than ever before, is receiving the serious attention and solicitude of the Egyptian nation and government, with the result that the ratio of educated women in Egypt has risen surprisingly in the last decade, and, according to some figures, has more than quadrupled. This has been especially true of the Moslem woman, whose education in the past had been sadly neglected. Since 1919 the number of primary schools for girls has increased from four, with an attendance of 578, to sixteen, with an attendance of 16,523. In the field of higher education, too, the Egyptian woman has taken a prominent place. There are now two high schools for girls under government control with 201 and 167 students respectively, besides a college for girls of the upper classes,



Courtesy of H. I. Katibah

RUG WEAVING

Instruction in Rug weaving under the auspices of the Egyptian Feminist Movement



Courtesy of H. I. Katibah

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE EGYPTIAN FEMINIST UNION

a finishing school, recently founded in Giza. Two normal schools for girls, the Sanieh Training College for Women, and the Hilwan Training College, with 407 and 176 students respectively, supply the government primary schools with a constant stream of competent teachers, trained in the modern methods of pedagogy and psychology. The Egyptian National University is open to men and women alike, and many Egyptian women, mostly Mohammedan, have availed themselves of its wide opportunities, while many women students have been lately included in student missions studying abroad. Again here we do not include missionary and foreign institutions of learning where thousands of Coptic and Mohammedan girls receive their higher education. The American missionaries have long been active in this field and deserve high credit for their splendid work.

This leads naturally to the discussion of the feminist movement in Egypt which has lately received some attention here and in Europe. It has become a social axiom that no nation can hope to attain any degree of social progress, or attaining it could hold it for long, when fully half its population, and that which is more directly influential in the bringing up and early education of the rising generation, is neglected and suppressed. This truth has long since dawned on the minds of Moslem social reformers in Egypt and elsewhere. The movement to emancipate the Moslem woman and elevate her social status went hand in hand with the nationalistic and literary renaissance of the Near East. Qasim Amin, the real founder of the feminist movement in Egypt who stirred the Moslem world with his impassioned appeal for the emancipation and education of the Moslem woman more than thirty-five years ago, had among his staunchest supporters Mohammed Abdou, the famous Mohammedan liberal, and Sa'ad Zaghlul Pasha, who later rose to the leadership of the national movement in Egypt.

With the exception of Turkey, where women's rights have been almost fully recognized by the Kemalist Government, Egypt has today the most highly developed and efficient feminist organization in the Near East, and its women are well on the road to complete emancipation. The Egyptian Feminist Union, with its new headquarters on Qasr al-'Aini Street in Cairo, is a very influential organization with many-sided activities. Its president, Mme. Huda Sharawi, is one of the ablest and most successful women leaders

in the Moslem world: her splendid courage and example have done much to enhance the status of the Egyptian woman. Many laws favorable to woman, such as one limiting the age of marriage, another granting equal educational opportunities to girls, and still another granting redress to woman in the religious courts in matters of divorce, have been passed mainly through the influence and agitation of this Union. The last of these laws was passed only recently, and the first record of a Moslem woman in Egypt divorcing her husband went on the calendar a few months ago. In this connection, it may be noted that unveiling has become almost universal among the higher circles of Moslem women in Egypt, and the fashion is spreading among the women of the middle and lower classes.

These are some of the phases in which Egypt has been "making up for lost time." has been catching up with a social-economic standard which, for generations, has been accepted as the norm and measure of highly civilized communities. Progress in many ways has been phenomenal. Having just escaped from feudal and autocratic institutions differing little from those of Europe in the Middle Ages, Egypt has taken one leap squarely into the new order without passing through various intermediary stages, for which the West paid so dearly in blood and anguish. It is emblematic of the times that countries in the Near East which had not developed the railway now use more and more frequently the truck and automobile for communication; and that in Arabia where the telegraph is still rudimentary the telephone and wireless have been adopted at less cost and superior efficiency.

In Egypt this sort of social acceleration has sometimes brought forth anomalous results. Thus labor unionism is a recognized force, with a labor party and a labor magazine, while Egyptian industry is still in its first stages of development. The fruits of labor unionism are being reaped by laborers who hardly realize their industrial rights, let alone the economic and social implications of the philosophy on which it rests. It must be said, moreover, that Egyptian labor enjoys conscientious and enlightened leadership usually recruited from the educated leisure classes.

More amazing than the growth of labor unionism and more urgently needed is that of the coöperative movement among the Egyptian fellahin. This latter movement, which owes its inception to

the crisis of 1907, was legally recognized by legislation in 1923. In one year, 1930, the number of the coöperative agricultural societies in Egypt was more than doubled and the membership was almost doubled, as may be seen from the following comparison of figures by Sayyid Ahmed al-Bakri in the magazine *al-Muktataf* for April, 1932:

	1929	1930	1931
Number of Coöperative Societies	217	514	539
Total Membership	22,336	44,000	54,000
Paid Capital (In Egyptian Pounds)	80,985	133,000	154,000
Reserve (In Egyptian Pounds).....	9,558	13,000	18,000
Loans Contracted by Societies (£ E.)		127,694	273,805

The newly organized Agricultural Bank of Egypt, under government control, gives preferential rates of five per cent interest to coöperative societies, against seven per cent to individual borrowers, a consideration which in itself is sufficient to guarantee the growth and stability of these coöperative societies.

A strong tendency also has appeared among many of these societies for the coöperative development of agricultural industries such as dairies, apiaries and sericulture. Instances of coöperative buying are common, while coöperative marketing, especially of the cotton crops, is one of the salient features of these societies.

There is undoubtedly a growing interest on the part



Courtesy of H. I. Katibah

A MODEL FARMING VILLAGE
Property of H. M. King Fuad I

of the Egyptian fellah in the value of technical knowledge, and magazines in Arabic relating to different technical fields are fairly numerous. *Al-Muktataf* has recently introduced a special department for news and information pertaining to the coöperative agricultural movement. Last year an agricultural-industrial exposition was held in Cairo attended by thousands of farmers, and in which the coöperative societies were well represented. The exposition program included a cinema in which farmers were shown the latest phases of the coöperative movement in Great Britain, and a lecture at the American University of Cairo where the American minister gave a talk on the subject of agriculture and the coöperative movement, and films, brought especially from Washington, were shown.

Space limitations forbid extended notice of other phases of the modern social development of Egypt. These include the trend toward liberalism in Islam, as demonstrated in the reform of al-Azhar; the progress made in the fields of higher education; the modern renaissance in literature, art, and music; the great service which the press, particularly the illustrated Arabic weekly, is rendering to the cause of popular education; the splendid work which Russell Pasha, the Hakimdar of Cairo, and his staff of loyal and competent officials, are making in checking the flow of smuggled drugs, the deadly heroin, cocaine, hashish, and the still more deadly synthetic esters, and the heroic crusade they are conducting to alleviate, if not eradicate the evil curse of drug addiction in Egypt; the equally splendid work which the department of health is undertaking to mitigate the affliction of bilharzia, which is said to claim fully forty per cent of the native population. Especially praiseworthy in this direction is the work carried on by the expedition of the Rockefeller Foundation in Cairo under Dr. Barlow. Every one of these subjects has a direct bearing on the progressive trend of the social development of Egypt.

Here a question arises which has often tended to discount the credit deserved by native Egyptians for their recent progress. It is frequently asked if the Egyptians could have accomplished all these things had it not been for the British occupation of Egypt. This question is difficult to answer. What would have been the course of history had it not been this or that, is matter of idle speculation. It is a fact, however, that Egyptians, left to themselves, have carried on the work with commendable sincerity, honesty, and zeal.



Courtesy of H. I. Katibah

BILHARZIA PATIENTS

A detention camp of Bilharzia patients of the Rockefeller Institute Expedition.

The fear which Lord Cromer, whose three-acre law is the Magna Carta of the Egyptian fellah, once expressed that "a freely elected Egyptian parliament... would not improbably legislate for the slave-owner, if not the slave-dealer," has been belied by time. Present and past Egyptian parliaments, in spite of numerous handicaps, have given good accounts of themselves. They have to their credit considerable social and economic legislation which has proved the progressiveness, far-sightedness, and loyal patriotism of the majority of representatives. Occasionally some of them have outlined legislative programs which would be considered advanced in any country. Thus in 1928 Dr. Abdul-Rahman Awad submitted a bill for the "betterment of the race," in which he boldly advocated the compulsory medical examination of couples seeking marriage.

The social tendency in modern Egyptian legislation is indeed one of its promising characteristics. Higher education, in its broader and cultural senses, was fully developed long ago; and Egyptians often contrast their progress along this line with the stupid, bureaucratic system developed under the British and known by the name of its sponsor as the Dunlop System, which was calculated to produce subaltern officials and clerks who knew how to take orders from their superiors. Dr. Faris Nimr, able editor of *al-Mokattam*, and one of the friends and supporters of the British régime in Egypt,

from his long career of observation and study of the Egyptian situation recently gave as his chief criticism of British administration in Egypt that "they have left a legacy of a highly developed government system, one hardly inferior to that of England or the United States, but paid little attention to the people themselves. The Egyptian system of education," he continued, "did not receive from them the same kind of attention or solicitude which the railways, the police, or irrigation was accorded. Consequently we have quite a gap between the system and the people for which it was made. Violations which create a furore of criticism and agitation in Egypt would pass almost unnoticed in less developed countries like Syria, Palestine or Iraq."

It was, therefore, only natural that when the Egyptians took hold of their own affairs they busied themselves with the betterment of the social system under which they lived, and sought to fill the gap which was left by the British.