

just about all that justifies another assault upon them. If this were not so, we should be able to rest content with the really good books that have been produced anywhere, at any time, in the past. This is why the West, its easily identifiable mood, its attitudes, and its history, become so important to anyone who proposes to write.

Some years ago, when Paul Scars wrote a book on the cyclical pattern of Western climate and all that it has done to us, I, among many others, told him that the writing was much out of the ordinary. He seemed pleased, but he reminded me that he had been *thinking* about the subject for fifteen years, and that it was, therefore, no trick to write the book, once he had set himself to it. I have underscored the word *think* here, just as I have underscored *ideas* at other points. It is less than useless to approach a typewriter unless you have done some thinking, and in the course of it have put a few ideas to work.

You will recall that I promised you an example from folklore. There is a school of thought which says that the task of the folklorist is merely to record. If a little synthesis goes on, too, that must be considered strictly incidental. I am sorry not to be able to second this opinion, for to do so would reduce the problems of countless aspiring writers on folklore subjects. But, ladies and gentlemen, it just ain't so. The gathering and writing of folklore exacts of its successful practitioners something of the same imagination I said is indispensable to the nonfiction writer, and a considerable portion of the narrative flair which is standard equipment for the short-story writer or novelist.

Over in Arkansas, Vance Randolph probably hasn't stirred out of the Ozarks in twenty years. But he came into those hills with an awfully good head and a sound pair each of eyes and ears. He has been using all three with very satisfying results, according to all of us who enjoy such rich and inexhaustible fare as *We Always Lie to Strangers, Who Blowed up the Church House?* and *Down in the Holler: A Gallery of Ozark Folk Speech*. Not all of these books were published by the University of Oklahoma Press—only the last, which came out during the spring.

The range, importance, and very large audience achieved by these books disposes, I think, of that constantly recurring question, What shall I write about? The necessary materials for writing lie all about, in boundless profusion. The Chancellor of this University and his able collaborator, Forrester Blake, saw in the Rockies a fine folklore opportunity, and they pursued it

in the book, *Rocky Mountain Tales*, which we published some years ago. A slightly different angle is provided by a book produced on or about Colorado and the Rockies more than a century ago—George Fredrick Ruxton's *Life in the Far West*—which has proved a precious resource to everyone from Hiram Martin Chittenden, who wrote *The Fur Trade of the Far West*, to my good friend, A. B. Guthrie, who wrote *The Big Sky*. When, some years ago, I asked a couple of reputable historians about republishing this book they shook their heads in dissent and said, "No, it's a compound of fiction and folklore." But your state historian, LeRoy Hafén, is a man who knows a reputable piece of work when he sees it. Said Mr. Hafén, when I asked him whether he would prepare an introduction and notes for a new edition, "Sure!" Mr. Hafén may actually have said, "Surely," but he went right ahead and did the job anyway. A lot of people have since discovered the enormous color, the authentic lingo, and the exciting life of the mountain man which have been preserved in this book. Nothing else that we have done at Oklahoma satisfies us more.

Now, a final word on the subject of what is snob and what is not snob.

There has been a disposition everywhere in America for more than thirty-five years to overemphasize research at the expense of writing, particularly lively, gifted, and imaginative writing. It has been said, not unjustly, that almost any duffer can break into print by assembling a batch of obvious statements abundantly supporting them by footnotes. This is true even of the West as a subject area. If there is any place that doesn't lend itself to the banal and the pedantic, the West is it. Therefore, in the most candid terms possible, I urge you to do two things: (1) if you have any gift at all in writing, try it out on the West, and be not dismayed by any palaver concerning "contribution," "advancement of knowledge," or "new data." (2) Accepting the fundamental premise that, in nonfiction, what we want is fact, not fancy, be not afraid to undertake a first-class work of synthesis. I mean by this, the utilization of the countless writings which have appeared over a period of a century and a half concerning this enormous and exciting region. Coupled with it and indispensable to its success, is a fresh, informed, imaginative point of view.

Remember Kansas, which got its sunflowers from Colorado in the first place. A writers' conference blew them over there! What I'm suggesting is that you blow some first-rate writing down Oklahoma way. We'll just up and publish it.

The Status of Women in Egypt

By BERNICE G. DUNCAN

The Middle East has become a focal point of interest because of the changes which are taking place there and because both the West and the East, speaking from the politically ideological standpoint, would like to gain the position of dominant influence in this geographically strategic location. Leaving international affairs and world problems to the political scientist, I turned my attention while I was in Egypt to internal and domestic problems which I feel intellectually more able to cope with. Thus, during the nine months spent in Cairo last year I followed with interest the considerable newspaper publicity, meetings, and speeches concerning the progress that is being made by the women of that country to secure more freedom, more independence, improved social, economic and legal status, and political recognition. That sounds like a big order, and it is, especially considering that the fight must be waged by a very small percentage of the women. Not many of them have yet secured enough independence, or have broadened their interests sufficiently, to be able to take an active part in the movement. But those who are doing so are earnest and well qualified and are winning converts among the better educated and more intelligent women. Theirs is a stiff battle but they have made considerable progress in a short space of time. Egypt has an increasing number of women doctors, lawyers, medical technicians, radio personnel, and teachers, including some at the university level.

Equality, inheritance rights and other legal rights, and social freedom were not unknown to the women of ancient times in Egypt. We have the proof of this in old documents, statues, tombs, and inscriptions wherein we learn that women, particularly upper class women, shared in many privileges which their husbands and brothers enjoyed. Furthermore, fixed property (houses, land, herds, etc.) might be held by women; even the kingdom could descend through the female line, and ancestry was traced much further back through the mother than through the

father. I do not need to recall to your minds that Egypt has been ruled by women: There was the famous Hatshepsut who reigned (about the fifteenth century B.C.) in place of her brothers, as well as the even more famous and more nearly contemporary Cleopatra upon whose death Egypt fell under the power of Rome. So, rights for Egyptian women are not a new thing but a very old one which simply became lost for some centuries.

According to one of the present-day women leaders whom I heard speak on the question of women's rights at a panel discussion in Cairo, the first setback was really due to the Greeks, so is to be laid at the door of the Western world. Much later came the Ottoman Empire and the Turks who imposed seclusion upon women, the veil, a dependent position, and restrictions of many kinds. Indeed, the panelist mentioned claimed that it was the Turkish influence and not the Moslem religion itself which was to blame for the later restrictions. But even though the Koran may not specifically impose restrictions upon women, it is apparent that at the present time those who are Coptic Christians are freer than those of the Moslem faith. This is evident in the dress, for instance. Many of the Moslem women, even when they have discarded the veil (now mostly confined to the urban proletariat), still wear black, still do not attend social gatherings with their husbands unless it is a small party of intimate friends or relatives, still take no part in community life, and do not go to public places of worship. On the other hand, among the Copts a large portion of the women are well educated, associate with foreigners, and are more at ease socially. Islamic insistence upon adherence to tradition and consulting the "consensus" of community opinion has been a factor which has combined with the existing economic conditions to fetter the women of Egypt. But it would be unfair not to point out that there are some outstanding leaders among Moslem women.

Reference has already been made to the social restrictions upon women in the purely "society" sense and to the fact that men attend many social functions without their wives. However, a little attention paid to the society columns of the various daily newspapers of Cairo indicates that it is now becoming the custom for men's social clubs to have annually or oftener a "ladies" night. Naturally, diplomatic functions are those which are most frequently attended by both sexes, for here foreign influence has modified social customs most noticeably, and in embassy circles one finds the widest social freedom for women.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The January issue of the QUARTERLY published Mrs. Duncan's interesting and amusing report on her experiences as a housewife in Cairo, Egypt. In the present article she gives her acute impressions of the position of women in a country where changes of great importance are taking place. The information given in this essay will add to our understanding of these changes.

Women in Egypt have traditionally received a different type of education than their brothers. Until quite recently, education for girls resembled the curriculum studied by our grandmothers with emphasis upon the social graces, the acquisition of some skill in music and the arts, the learning of the French language, a little literature, and general avoidance of the sciences. But the picture has changed and all faculties of the university are open to women students, even including those of medicine and engineering. In the former, women are becoming doctors, nurses, dentists, and medical technicians in considerable numbers, although in the latter, I am told, their interest is not yet much in evidence. Still, that is not surprising since the situation is similar in our own country. The important thing is that educational restrictions have been removed and those girls who are able to acquire it may obtain the same training as the boys.

The legal status of women may be concisely reviewed by stating a few facts with regard to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. These matters are decided by *sharia* (Koranic) law. Under this law a man may have as many as four wives if he can "love them all equally well." Some women leaders with whom I talked claimed that actually, however, only about five percent of the men have more than one wife. Again, it must be pointed out that the Copts are monogamous. Under Moslem custom, in marriage the man chooses the wife and although the parents have a hand in the affair, the girl has the right to refuse, even if both families urge the marriage. The lack of freedom as we know it is largely in the absence of easy friendship and association between the sexes before marriage. In divorce the situation has been more unequal because the husband may say, "I divorce you" three times and that was all that was necessary to legalize the action, until 1927 when Islamic laws were ameliorated to provide that such divorce action would be invalidated under the cir-

cumstances of oath (swearing, for instance, that if such-and-such be not true, "I'll divorce my wife!"), coercion, or drunkenness. If the wife should desire to be rid of her husband she can only return to her parental home, thus bringing about separation, or force her husband by other means to divorce her. She has a right to alimony only if she has children. In matters of inheritance girls fare half as well as their brothers. The argument is that the boys of the family will have to support wives or female relatives and therefore should have twice the amount that the girls receive because the latter will likely be supported by their husbands. There is a logical basis for this discrimination but it is difficult to learn how much or how little family dissension centers on this point. A woman may own property and carry out transactions.

It is not possible to discuss accurately any of these aspects of the status of women in present-day Egypt with both, so-called "upper" and "lower," classes in mind at the same time. There is such a vast gap between them that it is necessary to comment on the under-privileged group separately.

The economic groupings into the well-to-do, the moderately well-off, and the poor are not arbitrary but actual to a greater extent in Egypt than in the United States, where the gradations in living conditions are much more fluid and where the poor enjoy at least some of the advantages of their financially more fortunate sisters. In the first group, the woman has a nurse to take care of her children, a cook (she seldom sees her own kitchen), servants to do the cleaning and take care of the gardens (if they live in a villa instead of an apartment), and a chauffeur to drive her on occasional trips around the city. Very, very few Egyptian women drive automobiles or engage in any sort of sports. If she is middle-aged she probably still wears black a good deal, although no longer a veil. She has a small circle of friends, lives very much a "family life," and is a sheltered

creature. But her daughter may now be enrolled in the university or in the American School for Girls (a fine institution) and *she* has different ideas. It is this generation, now adolescent or recently out of their teens, which increasingly seeks to throw over many of the restrictions placed on choice of husbands, possibility of entering a career, and the sort of life they themselves may lead after marriage.

The middle group comprises those women who do not have so many servants, nor so fine a home, but a fair amount of financial security because their husbands are administrators in a government agency, perhaps, or proprietors of small businesses, or members of the professional group—lawyers, doctors, teachers. To this group may also be added those young women who are employed in offices or the better shops. This group is seen more frequently on the streets; they are smartly dressed, more European or American in style and use of color, and are less noticed by the foreigner because they look so much like ourselves. Just how numerous this group is would be hard to say without authoritative figures. The middle group probably seems larger than it is because the women are more in evidence, since they have more freedom than the wealthier group and also have to do more things for themselves.

The third group arouses one's sympathy, if not always one's admiration. I used public transportation much of the time while I was in Egypt and came in close contact with these black-clad women, almost invariably with a baby in their arms, and perhaps another child tugging at their skirts. A woman of this group sometimes does not wear the veil, is often not clean-looking, presents an apathetic, down-trodden appearance, and is inclined to talk shrilly and voluminously. These women squat on the streets selling the small green "lemons" which we call limes, or eggs, or vegetables; they carry heavy loads on their heads; in the rural areas they work in the fields. They can not read or write but many seem to have an alert intelligence.

It is this last and largest group which most needs a better way of life and for whom the process of changes will require the longest time. This fact is recognized by Dr. Doria Shafik, one of the leaders of the feminist movement whom I met. Dr. Shafik is a remarkable and charming young woman, educated at the University of Paris. She edits a woman's magazine, *Bent El Nil* (Daughter of the Nile). She is also head of the women's political party of the same name. However, while I was in Egypt all political parties were banned, so

presently Bent El Nil does not function as a party, at least outwardly. Naturally, Dr. Shafik has her admirers and her critics, but a few prominent Moslem men have defended her beliefs and the fight she is making for women in Egypt. Personally, she is attractive and poised. She has the good sense to make her appeal with tact and charm rather than assuming the belligerent, masculine attitude that characterized some of the American campaigners in the early days of our fight for women's suffrage. At the time a committee was being chosen for the drafting of a new constitution for Egypt, she urged that women be represented by one of their number on that committee. Her plea was that only by guaranteeing women's rights constitutionally could Egypt take her place in a progressive family of nations. She lost this round, for no woman was appointed on the committee, but the end is not yet and the seeds have been sown for later reaping. Dr. Shafik advocates in public speeches and through the newspapers that qualified women be appointed to public office (unheard of as yet in Egypt) and that they be given the right to have a seat in Parliament. There they would be able to introduce needed reform laws and women could eventually take their place as real citizens.

Some of her critics are women themselves and some of them are leaders also. But it must be admitted that a number of these are motivated by the desire to share the spotlight she enjoys. Others are conservative-minded women who are not in accord with her forward-thinking ideas. But, whether she is motivated by publicity-seeking as some of her critics charge or not, she has stimulated enough attention to this problem that the feminist cause is growing in strength and sphere of influence.

Dr. Nejla Izzedin, the first Arab woman to receive a Ph.D., points out in her book *The Arab World* that women's work thus far has been largely social service: orphanages, milk centers for undernourished children, kindergartens and nurseries, and hospitals. Women have also been interested in the preservation and revival of native arts. Dr. Izzedin presents the orthodox Moslem attitude toward the position of women: "Integrated in the family where at all stages of her life she has essential tasks, woman feels secure in her usefulness and derives power and importance from the broad responsibilities and fundamental functions she performs. Consequently, Arab women are, on the whole, at peace with their society and in harmony with their environment; drifting, uprooted, and neurotic women are practically unknown among them." The staunchest argument against changing the status of women in

the Middle East is that they would lose some of the advantages they now enjoy. But from my own experience I know that while they may not be "drifting" or "uprooted," boredom is not an uncommon malady, on the part of the privileged, nor is over-work and economic oppression, on the part of the underprivileged. If the first group could lend a helping hand they could contribute something toward solving their own ennui and the other, more real, problems of others.

Literacy, poverty, and over-population are problems which have to be solved by both men and women and will never be solved by one of them alone. However, it must be recognized that politics in Egypt is not politics as we know it here. There, political parties seem to have run the country's affairs (at least till the present government) often more for the direct benefit of the party and its adherents than for the benefit of the people as a whole. This is probably the most frequently used argument on the part of the conservative-minded against allowing women to participate in politics. They not only think, they say they know, that politics is a "dirty business" from which they wish to protect their women. This can be, of course, one of the strongest reasons why women should be given political rights—namely, that a good housecleaning might result. Still, because the situation is different, it will, no doubt, be advisable to proceed somewhat differently than was the case in the United States, but it is nevertheless my belief that political equality should be given to the women of Egypt soon, even if they are not all ready for it (they weren't in America, either), for the capable and educated women can only then, by taking their rightful places in public life, win for themselves and their less fortunate and more indifferent sisters the social and economic equality that may otherwise not be theirs unless as the result of a struggle that would probably be much too long and too discouraging.

Your Career . . .

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strength and resource in life—all these things, my good friends, are your own. They are yours, and only yours, to have and to hold and to create and to develop. No one can supply these most important things for you. Good luck—God speed—and thanks very much for your kind attention.