

WOMEN IN PALESTINE

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Women in Palestine are under somewhat similar social conditions as in Turkey and Egypt. Their Moslem conquerors imposed upon them the veil, the seclusion, and many other limitations. The veil ordinarily worn is a colored print with embroidered edge, and a white robe envelops the rest of the figure. According to the social rank, silk robes, black, gray, purple, or crimson, with an ornamental border of gold thread, are also worn. Women contribute to the household service by drying fruit and grain upon the housetop, grinding corn, and bringing water. They carry the water in heavy jars, each weighing when full from fifty to seventy-five pounds. This they lift and poise upon the head in going from the spring, the river, or the distant well to the mud hovel



WOMEN GRINDING.

which answers for a home. The mill used in grinding corn consists of upper and lower circular stones, between which the grain is placed; the upper, a large stone from two to three feet in diameter, is made to revolve upon the lower by pushing it around by an upright stick or handle inserted in a hole. Two women are seated on opposite sides of this mill, and alternately push and pull, thus reducing to corn to powder by the weight and motion of the upper stone. The labor must be as severe as heavy convict labor in civilized countries.

Women formerly had no education except such as was provided for them by the mission schools. But so much has public sentiment been raised by these schools, especially in Syria, that the Moslems have become aroused and have started their own schools by the side of the mission schools, ordering those of their religious faith to withdraw their children from the mission to their own school, and even enforcing their threats by taxation and persecution. The head of one mission school, a quaint, bright, Scotch woman, said she was glad they had taught the Moslems the value of educating their women. Her account of the conditions under which her school was started was full of interest, and illustrated the difficulty under which such work with an oriental people is begun. She has now a school of about one hundred boys and girls of the lower classes, Moslems and Druses. She teaches them in Arabic, elementary number, reading and writing, with sewing and embroidery for the girls. Her first school was very successful, and numbered nearly three hundred when the Moslems opened their noisy school under the windows, forcing her to move, and reducing her numbers by taking away all her day pupils.

The higher education of women is conducted in English and French in the Beirut Seminary, where about seventy students were enrolled. On the day of our visit we heard recitations in natural history, French, psychology—to which the oriental mind takes naturally—and reading from English readers. The class in calisthenics was conducted on the lawn under the trees, and was a pretty sight, though the pupils were listless and nerveless in their movements. The principal said that it was very hard to get concerted action from the girls at first.

To show how such education is now valued by the Syrians, I quote from a Druse father who had sent his daughter to this seminary, and was asked to give his opinion in regard to woman's education. The letter is addressed to Dr. Jessup:

To my honored Sir, to whom ever overflow the tides of grace and favor:

I would inform you that in the most propitious of seasons and most lovely of the glorious ages the full moons of your honored writings sparkled over the flowery glades, and the sweet waters of your courteous language murmured through the recesses of our heart, giving life to the dead by the delicacy of their hidden wisdom, and by all the kind inquiries you have condescended to lay before us as to what are our views in regard to the propriety and necessity of teaching women and girls that knowledge and those arts which are appropriate to them.

My honored sir, I would answer in the way of apology that I am not of the knights of this arena, and my great incapacity to handle such a subject must be apparent to your excellency and to all who know me. But your kind interest in me and my child has led you to impute to me a degree of knowledge in these matters which I do not really possess, and I can only understand it by recalling the lines of the poet:

The favoring eye of loving friends
Our fault conceals, our name defends.

and I would implore of Him most exalted never to deprive me of your exalted regard.

In obedience, then, to your request, I will venture to express my views in as far as I know anything about the subject. It is not only proper, but necessary, that girls should be taught those sciences and arts which are appropriate to them. We all know that it is the law and custom that girls marry men, and have thrown upon them the duty of training children. Now, children, are brought up in the lap of the mother, and not of the father; and if the mother has been educated, her children grow up acute of perfection, intelligent and pure, and this for the reason that the son associates with his mother far more than with his father for the first ten years of his life. If the mother is enlightened, educated, and intelligent, her son will be the same. But, on the contrary, if the women are uninstructed in science and proper knowledge and useful arts, and know not the value of learning, their children will be like them. And supposing that a woman remains unmarried, still less can she afford to remain in ignorance, for she must depend for support upon her needle or her pen or some one of the useful trades and arts, and a proper education in these will make her independent for life. I might say more, but this is the extent of my knowledge, and those who are possessed of wisdom and knowledge on these themes can supply my deficiencies and convince all objectors and opposers.

Please make my highest regards to their excellencies, the most honored, the teachers of the seminary, and to all your family. My Uncle, Ali Beg, the Kaim Makam, offers to you the due salutations of reverence and honor, and hearty longing to behold the light of your countenance. This is all I need to write, with the hearty offer to do anything you command in this region, for your commands are my highest honor.

The petitioner to God for you,

HASSAN HAMADY.

This was from a prince or leading man of the Druses, and represents advanced oriental sentiment. Leave off its wordy complimentary phrases, which are only a form of oriental courtesy, and the Druse leader has clear elementary ideas on the education of women, which are probably due to the value of the instruction given to his daughter in the seminary in Beirut.

Beirut is favorably situated on the curve of a beautiful bay, with the snowy peaks of the Lebanon mountain ranges in full view from the city. It is a great educational and missionary centre. There are more schools, in proportion to its size, than in many cities in more civilized lands. The college is largely attended, and ambitious young Syrians look forward to it as the great goal of their education, and from it young men go out to teach and to preach.