

## RISING STATUS OF WOMEN

The countries of the Middle East have made amazing progress in modernization since they began functioning independently. This progress is evident in Lebanon, where independence was gained in 1943; Jordan, independent since 1946; Syria and Egypt — all referred to as Arab countries. The same is true of Israel, recognized as an independent country in 1948.

The most profound changes in culture patterns in the Middle East are the results of the emancipation of women through education and their growing freedom to move outside the home. Although it is early to discuss equalization between the sexes, there is much evidence that women are moving in that direction. For example, in a study to determine priority given by men and women in planning new

housing in the suburbs of Khartoum, five features were listed as important: (1) a wall between houses which would give women seclusion in the yard, (2) a bathroom, (3) a store room, (4) a veranda, (5) a shelter for earthenware water jugs. The men gave highest priority to the dividing wall but women gave it the lowest. In the same study only 57 per cent of the women, about the same as men, mentioned marriage as one of their greatest of three wishes. When the same question was asked of a group of women four years later, this figure had declined to 41 per cent, 7 per cent lower than for American college women who mentioned marriage in exactly the same type of study.

The enrollment of girls in primary schools in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and

Syria increased by 703,996 from 1931 to 1954; and the proportion of girls enrolled in secondary schools in the same countries in 1954 ranged from 25 per cent to 41 per cent, with the highest percentage in Lebanon. These figures give evidence that compulsory elementary education is reaching an increasing proportion of children, and higher education has also grown rapidly. The increase in technical education has not been as great.

In addition to the increased enrollment in public schools in the Middle East, educational opportunities through the press have been expanding with an increase in circulation of newspapers. There has been a gain in book production, also. The number of radio receivers has more than doubled in less than a decade. Attendance at cinemas has likewise risen for both European and American films.

Lebanon, although the smallest of the countries named, is the most up to date. It is half the area of Israel to its south, and 6 per cent of the area of Syria. It

has one and one-half million inhabitants and more than one-fourth of these live in Beirut.

According to a survey in 1943, the population of Lebanon was slightly more than 50 per cent Christian and the rest were of the Moslem faith. The Moslems are divided into two groups and the Christians into at least six. By general agreement the government recognizes these differences. The President is a Christian and the Prime Minister is a Moslem. The parties have thus established an equilibrium. They have freedom of religion, of the press, and of speech.

The country receives no foreign aid now. Most of the revenue comes from custom taxes. They have no vast oil reserves like some of the other Arab countries. The people are described as hard-working, paying their own way, and very hospitable.

There is 85 per cent literacy, with good schools. Because of its emphasis upon training people to think for themselves, the American

University of Beirut, started years ago as a missionary enterprise, has had great influence upon the country.

Jordan, which started out as a poverty stricken little kingdom held up entirely by outside aid, in which the United States had a major part, has made phenomenal progress. We rode over a magnificent new highway from Amman, the capital city of Jordan with a population of more than 200,000, to Jerusalem. The guides proudly told us the highway was built with American money, part of the Point IV program.

Syria, formerly a part of the United Arab Republic, organized to work for Arab unity, is now under the rule of the Ba'ath Party. This party opposes the dreams of President Nasser, of Egypt, for organic union. There have been flare-ups and counter-revolutions since the Ba'ath Party took over the government of Syria in 1963. Immediately after our visit to Damascus and return the same day, a riot broke out and the border between Sy-

ria and Lebanon was closed for several weeks.

Much has been written about the miraculous developments in Israel. One writer refers to the frantic activity of the Israeli as "making up for lost time." In the first three years after the country became a republic, the population doubled; in ten years it had trebled; and in fifteen years it had soared to 2,300,000, of whom over two million are Jews born outside Israel.

Irrigation has turned a desert or semi-desert into a garden with citrus and banana groves, sugar beets and other crops, and \$70,000,000 worth of agricultural products being exported annually. New developments include, in addition to water traveling immense distances to revive parched soil, strawberries growing by the shores of the Dead Sea, roses growing in the desert, crops growing in gravel, salt water being desalted, refrigerators driven by sun-power, straggling rivers straightened out, new forests where only naked crags existed, fens turned in-

to farms, and maps becoming outdated.

There are three big cities in this little country of less than a thousand square miles, about the size of Massachusetts. Haifa, situated on the Mediterranean, down under Mt. Carmel, has a population of 300,000. This city has the first underground electric train in Israel, includes Haifa Harbour, and is known for its cleanliness and attractiveness.

Tel Aviv, the newest and largest of the cities, has a population of 400,000. This city includes theaters, fashion shops, concert halls, luxury hotels, modern offices, and other important buildings.

New Jerusalem, the capital, has a population of 175,000. In contrast to Tel Aviv and Haifa, Jerusalem has no places of amusement but has synagogues and seminaries, cathedrals, colleges, museums, and government buildings. The oldest part of the city, called Mea Shearin, is populated with ultra-conservative Jews. Life revolves around the old Jewish Law with its 613 command-

ments. Mea Shearin guards the Faith that has guided the Jewish people for thousands of years.

Another town which reflects the older traditions of the Jewish people is Nazareth, where there has been little change in the past two thousand years. New and modern buildings are now being erected in the surrounding area, however, and new industries are being opened.

There is as much contrast in the clothing worn in different parts of Israel as there is in the type of buildings and activities. Western dress is worn much in cities like Haifa and Tel Aviv, but in Mea Shearin the dress of the orthodox Jews reflects the traditions being fostered by that group. Men wear heavy frock coats and big broad-brimmed hats of plush, while women, demurely kerchiefed, appear in long-sleeved and high-necked dresses. The little children have glossy braids, wear white woolen stockings and side curls. Men and boys wear sideburns.

One of the first acts of the

new state was to make elementary schooling compulsory and free for all children between ages five and fourteen, with responsibility placed upon the central and local governments. Two types of schools are maintained, state schools and state religious schools. The main difference is that in the state religious schools there is more emphasis on religious studies, including the Bible, the Talmud, prayer, and the Sabbath, but not to the exclusion of other educational studies. The state schools also include Jewish studies and a thorough knowledge of the Bible. The Hebrew language is spoken and taught in all schools. Education is practical and most schools have well-equipped laboratories, workshops, and even small farms.

Two very important institutions of higher learning are the Hebrew University, in Jerusalem, and Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology, located in Haifa. The enrollment in the Hebrew University multiplied eight times, from one thousand to eight thousand, be-

tween 1945-47 and 1962-63. Students, who come from all parts of the world, take their work seriously and study hard. All students must learn Hebrew but 90 per cent of the books are written in English.

The big problem in the Middle East is the so-called Palestine Question. Encouraged by the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the Jewish people flocked back to Israel. The Zionist party, partly religious and partly political, felt that Palestine was their own land, quoting Scripture to prove that God had given it to Abraham and his descendants forever. On the other hand, the Arabs, who had lived there for a thousand years, felt that the land belonged to them. Feeling is intense and bitter on both sides. Someone stated that the problem is anchored in the emotions of two peoples. There is no communication between Israel and the Arab countries. Only at one point, the Mendelbaum Gate in Jerusalem, is there passage from one country to another, and it is strictly one-way travel from Jordan to Israel.

The number of Palestinian refugees in the Arab countries exceeds one million, over half of them seventeen years of age or younger, who deserve an opportunity to become members of society. The majority of these refugees are in Jordan, but the Gaza strip; a narrow coastal plain twenty miles long and five miles wide next to Egypt, is crowded with 350,000 people — 250,000 of them refugees — where 80,000 used to live.

For several years the refugees were crowded into miserable huts but most of them are in better housing today. The United Nations is feeding them, with an average of 1,500 calories a day. Their ration stamps include flour, rice, sugar, cooking fat, and a bean-like substance. The United Nations also provides some hospital care and schools for vocational training including eleven teacher-training schools. Although conditions are better, the refugees are still a

burden and a problem to their host countries; and they increase at the rate of thirty thousand a year. The most encouraging fact is that the number of young people who start to school and remain in school is increasing rapidly. These young people are developing skills and getting enough training to move out into other places as five thousand of them did in 1962.

It is evident that the patterns of culture in the Middle East are changing, and the changes are becoming more rapid. The rising status of women through education and their emergence into the world of affairs has greatly influenced the changing patterns. Changes appear to be more rapid in places where Western culture has had greatest influence. Improvement in the quality of education will, no doubt, mean continued change for better living. — *E. Reed Waters, condensed from Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin.*