

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Budget – Greve editor

April 3, 1886

Customs and Habits.

From al-Jawaib, (The News) of Constantinople –
Translated by Prof. W.O. Sproull

In some former remarks we referred to the influence of custom upon men. I can do no harm to add here something in relation to the difference that exists between us, Moslems, and the Europeans, as to shaving of the whiskers and mustache. We affirm that this practice of beardlessness is the ugliest of all European customs. Especially ugly is it in the case of old men whose faces are wrinkled and furrowed; for without whiskers they look like apes. Thus ugliness is further increased if such persons are men of rank and position; for example, judges and bishops. What can be uglier than a judge thus shorn and scraped, sitting on the bench and deciding questions of right between litigants that have not thus disfigured their faces! The same is true of a Bishop in the pulpit, preaching in the midst of bearded men. You can only laugh at him, and must imagine that you are witnessing a farce or burlesque. Moreover, you would be astonished at the skill with which this man handles the razor when he is making smooth his chin and cheeks. If you could converse with him about different kingdoms and nations, you would wonder at his sagacity. So, on the one hand, you must regard him as a man of wisdom, and penetration, and on the other hand as one that is stupid and without common sense. The cause of this is custom, which has gotten the better of his sound judgment.

Within a few years the people of Europe began to see how ugly this custom is, and have begun to let their whiskers grow, the mark of manliness and beauty. But what is remarkably strange is the fact that this effeminate abomination has remained as a badge of those occupying high positions: e.g., officials, military officers, judges, lawyers, and clergymen. As for the clergy, they set themselves in direct opposition to the Messiah and his apostles, (peace be upon them) for all of them were bearded. Likewise, the church fathers are always represented as adorned with long beards. As for you, judges and others, whose duty it is to uphold the majesty of the law, and who have been raised to your high positions on account of your keen perception and extensive knowledge, we shall ask you only one question:

What difference is there between shaving off one's mustache and shaving off one's eyebrows? Both grow on the face of the men naturally; and if the creator, (whose power is exalted) had not wished the mustache to be an ornament to man, he would not have made it grow. You, a judge, who, by the great powers of your mind make known the mysteries both of written and unwritten law, have become the slave of an ugly custom. And you, oh European bishop, who deliver long sermons about slavery, and affirm that by the messianic gospel the human race has been freed from bondage, we see in yourself a slave to the custom of your own country, although you know that the bishops of the Orient, of whatever sect, are adorned with long beards, and thereby have honor in the sight of men. Of what use have been to you the study of history, and your knowledge of the political condition of all lands, when custom has so completely gained the mastery over your understanding. In the columns of the London Times, there is a constant harping on civilization and elegance and refinement. It is always telling about the great culture of Europe: "highly civilized Europe," "the fine education of the Europeans," but it never has occurred, and never will occur, it is that man's adorning himself by wearing a mustache and beard, is the first sign of culture. The Europeans, great and small, townsmen and countrymen, although they have studied so deep into the arts and sciences, that they have succeeded in making a grammar and a lexicon out of the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt, yet they do not understand the language of the eye, although it is intelligible to sheep and goats. And all this is the result of custom.

Now let us consider the customs of the women in so far as they remain as God has created them. They do not make use of white or red paint for their faces, nor of antimony for their eyebrows. They do not color either their hands or fingers. They never apply lotion, depilatories. Moreover, they never sharpen their teeth. These things are done only by the women of the Orient because they think their natural beauty is not sufficient to charm men. On the other hand, the women of the Occident wear hair taken from dead bodies, also artificial teeth, false bosoms and hips. Yes, their concern about the last is greater than their concern to beautify the face. This also belongs to the customs of European women. At dinners and other festivities they have their arms and bosoms bare, and consider this to be one of the chief demands of etiquette. The men on such occasions wear a kind of jacket with two tails that danced behind them like the tails of a bird. We by no means assert that the oriental women are unchaste because they thus enhance their beauty nor that the women of the Occident are immodest because they expose their

bosoms, nor that their husbands are fools because they shave off their beards and have two tails dancing on the ends of their coats, but we do say that it is custom and habit that make certain practices, wherein we differ from others, seem beautiful to us.

As long as man stays at home, and always walks in the ways of his people, it will be difficult for him to depart from established customs. This is possible only when he has seen strange lands, and other nations. His eye will then become practiced, and he will be enabled to distinguish between what is beautiful and what is ugly in customs. Though we are well aware that our words will make no impression upon Europeans, or upon others, yet we can not keep silent about certain things, for we are convinced that it is the duty of all who write for the public, to blame what is blameworthy, and to praise what is praiseworthy. It is not easy to do away with customs that have been in vogue for centuries, and especially if they have been made sacred by religious traditions. For example, the custom that prevails among some of the Faithful, of licking the fingers after eating, because Muhammed the Prophet, (may God bless him and grant him peace), is said to have done so.

There are some ugly habits to men and women alike that could be overcome without much trouble. We mention the following: Cleaning the nostrils with the fingers in the presence of others, belching when eating or drinking, snuffing, clearing the throat, yawning, and stretching one's self.

We must not pass by the very prevalent habit of frightening children by telling them of ghosts and hobgoblins; and yet there is scarcely a house in Constantinople in which God's Word (the Koran) is not read. What sense is there in believing that ghosts and hobgoblins visit the homes of the Faithful by day and night, and never enter the houses of Jews or Christians. Can a man of understanding refrain from speaking about this? Can one hope for good results from children that are brought up in constant fear? Will that one be of any account as a soldier for battle, in whose ears are sounded morning and evening the words ghosts and hobgoblins?

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