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sacred law, and the true and loyal believers? If it prohibits all abomination, whether evident or hidden, what is it we see among them, both secret and open, both physical and spiritual?

If Islam teaches that religion consists in sincerity before God, His Apostle, and fellow believers in both immediate and general relationships, if "man is the loser, save those who believe, do good works, and enjoin upon each other justice and patience" (Sura 103, Verses 1–3) and yet, not enjoining kindness or forbidding evil, they go altogether to the bad, and their honest folk call and get no response, and if this which they quite fail to fulfill is in fact their most bounden duty, why is it that they thus so totally fail to counsel each other and lay upon each other squarely what the divine will requires? Why do they not hold to it with fortitude and speak truth about right and wrong? Who do they in fact take each other in good faith, letting things go as they will in rabid individualism, ignoring each other's affairs as if they were totally unrelated to the one to the other, having nothing in common? Why do sons murder fathers, and daughters prove refractory toward their mothers?

Where are the bowls of mercy, of compassion for a neighbor? Where is the just dealing the rich owe to the poor with their possessions? Rather the rich plunder even what remains in the hands of the wretched.

A glimmer of Islam, it is said, illuminated the west, but its full light is in the east. Yet precisely there its own people lie in the deepest gloom and cannot see. Does this seem intelligible? Is there any parallel in the annals of men? Does not appear that the very Muslims who have known something of science are precisely those who, for the most part, instinctively regard Islam's doctrines as superstitions and its principles and precepts as a farce? They find pleasure in asping the free-thinking people who scoff and jeer and think themselves forward-looking. Do you not see Muslims whose only business with the scriptures is to finger their pages, while they preen themselves on being memorizers of their precepts and expert in their laws? How far they are from the rational study of the Qur'an which they despise and regard as worthless to religion and the world! Many of them simply pride themselves on ignorance, as if thereby they had evaded prohibited things and achieved some distinction. Those Muslims who stand on the threshold of science see their faith as a kind of old garment in which it is embarrassing to appear among men, while those who deceive themselves that they have some pretension to be religious and orthodox believers in its doctrines regard reason as a devil and science as supposition. Can we not, in the light of all this, call God, His angels, and all men to witness that science and reason have no accord with this religion?

It may well be said that the foregoing has not exaggerated the plight of Muslims today, indeed, these several generations past. But is the objection the whole story? Parallels could be found in the descriptions of Islam in their day given by al-Ghazzal, [Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad] Ibn al-Hajj (died 1336), and other writers on religion, filling whole volumes, both about the general population and the intelligentsia. But the reading of the Qur'an suffices of itself to vindicate what I have said about the essential nature of Islamic religion, provided it is read with care to understand its real import, interpreted according to the understanding of those among whom it was sent down and to the way they put it into practice. To admit the validity of what I have said of its fine effects, it suffices to read the pages of history as indicated by those who truly knew Islam and the objective writers in other nations. Such Islam was—and is. We have earlier said that religion is guidance and reason. Whoever uses it well and takes its directives will gain the blessedness God has promised to those who follow it. As a medicine for human society its success when truly tried is so manifest that not even the blind and the deaf can deny or gain it. All that the objection just elaborated leads to is this: a physician treated a sick man with medicine and he recovered; then the doctor himself succumbed to the disease he had been treating. In dire straits from pain and with the medicine by his house, he has yet no will to use it. Many of those who come to visit him or seek his ministrations or even gloat over his illness could take up the medicine and be cured, while he himself despair of life and waits either for death or some miraculous healing.

We have now set forth the religion of Islam and its true character. As for those Muslims who by that conduct have come to be an argument against it, there must be dealt with not here, but in another book, if God wills.

The Emancipation of Woman

I call on every lover of truth to examine with me the status of women in Egyptian society. I am confident that such individuals will arrive independently at the same conclusion I have, namely the necessity of improving the status of Egyptian women. The truth I am presenting today has preoccupied me for a long time; I have considered it, examined it, and analyzed it. When it was eventually stripped of all confounding errors, it occupied an important place in my thinking, roused other ideas, overcame them, and finally reached the point where it became my dominant thought, alerting me to its advantages and reminding me of its necessity. I became aware of the absence of a platform from which this truth could be elevated from reflection to the unlimited space of appeal and attention.

A profound factor that influences human development and ensures its positive fruits is the strand of power that compels a human being to communicate every scientific or literary idea once it crystallizes the mind, and once it is accompanied by the belief that it will benefit the progress of future generations.
Communicating these findings supersedes concern over any negative consequences that may be incurred by the individual in presenting his knowledge. The impact of this power is recognized by anyone who has experienced a trace of it. Such an individual feels that if he fails to use this power toward the goal it is aiming to achieve, and if he does not use whatever strength he has to assist it in reaching that goal, it will eventually overcome him in the struggle, resisting him if he opposes it, coercing him if he tries to force it, and appearing in an unfamiliar form, like a gas that could not be contained through pressure. In fact, the pressure may cause an explosion that would destroy its container.

History offers numerous proofs of this phenomenon. The history of nations is saturated with disputes, arguments, sufferings, and wars that originated with the purpose of establishing the superiority of one idea or ideology over another. During these encounters victory was sometimes for truth and at other times for falsehood. This characterized Islamic countries during the early days and the middle ages, and continues to characterize Western countries. It is reasonable to state that the life of Western countries is a continuous struggle between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong: it is an internal struggle in all branches of education, the arts, and industry, and an external struggle among the various countries. This is especially obvious in this century when distance and isolation have been eliminated by modern inventions, and when the separating borders and forbidding walls have been torn down. These changes are reflected in the increasing number of individuals who have toured the whole world and who presently can be counted by the thousands. Likewise, the ideas of any Western scholar, when formulated in a book, are translated and published simultaneously in five or six languages.

Countries like ours have preferred a less ruffled existence. This is because we have neglected the nurturing of our minds to such an extent that they have become like barren soil, unfit for any growth. Our laziness has caused us to be hostile to every unfamiliar idea, whether a product of the sound principal traditions or of current events.

An intellectually lazy person whose arguments are weak is often satisfied, in refuting an apparent truth, to hurl a false remark and declare it a heresy in Islam. He only makes this false remark to avoid the effort of understanding the truth, or to disengage from the labor of research, or to avoid its application. It is as if God created the Muslims from clay especially set aside for them and freed them from obeying natural law, whose power dominates human beings and the rest of creation.

Some people will say that today I am publishing heresy. To these people I will respond: Yes, I have come up with a heresy, but the heresy is not against Islam. It is against our traditions and social dealings, which ought to be brought to perfection. Why should a Muslim believe that traditions cannot be changed or replaced by new ones, and that it is his duty to preserve them forever? Why does he drag this belief along with his work, even though he and his traditions are part of the universe, falling at all times under the laws of change? Can the Muslim contradict God’s laws of creation—God who has made change a prerequisite for life and progress, rather than immobility and inflexibility, which are characteristic of death and backwardness? Is not tradition merely the set of conventions of a country defining the special customs appropriate to its life and behavior at a specific time and place? How can people believe that traditions never change, and at the same time maintain the understanding that traditions are one of the intellectual products of humans, and that human intellect differs according to historical era or geographical location? Does the presence of Muslims in various parts of the world imply a uniformity of traditions or ways of life? Who can pretend that Sudanese preferences are similar to those of the Turks, the Chinese, or the Indians; or believe that the Bedouin tradition is appropriate for an urbanite; or claim that the traditions of any country have remained the same since the creation of that country?

In truth, during a specific historical era every country has peculiar traditions and mores that match its intellectual state. These traditions and mores change continuously in an unobtrusive way, so that people living during that era are unaware of the changes. However, the changes are influenced by regional factors, heredity, intercultural exchanges, scientific inventions, ethical ideologies, religious beliefs, political structures, and other factors. Every intellectual movement toward progress is inevitably followed by an appropriate change in the traditions and mores of a society. Therefore, there should be examples of differences between the Sudanese and the Turks comparable to the differences in their intellectual status. This is a well-known, established fact. The differences between Egyptians and Europeans also need to be considered in this context.

We cannot consider traditions (which are merely a way of life for an individual, family, companions, and children of the race) to be the same in a civilized nation as in an ignorant, barbaric one, because the behavior of every individual in a society is appropriate to the intellectual abilities of that society and to the method by which its children are brought up.

This total interdependence between the traditions of a nation and its level of civilization and knowledge suggests that the power of tradition controls a country more than any other power, and that tradition is one of the most influential permanent components of a nation, and is least likely to change. Therefore, citizens of a nation cannot but comply with the existing traditions, unless they change, or unless their intellectual level increases or decreases. Thus, I believe that traditions always overcome other factors in a society, and that they even influence the laws of that society. This belief is confirmed through daily observation of the laws and programs of our nation, which are usually intended to improve the state of affairs but are immediately turned around to become new instruments for corruption. It is not difficult to understand this phenomenon, because at times tradition may even supersede the existing religion, destroying or transforming it so that those who are most knowledgeable about religion eventually down its existing form.

This is the basis of our observations. This evidence of history confirms and demonstrates that the status of women is inseparably tied to the status of a nation. When the status of a nation is low, reflecting an uncivilized condition for that nation, the status of women is also low, and when the status of a nation is elevated, reflecting the progress and civilization of that nation, the status of women in that country is also elevated. We have learned that women in the first human societies were treated as slaves. The ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, considered a woman to be under the power of her father, then her husband, and after him his eldest son. The head of the family had the absolute right of ownership over her life. He could dispose of her through trade, donation, or death, whenever and in whatever way he wished. Her heirs eventually inherited her and with her all the rights that were given to the owner. Prior to Islam, it was acceptable for Arab fathers to kill their daughters, and for men to gratify themselves with women with no legal bonds or numerical ties. This authority still prevails among uncivilized African and American tribes. Some Asians even believe that a woman has no immortal soul, and that she should not live after her husband dies. Other Asiatic present her to their guests as a sign of hospitality, as one would present a guest with the best of possessions.

These traits are present among emerging societies, which are based on familial and tribal forms rather than on formal structures. Force is the only with which such societies are familiar. The use of force is also the medium of control for governments run by autocratic structures.

On the other hand, we find that women in Latin America have made progress on a path that has led to a more advanced civilization. Women in Latin America have made material and spiritual progress in science, literature, and the arts. They have made significant progress in the fields of education, medicine, and the social and intellectual sciences. They have made progress in the fields of education, medicine, and the social and intellectual sciences. They have made progress in the fields of education, medicine, and the social and intellectual sciences.

In light of this, one can see how progress has been made in the field of women’s rights and equality. Women in Latin America have made significant progress in the fields of education, medicine, and the social and intellectual sciences. They have made progress in the fields of education, medicine, and the social and intellectual sciences. They have made progress in the fields of education, medicine, and the social and intellectual sciences.
The Islamic legal system, the shari'a, stipulated the equality of women and men before any other legal system. Islam declared women's freedom and emancipation, and granted women all human rights during a time when women occupied the lowest status in all societies. According to Islamic law, women are considered to possess the same legal capabilities in all civil cases pertaining to buying, donating, trusteeship, and disposal of goods, unhindered by requirements of permission from either their father or their husband. These advantages have not yet been attained by some contemporary Western women, yet they demonstrate that respect for women and for their equality with men was basic to the principles of the liberal shari'a. In fact, our legal system went far in its kindness to women that it hid them from the burden of earning a living and freed them from the obligation of participating in household and child-rearing expenses. It is unlike some Western laws, which equate men and women only with regard to their duties, giving preference to men with regard to societal rights.

Within the shari'a, the tendency to equate men's and women's rights is obvious, even in the context of divorce. Islam has created for women mechanisms worthy of consideration and contrary to what Westerners and some Muslims imagine or believe. These will be discussed later.

Islamic law favors men in one area only—polygamy. The reason is obvious and is related to the issue of lineage, without which marriage is meaningless. This topic too will be addressed later. In summary, nothing in the laws of Islam or in its intentions can account for the low status of Muslim women. The existing situation is contrary to the law, because originally women in Islam were granted an equal place in human society.

What a pity! Unacceptable customs, traditions, and superstitions inherited from the countries in which Islam spread have been allowed to permeate this beautiful religion. Knowledge in these countries had not developed to the point of giving women the status already given them by the shari'a. The most significant factor that accounts for the perpetuation of these traditions, however, is the succession over us of despotic governments. At various times and places, Islamic societies have been striped of the political structures that delineated the rights of the ruler and the ruled, and that granted to the ruled the right to demand that the rulers stop at the limits established for them by the shari'a. In fact, their governments continually took on a despotic nature, with their sultans and his assistants having total authority. Thus they ruled however they wished, without restraint, counsel, or supervision, and they administered the affairs of their citizens without these having any say.

Yes, rulers, whether important or unimportant, are obliged to follow justice and avoid injustice. Experience demonstrates, however, that unlimited power is a temptation for abuse, especially when it is unaccountable, unchallenged by any other opinion, and supervised by any formal structure. This explains why for so many centuries absolute and autocratic role was the norm for Islamic countries. Rulers administered these nations poorly and were excessive in their capricious tampering with the affairs of their subjects; quite often they even tampered with religion. There are a few exceptions to this pattern, but they are insignificant in contrast to the majority of cases.

When despotism prevails in a country, its impact is not limited to individual cases only, since it is central to the ideology of the supreme ruler. Despotism continues to flow from him to those around him, and they in turn influence their subordinates. A despot splits his spirit into every powerful person, who, whenever possible, dominates a weaker one. This attitude pervades the life of all individuals, regardless of the approval or disapproval of the supreme ruler. These despotic systems have also influenced the relationships between men and women—men in his superiority began to despise woman in her weakness. As a result, corrupt morals became the first sign of a country ruled by a despot. Initially, one would assume that a person who experiences injustice would love justice, and that he would be inclined toward compassion, having experienced the suffering resulting from the catastrophes which have befallen him. Observation indicates, however, that an oppressed nation does not contain an appropriate and fit environment for the development of desirable virtues. The only plant that grows in an oppressed nation is that of depravity. Every Egyptian who has lived under despotic rule in the not-very-distant past knows that the village mayor, robbed of ten Egyptian pounds, claims a hundred pounds from his villagers, and that the village chief, struck with one hundred lashes, upon his return to the village takes his revenge upon a hundred peasants.

The natural implication of this situation is that human beings respect only force and are deterred only by fear. When women were weak, men crushed their rights, despised them, treated them with contempt, and stomped on their personality. A woman had a very low status, regardless of her position in the family as wife, mother, or daughter. She was of no importance, was ignored, and had no legitimate opinions. She was submissive to a man because he was a man and she a woman. She obliterated herself in the person of the man. She was allowed nothing in the universe except that which she concealed in the corners of her home. She specialized in ignorance and secluded herself with the curtains of darkness. A man used her as an object of delight and pleasure, amused himself with her whenever he wished, and threw her into the road whenever he wished. He had freedom and she had bondage; he had knowledge and she had ignorance; he had a mind and she had simple-mindedness; he had light and space and she had darkness and prison; he had absolute authority and she had only obedience and patience. Everything in existence belonged to him, and she was part of that totality of which he took possession.

Despising the woman, a man filled his home with slaves, white or black, or with numerous wives, satisfying himself with any one of them whenever his passion and lust drove him. He ignored the prescribed religious obligations, which required good intentions for his actions and justice in his dealings.

Despising the woman, a man divorced her without reason.

Despising the woman, a man sat alone at the dining table, while his mother, sisters, and wife gathered after he was done to eat what was left over.

Despising the woman, a man appointed a guardian to protect her chastity. Thus a eunuch, a legal guardian, or a servant supervised, observed, and accompanied her wherever she went.

Despising the woman, a man imprisoned her in the house and boasted about her permanent restriction, which was lifted only when she was to be carried in her coffin to the grave.

Despising the woman, a man announced that she was unworthy of trust and honesty.

Despising the woman, a man secluded her from public life and kept her from involvement in anything except female or personal issues. A woman had no opinions on business, political movements, the arts, public affairs, or doctrinal issues, and she had no patriotic pride or religious feelings.

I do not exaggerate when I say that this has been the status of women in Egypt until the past few years when we have witnessed a decrease in the power of men. This change is a consequence of the increasing intellectual development of men, and the moderation of their rulers. We have observed that women present have more freedom to look after their personal affairs, that they quite often go to public parks, and that they have learned the works of the Sublime Creator, displayed for the eyes of all men, whether male or female. In fact, many women now accompany their husbands during their business trips to other countries. Likewise, many men have given women special status within the family structure. This has occurred among men who are consent in their women and have no worries regarding their trustworthiness. This is a new kind of respect for women.

Yet we cannot claim that this change removes need for criticism. In reality, the causes of criticism are not the same as the conditions surrounding the most important of these are the firm established tradition of veiling among the major of the population, and the inadequate socialization of women. Women's socialization affected according to religious and moral principles, a woman was raised with any one of them whenever his passion and lust drove him. He ignored the prescribed religious obligations, which required good intentions for his actions and justice in his dealings.

The Current State of Thinking about the Situation of Women in Egypt

Egyptians have, over the last few years, become aware of the poor state of their social order. They have begun to show signs of dissatisfaction with it, and felt the need to improve it. They have heard about the West and have mingled with Westerners, spent time with many of them, and learned about the West's progress. When Egyptians saw the good life that Westerners enjoyed, their widespread influence and their indisputable word, as well as certain other advantages for which they themselves were forbidden—but which life has no value—a desire spread among them to keep up with the West and its blessings. Lead arose among them who competed with each other to disseminate new thoughts which they believed
brieved would guide the community down the road to success. One would call for work and action, and another for harmony and unity, and for the rejection of any possible sources of discord. A third would call for love of the country and self-sacrifice in its service. A fourth, nothing less than increased adherence to the precepts of religion, and so on.

But one factor escaped the attention of these leaders: these ideas, and those similar to them, won't have any influence worth mentioning upon the community if they do not reach women, and if women do not understand their meanings. They will not have any influence if women are not favorably disposed to them, or are not filled with love for them, such that their children embody the perfect picture that represents human perfection.

This is because no social condition can be changed unless it is made the target of education. It is not enough for a reform program, no matter what its target, to consist merely of a governmental order issued to spur the masses to action, or of a speech designed to encourage its listeners to want to change. Nor can it consist merely of books and articles written about the benefits of change. These will merely inform a nation about the state of its deteriorating conditions; they are not the means by which people will change, nor are they the things that will transform a people from one state to another. Any and all change must be the result of a confluence of virtues, characteristics, morals, and customs which are not innate to the individual upon his birth. They cannot be had except through training, or, in other words, they cannot be had without women.

Hence, if Egyptians want to reform their current situation, they must begin with the roots of reform. They must believe that there is no hope that they will become a vibrant community, one that can play an important role alongside the developed countries, with a place in the world of human civilization, until their homes and their families become a proper environment for providing men with the characteristics upon which success in the world depends. And there is no hope that Egyptian homes and families will become that proper environment unless women are educated and unless they participate alongside men in their thoughts, hopes and pains, even if they do not participate in all of their activities.

This truth, despite its simplicity and its self-evident nature, was considered by certain people, upon

its publication last year [in the author’s book The Liberation of Women, 1899], to be a kind of lunacy. Legal scholars decided that it was an offense to Islam. Many graduates from the madrasas [seminaries] saw it as an exaggerated imitation of the West. Some of them went so far as to say that it was a crime against the country and against religion. In their writings, they were even so deluded as to say that the liberation of Eastern women was something that the Christian nations were striving for in order to destroy Islam, and that any Muslim who supports women’s liberation is not, in fact, a Muslim. These are delusions that the simple-minded are inclined toward and that the ignorant delight in believing, because they do not understand where their true interests lie. Such delusions prevent them from reaching the truth.

We have but one word with which to respond to such people: If the Europeans intended to destroy us, they would have only to leave us to our own devices! They have no more perfect method than that is used by us in our present situation!

This is the indisputable truth, and no matter how much one group might try to hide it, or how much another group might try to neglect it, it will be made clear to everyone, sooner or later, just as the truth always is.

Anyone observing our present social situation will find proof of the fact that our women have broken away from their role as slave, and that there remains but a hijab [that is, a thin veil] between them and freedom. Such an observer sees:

1. A new awareness amongst the Egyptians of the necessity of educating their daughters, rather than teaching them nothing, as was their custom.
2. A decrease in the use of the hijab and its concomitant institutions, such as segregation, and a movement toward its obsolescence.
3. The displeasure that our youth takes in marriage along the lines that it is now practiced, as well as their desire to change that practiced through the institution of engagement.
4. The government’s interest, as well as that of certain Egyptians—at the head of them being His Excellency Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abdul [Egypt, 1849-1905; see chapter 3], mufti [chief religious official] of Egypt—in reforming the shar’i [Islamic law] courts. Anyone who sees the report that His Excellency made regarding these courts will find a number of matters regarding the reform of the Egyptian family. The matter that is most worthy of mention is the mufti’s statement about polygamy:

I am hereby raising my voice in complaint over the number of wives that poor men are marrying. Indeed, many of them take four wives; some have three, others two, without being able to support them. These men continuously fight with their wives over expenses and over their marital rights. Moreover, they will not divorce a single one of their wives and, thus, depravity continues to affect them and their children. [In this state] it becomes impossible for men and women to respect the limits that God has placed on mankind’s freedom of action. [This condition] damages Islam and the Islamic community in ways too clear to explain.

This year, it happened that the wives of men who had been sentenced to life in prison, hard labor, or long prison terms, complained to the Ministry of Justice about their unhappy condition, with no means available for them to divorce their husbands and no family member who could support them or their children. The Ministry found itself in need of consulting the mufti about the legal recourses that could be adopted in response to such complaints. He studied the issue and others similar to it, and in response to them he produced eleven stipulations, in line with the Maliki madhab [school of law], which we present below for the reader’s benefit.

Stipulation One: If the husband refuses to provide for his wife despite the fact that he has a clear source of income, he is sentenced to pay alimony. If he has no clear source of income and continues to refuse to provide for his wife, the judge grants the wife a divorce from him on the spot. If the man claims financial incapability but cannot prove it, the judge takes the same action. But, if he can prove incapability, he is given a one-month grace period—no more—at the end of which he is considered divorced if he does not provide for his wife.

Stipulation Two: If the husband is ill or imprisoned and he refuses to provide for his wife, the judge grants him a period of time after which it is assumed that he will be cured or released from prison. If the period of illness or imprisonment is so long that harm or fina [disinheritance] is feared, the judge grants the wife a divorce.

Stipulation Three: If the husband is absent for a short period of time, but before his departure he did not leave means of provision for his wife, the judge

fixes a date by which he must send provisions. If he does not, the judge grants the wife a divorce after fixed period elapses. In the case that he is absent a long period or his destination is unknown, and proven that he has no means of providing for his v judge grants the wife a divorce.

Stipulation Four: If someone owed the husband money, or if he left money in someone’s trust, the wife has the right to be provided for from money. She also has the right to make a refusal of anyone who claims that she has no right to trust, after swearing that she deserves to be provided for by the absentee, and after swearing that he deeded, left nothing behind for her provision, and he left no guardian to provide for her.

Stipulation Five: The judge’s prerogative is to order a man from his wife for not providing for her is not a refusal. The husband has the right to remarry; if he proves his sources of provision and willingness to support her through them. If he does not do both, any return to his wife is unacceptable.

Stipulation Six: If a man is lost in an Islamic and there is no news of him, his wife has the right to divorce him if he has no news of the husband. She can go to the court, proclaim what she believes he is like, or his whereabouts. Then, the Ministe Justice should search for him in the areas where believes he to be, either through the courts or means of the police. If the Minister fails to find lost husband, he sets for the wife a period of years. If those four years pass, the woman must wait out the time of her ‘idda [Qu’ranic term of time before remarriage, apparently to clarify p]. Without then needing to return to the co she is allowed to remarried.

Stipulation Seven: If the absentee returns proves to be alive, and if he does so before his wife new husband consummates the marriage, not kir ing that the absentee is alive, then the wife is retu to her original husband. If, in fact, the second band knew all along that the original husband alive, the wife is also returned to her original band. If the death of the original husband is dis ered during the wife’s period of ‘idda or after it before the new marriage contract is drawn or aft the wife inherits her original husband’s proper the second husband was ignorant of the husband’s death. However, if in fact the first hus died and the second husband knew of his deat
fore consummating the marriage, then the wife inherits nothing.

**Stipulation Eight:** If a man dies in a conflict between Muslims, and it is proved that he indeed fought in said conflict, his wife is permitted to raise the issue before the Ministry of Justice. If after the Minister of Justice searches for the man, and after the period of 'idda has passed, then the woman can remarry if she wishes, and his money goes to her heirs. If all that can be proven is that the man went along with the fighting armies, then the case is reverted to stipulations six and seven.

**Stipulation Nine:** The wife of a man missing as a result of a war between Muslims has the right to take her case before the Minister of Justice. After the minster has searched for, a period of one year is set. If that year passes and the man is not found, the woman then begins her period of 'idda. She then has the right to remarry, and his money is inherited at the end of the year.

This process of setting a grace period is valid only in cases in which the absentee had, before disappearing, an income with which to provide for his wife, or in cases in which the wife does not fear seduction. Otherwise, the judge grants the wife a divorce once the woman’s claim is proven to be true.

**Stipulation Ten:** If a dispute between a husband and wife becomes quite severe, and it cannot be settled through one of the means provided for in the Book of God, the case is brought to the provincial judge. He must then appoint two trustworthy arbitrators, one of them from the husband’s family and the other from the wife’s. It is best if they are neighbors. If it is difficult to find such arbitrators from among the members of their family, then they are chosen from among people outside of the family.

The arbitrators are then sent to the couple. If they are able to settle the dispute between the couple, so be it. Otherwise, they recommend divorce and bring the matter before the judge. He is required to rule according to what his appointed arbitrators have recommended. In this case, the divorce is revocable, and the arbitrators have no right to make it irrevocable.

**Stipulation Eleven:** The wife has the right to ask the judge to grant her a divorce if she is harmed by her husband. The shari’a does not permit a man to harm his wife, just as it does not permit desertion or beating or abuse without legitimate reason. It is incumbent upon the wife to prove, by legal means, that her husband is harmful to her.

The *Shaykh* of al-Azhar lent his agreement to this project, and sent Muhammad ‘Abduh the following letter:

To the Mufti of Egypt, may God keep you:

We have received your letter dated the fourth of Rabi’i-al-thani 1318 [August 2, 1900], number 19, containing eleven stipulations, following the guidelines of the Malikite madkhah, about which you seek our opinion. We conclude as you do, and thus grant you our agreement. We thank you for your high aspirations, as they are reflected in your interest in this venerable matter.

Signed, Salim al-Bishri [Egypt, 1832–1917], the humble Maliki Servant of knowledge and of the humble ones al-Azhar

These two issues—that of polygamy and that of granting women the right to divorce her husband—are amongst the most important issues that I addressed in my book *The Liberation of Women,* and about which *Shaykh* Muhammad ‘Abduh, a great religious scholar and a wise jurist, has called worthy of his interest. He supports my suggestions about polygamy and divorce in a voice that is well heeded.

The sum of these facts—and then some—along with the things that one witnesses every day in Egyptian homes, forestells that the state of Egyptian women is in need of improvement.

This movement did not result from study. It grew, rather, through the influence of contact with Westerners, and according to the law known to natural scientists, which orders that every animal follow the nature of the environment in which he lives. The proof that our will does not interfere with this movement lies in the fact that when we pointed out the necessity of preserving and continuing the movement until our goals are met, we met with serious opposition even from those in whose selves and in whose homes the changes that we work for had already appeared.

There is nothing strange about this: It has always been our way to follow our whims. If it makes no difference to us whether we spend our lives in excess or lack, richness or poverty, freedom or servitude, knowledge or ignorance, virtue or depravity, then it would be my opinion that there is no need for the freedom and the education that have been granted to Egyptian women up till now. If it makes no difference, then let men have a number of women, and marry a new woman every day, only to divorce her the next, and imprison their wives and daughters and sisters and grandmothers if they wish!!

In Africa and Asia there are a number of countries in which women live entombed in their homes, from which they see no one and encounter no one. And amongst these nations there are those that have decayed to the extent that when a woman’s husband dies she must kill herself, so that she may not enjoy life without him! What else can we do but direct our attention to these countries and ask them what the secret to the progress of their women is, in ignorance and isolation. Perhaps we will learn from them how to isolate our women and hold them back even further!!

But if what we hear and read about every day is true, that Egyptians want to create a living, advanced, civil nation, then we have the following to say to them:

There is a means of getting yourselves out of the poor condition that you complain about. There is a way of raising yourselves up to the highest level of civilization—the kind of civilization you aspire to, and then some. It consists of liberating your women from the bondage of ignorance and hijab [here, isolation]. This means was not our brainchild; we deserve no credit for its invention. Nations have used it before us, tested it, and put it to their advantage. Take a look at the Western nations; you will find amongst their women great differences. You’ll find that the way American women are raised, and their morals and habits and manners, are not those of French women. And you’ll find French women to be entirely different from Russian women. And you’ll find that the Italian woman has nothing in common with the Swedes or the German woman. But all of these women, despite differences in their regions, nationalities, languages, and religions, share a common ground in one matter: they enjoy freedom and independence.

It is this freedom that has delivered Western women from their former state of decline. And once they were granted an education, women began to direct their energies, working alongside of men, to the establishment of and participation in charitable societies. This took place when women were given useful work—different, no doubt, from that of men. But just because this work is different does not mean that it lacks importance: women’s work is like that of the merchant who spends his day bent over his goods in order to sell them, or the scribe who spends long hours in some governmental bureau writing an inter-departmental report. It is like that of the engineer who builds a bridge in order to make transportation easier, or the doctor who amputates a patient’s limb in order to preserve life in other limbs. It is like that of the judge who mediates in the disputes that arise between people. But none of these has the right to call his work more useful to the social order than the woman who gives to society the gift of a well-raised man, useful to himself, his family, and his country.

We aren’t saying the same things to you that others say, things like “Unite and be of help to one another,” or “Cleanse yourselves of the faults that have crept into your morals.” Nor are we saying, “Serve your family and your country,” or any such slogans that get lost in the wind. We are teaching that the changing of the self requires more than a leader’s advice, or a sultan’s order, or a magician’s magic, or a saint’s miracles. Rather, it takes place, as we’ve said, through the preparation of young people ready to meet the requirements of a changing society.

This is the natural, long-term secret—one which is surrounded in difficulties. But the easiest of all difficulties is the one that ends in victory and success. And the shortest path is the one that delivers you to your goal.