

## **Selected Writings by Aḥmad Fāris Ash-Shidyāq**

### **(Chronological Order)**

#### **The English and their Manners**

It is rightly said that the English women are austere and content; very little clothing please them, and a few restaurants suffice for them. They do not smoke or use inhalants like some of the French women do, neither are they similar to them in their denial of men's power over women. As genuine as the English woman can be, she admits that God created men in a way that makes them stronger than women. If you buy one of them a gift, whether it be a scarf or a pair of shoes, or anything of the sort, she exaggerates in her description of the gift's beauty and she receives it with utter appreciation, to the point where you begin to feel like you come fourth after Ḥātīm Tai, Harem bin Sinān, and Ka' b bin Māmā.

I am also fond of some of the English's defects, such as their lack of curiosity and how they never interfere in a person's business, even if the person happens to be one of them; they only pay him a visit when it is the right time for it, they do not borrow anything from him, nor do they throw themselves at whatever he offers. If they see him, for instance, stretching on the side of the road, they do not ask him why he would be doing such a thing, instead, they assume that maybe all of his people stretch like he does, and that it probably has some benefit for them. If one of them pays you a visit, for example, and they see a woman or many women, they do not care to ask about the purpose of their presence, which is an inevitable phenomenon in our countries. Same thing applies to them seeing you walking with a woman on the street with your arms around her, they are only occupied with their business.

In addition to that, there is their seriousness in every endeavor, their lack of gloating, and their hatred of the frivolity of antagonism, animosity, and the spiting of the enemy... and they do not

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envy others. For instance, if they see you possessing some goods that they do not possess, they do not smother you with their attempt to attain it, or say: I wish we had what he has! That quality of envy and competitiveness is something that, in our countries, nobody lacks!

Furthermore, they never undervalue a person's right; if, for instance, one of them masters a craft, nobody is found claiming him to be ignorant or wrong, in an attempt to halt his improvements and blow out the flame of his talent... instead, he is encouraged and provided with opportunities. Whereas in our countries, if someone were to master anything, he is met with those envying him and saying: he is an idiot! He is childish!

They also do not cling to old tales, and they rarely gossip. If a stranger resided next to them and they heard something that they did not like about him, they do not tell him about what they heard, and they do not even care about what was said, instead, they treat him based on how he presents himself to them; which is quite different from the French, the latter are similar to us in their ways of dealing with gossip, and in their examination of their neighbors, and even the people of the country!

The English speak with a low voice, which is a trait inevitably found in their women, whereas in some countries, you hear women screaming like genies.

They are also organized in their work and quite punctual. They have time for everything and something for every time. For instance, if someone pays them a visit during working hours, they do not pretend that they had forgotten about him, instead, they honestly tell him that they have some work to do, and they ask to be excused and to set up another time for a visit; and so the person leaves understandably and does not feel abandoned by them; since he also would have treated them this way. Whereas in our countries, it seems that the Man's work has been disrupted by the frequent visits, to the point where he has to carry his pillow and say: May God heal your sick ones!

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“Khalq el-Inglīz wa Akhlāqihim” (“The English and their Manners”), from his book *Kashf al-Mukhabbā 'an Funūn Europa* (“Revealing the Hidden European Arts”), taken from: Al-Asḥār,

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‘Abd al-Karīm, “Aḥmad Fāris Ash-Shidyāq,” in *Nuṣūṣ Mukhtara min al-Adab al-‘Arabī al-Ḥadīth* (“*Chosen Texts from Modern Arabic Literature*”), prose, 1, *‘Ālam al-Ruwwād* (“*The Greatest of the Pioneers*”), Damascus, al-Maktaba al-Ḥadīthah, 1966, p. 193, 202-204.