

Selected Writings by Buṭrus Al-Bustānī

(Chronological Order)

Preface [to the book Circle of Knowledge]

And we entitled this work - Circle of Knowledge - and it proved to be the ideally suited to the book. And if the ones exploring it produce a just and unbiased comparison with similar books by Occidental authors, belonging to this genre, they would deduce that it is not less valuable in general and it is better and much more beneficial concerning some by Arab and Occidental authors. Indeed, we have quoted them for the best we long to know and we need to read through their works, adding the various information their books lack. Hence, they have credit for getting a head start on us as Yāqūt Al-Ḥamawī, Ibn Khalkān, Ibn Al-Baqā', Al-Dūmayrī, Ibn Al-Bīṭār and many other notorious Arab scholars have credit on them and on us in this matter.

Needless to say that the lack of books, in all arts and fields, needed by Arabic speakers emphasizes the credit of this work and its utility for them and serves as an excuse for us as we cited some materials, from other books, which would, initially, seem trivial compared to some other crucial materials mentioned in it. We also mentioned some information against our will as they did not meet our taste or because we considered erroneous such as the Greek Myths and others. However, we may be excused for mentioning them as well as relevant details, for many had considerations for such information and people tend to exploring them for a better understanding. And we have often explained this purpose through the poet's quote:

Some people masquerade as lovers and some friendships are improper

However, we avoided the obscene, the unpleasant or the indecent. We even took the decision to refine such details or omit them in some parts, mentioning the changes. Our intention was to achieve this work on the basis of unbiased information in all aspects and to avoid affiliations in order for this book to be universal to all factions and religions, beneficial to

common people and to authors. And as we wished it would be a reading book as well as a reference book, we have included anything one would aspire to explore, ranging from the best of the Arabs' poetry, translation of some poetry by the Greeks, Syriacs and Occidentals to sayings and proverbs.

Needless to mention the difficulties and weariness we faced to correct it, especially concerning people, places, populations, measures, usages and others, especially for Eastern areas and countries with unknown or unreliable sanitary conditions. However, we did not spare any effort to investigate, regulate and check as much as required, in consequence with the nature of the topics and as necessary. We relied on many references to achieve it, namely, modern Occidental encyclopaedias, the most famous Arabic-language and Occidental-language works related to history, geography, industry, sciences, religion, literature, politics and so on, quoting, abridging, translating, and introducing the necessary additions, clarifications and notes. We corresponded with the parties and received confirmation on the utility of the book from trusted and reliable sources. As for information we could not check through observation or correspondence, we settled for the predecessors' word. And we relied on trustworthy scholars, famous for their knowledge about specific sciences and arts, within and outside the Circle, to review the information before printing them. Weariness, difficulties, long hours of work, cost and recourse to all what was needed had never been obstacles to achieve this work with mastery, accuracy, precision and enhancements to please and gain the trust and satisfaction of all. And yet, we do not pretend to be unerring for the horse might arch his neck, the inflexible might reconsider his view and memory might fail humans. Hence, we hope all those who would examine this book to flip through it with contentment and approval and forgive and excuse any error, for no one is perfect but God.

Buṭrus Al-Bustānī,

Excerpt from the encyclopaedia *Circle of Knowledge*, Vol. I, Beirut, Dār Al-Ma'rifah, [D.V.], pp. 3-4.

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Address on Women's Education

“How surprising it is that many of our contemporaries, even in civilized regions have neglected this gender, unwilling to promote it from its wild status to a status that befits those who share the same brainpower and help them reform the conditions of the population and the region. And some others do their utmost to prohibit women from benefitting from what could reform them physically and morally as, God willing, we would show. Hence, they degrade women from the position attributed to them by the Creator and they deprive them of those rights endowed to them by God Almighty.

As for women in this region, though they enjoy a more comfortable living and a better status than those living in heathen nations, they have not reached the appropriate level of knowledge required for the success of the region and the evolution of the citizens as if they were at equal distance of the barbarians and the civilized: they are considered as civilized by Indian women, for instance; whereas, compared to European women they still have a long way to go. Indeed, how many women among the thousands in our region are reading literate? And how many schools were built in Syria to educate them? Isn't denying the contempt they face and their ignorance in religious and earthly matters comparable to denying the presence of the sun in broad daylight?

It is obvious that women have skills that men lack and vice-versa. However, they could share equal rights among which our actual concern. Is there any law prohibiting men from accessing what is needed to initiate and perfect the tasks he shares with women or those he solely fulfils? Hence, no other law or custom or obstacle must prevent women from enjoying such right.

And why can't we consider that, in this context, men and women are alike? And in case they show any difference, it is nothing but trivial and insignificant. And in case men are completely neglected and totally deprived of all means of knowledge and progress, as is often the case with women, wouldn't they regress to the women's status or even decline further?

Then, if we admit that men have the exclusive right to education, progress and enjoyment of the blessings of this life and the life after, shouldn't we admit that women's education is an obligation to facilitate their access to these rights? As, it is obviously evident that, all men

cannot be educated if all women are not, and yet, knowledgeable women cannot exist in a world of illiterate men for both parties are closely linked to each other and simultaneously influenced by each other. Exceptions are rare and cannot be referred to as grounds for any judgment. Indeed, don't we often witness women replacing men in case they are incapable of fulfilling their obligations or in case of their loss, which would compel them to engage in tasks relevant to men? Sometimes, we may witness men absolutely compelled to ask for women's assistance and help as for both opinion and work.

Regarding the benefits of women's education, they are numerous. Some concern women themselves, others their spouses, some would relate to their children and others would involve the whole world. I previously, mentioned many relevant aspects.

We deduce from the above that if we try to reform a people, we should start with women as the first step of the ladder and the first door to open, starting from their childhood. As for those who leave women behind and educate boys or teenage boys, they look like stepping with one foot on earth and the other in the clouds. Very often, they don't reach their aim fully and barely do they succeed in their efforts to reform what women have ruined; for every time they build a sanctuary women destroy a tower and every time they raise them to a higher level they make them recede many, and what men erect through a hundred years, women could destroy in one only year. All the above mentioned has been proven through experiences and experiments and, in case of doubt, reconsideration and review are to be regarded. My statements might be sufficient to deal with such a topic that my compatriots have never written about previously. In short: the obligation of educating women, on the grounds that the one who rocks the crib with her right hand is the one who move the world with her arm”.

Buṭrus Al-Bustānī,

Addressed at the request of the Dean in office (in the First Syrian Association), in Beirut, within a General Assembly, on December 14, 1849 A.D.”. It was first published in the Collection of Works of the above mentioned association, in 1853 and then abridged in Al-Jinān Magazine (13 [1883], pages 207-214).

“Address on women's education (1849), quoted from Fū'ād Afrām Al-Bustānī, **Al-Rawā'ī** (The Masterpieces), volume 22, I.4, Beirut, Dār Al-Mashreq, 1975, pp. 90, 93-94, 97, 99, 103, 111.

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Syria's Upheaval (Nafīr Sūriyyah) or the Fourth National Text

Beirut, September 25, 1860

Dear compatriots,

We have considerably mentioned home through our publications only for it is what a home-loving longs to hear about most and for it is the most exquisitely inspiring in Arabic masterpieces. Syria, famous as Barr Ash-Shām (Syrian hinterland) and 'Arabistān is our home through the variety of its valleys, rugged lands, coasts and mountains. And citizens of Syria, through all their diversity of religions, entities, races and ramifications are our compatriots. And home is similar to a chain made of numerous linked rings, with one end representing our house or place of birth and all who live under its roof and the other end representing our country and all who live there, the center of these two ends and their magnet being our hearts or them being the center and the magnet of our hearts. The incontestable powerful attractiveness home has on its fellows, restrains them with a resolute determination within its circle, however horrible it could be and it grips on their hearts and attracts them to it fiercely to bring them back if they leave, though their immigration land is preferable. Among the famous sayings: the blind love of home maintains the worst of homes. The closest the material and literary rings of home are to us, the strongest our attachment and longing to it are. For, the fact is that our home is the best of homes and our compatriots are the best of all for us. And how true it is that: the secret resides in the dwellers and not in the dwelling. And it is as clear as day for he who has toured the world and observed the countries and their citizens, that whatever the assets of home, they might be sabotaged by the wickedness of its residents and no matter how deeply appalling it is, its citizens' merits could reform it.

Dear compatriots,

Citizens have rights and obligations. It is obvious that, as far as these rights are met, the attachment to the country increases and so do the will and the pleasure of fulfilling these obligations. Among the citizens' rights, the obligation of the country to meet their main rights, namely their safety, honor and capital. Hence, the freedom to exercise their civil, moral and religious rights, especially the religious freedom of conscience. And how numerous are the countries which have martyred themselves for this freedom. What increases the citizens' love for their country is the feeling that the region is their region, feeling

happiness for its progress and peace, sorrow for its destruction and misery. And what increases their desire for witnessing its success and exacerbates their longing to its progress, is their participation into its projects and their interaction with its interests. And the more responsibilities they have to meet, the deepest and strongest these sensitivities are. Among the citizens' obligations is the love of their country. It was stated in the *Hadīth*: “Love for one's country is part of faith”, and how numerous were those who offered their lives and all their belongings out of love for their country. As for those who exchange the love of the country for religious fanaticism and sacrifice the good of their country for personal purposes, those do not deserve their belonging to a country and are enemies to that country and so do those who do not try their best to prevent the circumstances which could affect the country or to sooth the effects in such circumstances. And how few are those citizens who have shown their love to their country through these hard days. For the first who had pulled the trigger and the one who had first moved the crust over the dormant volcano which decimated the peoples, and ruined and darkened the history records through the horrible deeds which would remain a black spot in the history of Syria forever and a day; and all those who did not try hard to cover the muzzle of that gun and the mouth of that volcano, all these are guilty of having failed to their obligations towards their country.

We avail ourselves of this opportunity to clarify the motives of our thanks and gratitude to our brothers, who live across our Sea and on the other side of the Atlantic and to their sons who are the guests of our country, for all the continuous help they offered and still offer to our compatriots as a censure.

Dear compatriots,

Our country, which is acknowledged among the best for its air, water, fertile lands and location, the sweetest for its memories and the most immeasurable in pride, has been enduring the corruption of some uncivilized groups of its citizens for many generations. Hence, it strays too far behind the other countries and has witnessed more devastation due to the last movements. However, we hope that, thanks to God's Divine Providence and to our powerful Empire and the great friendly Nations, the present strike which news has reached the whole world, would be a prelude to great promise and a beginning of a new era for Syria. Through these lines, a reason enough for hurtful people to remember:

Tell troubled people that no trouble remains

Troubles fade away as joys fade

Dear compatriots,

We warn you about four facts, namely: wickedness, domination, fanaticism and idleness which have no benefits in any way. And we warn you about the Golden Rule, I quote: "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And we remind you that: men have no real home on this earth; However, their real home is in the abode of spirits, beyond the grave where they remain until trumpets are blown for the Final Judgment. Numerous are our brothers who departed this year to that still home. So multiple are the causes but death is still one and unique. Hence, our path is to prepare for that home and for that day.

By a patriot,

Buṭrus Al-Bustānī,

Excerpt from the book **Buṭrus Al-Bustānī**, Beirut, Dār Fikr for Research and Printing, Autumn 1990, pp. 21-23.