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Women and Work

In an Arabic book entitled: "Characteristics of Despotism", published in 1905 by an outstanding Arab reformer of the late 19th and the early twentieth century, the author Abdel-Rahman el Kawakibi, refers to woman's despotism over man as follows: "Women have effected an unjust division of labor between them and men. They have imposed on the latter a law which reserves to them the lighter burden on the pretext of their weakness... Woman's harmfulness is greater in the more civilized communities. The bedouin woman robs her man of half his earnings, while the village woman does it at the proportion of two thirds, and the city woman, at five sixths."

This statement by Kawakibi may have been inspired by good intentions, based on his desire to drag women out of the state of inertia into which many of them had fallen. But it is nonetheless a sweeping statement which may apply to a minimum number of rich women, who live in luxury and lead a lazy, parasitic life. The vast majority of them, however, whether they be city women, rural or bedouin, carry a full time work-load in endless housekeeping tasks, requiring skill in many fields and forming a basic element in the life of the family. The rural woman, besides her housekeeping activities, participates in various agricultural tasks. In industrial areas, she takes part in home industries or in factory work outside the home. Hence it is possible to say that though woman does not often carry out managerial tasks outside her home she accomplishes in her own field functions that are at least equivalent to man's work and require more time and sometimes more energy.

Women who work at the same time in and outside the home, perform a double task. If women have until now carried out these functions without any return except maintenance, this does not reduce the value of their achievement because it has a basic importance in the building of the family and of society.

In this issue of Al-Raida, we are including articles and reports which will throw some light on woman's participation, more particularly, the Arab woman's, in the vital activities of her environment. The articles also refer to the more important role she may play if she receives more opportunity and more support in the way of education and training, in the revision of family laws and in opening new doors for work and employment.

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