

R E P O R T
of CHARLES R. WATSON, PRESIDENT
TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF
THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AT CAIRO
FOR THE YEAR 1931 - 32

The normal life and development of the American University at Cairo during the year 1931 - 32 has been greatly disturbed by two fierce outbursts of criticism and attack in the Moslem press on account of the Christian character and supposedly objectionable missionary methods of the University. The first outburst was based upon an incident which the University was not at all implicated, and the second was due to misrepresentation of the University's missionary policy. A brief statement and explanation are necessary.

During the year of 1929 - 30, a Moslem boy named Ibn Abdul Sammad was enrolled as a student in the College. Having failed scholastically, he was allowed "to repeat" during 1930 - 31. Again he failed and was notified that he could not enroll again. Thus his connection with the institution ceased in June 1931. He was not a note-worthy student in any way and would have passed out of mind quickly but for subsequent events. In some way, wholly unconnected with the University, he made the acquaintance of a Mrs. Boutros, an American woman married to an Egyptian, who has been doing missionary work independently of any recognized Mission or Church. We know nothing of her relations with Abdul Sammad, save that in the fall of 1931 she had the young boy baptized as a Christian and that fact was kept secret, presumably to protect the boy from persecution. The father sought possession of his son and thinking that he had enrolled as a student once again in the University, came to us to find him. Through the boy's continued subscription to the students' paper, the A. U. C. Review, we were able to tell the father that the paper was going to the boy at the home of Mrs. Boutros, but pointed out that

we were in no way related to her or she to us. Whether wilfully or sincerely, the father accused the University of abducting his son and of exerting upon the boy hypnotic influences to make him profess Christianity. The Moslem press took up his accusations with enthusiasm and amplified them; then the attacks broadened to include all missionary work; cases were cited of numerous disappearances; hypnotic influences by missionaries were suggested as the methods in use in these abductions. The Wafdist papers gave great space to these attacks, for political reasons; for, if the existing Government, which is non-Wafdist, could be shown to be lax in its defense of Islam, this would argue for its removal as disloyal to the best interests of a Moslem country. The excitement became dangerous to public safety and Government opened an inquiry. The University disclaimed all connection with Mrs. Boutros and the boy's baptism, but fanaticism refused to give either publicity or credence to the University's official disclaimer of responsibility. After several weeks of disagreeable publicity, interest in the incident was eclipsed by excitement over another political incident of major importance and attention was diverted from the University. It seems the irony of fate that the University should be implicated in this unfortunate incident, for the irresponsible act of this independent missionary was repugnant to our policy at two points: (a) that a minor ought ordinarily never to be baptized without the consent of his parents, and (b) that baptism ought not to be secret. The fact that the boy repudiated his profession of Christianity and accused those who had befriended him of having hypnotized him, goes to show how unreal the whole experience was. It is hard to appraise the total effect of this incident. It occurred at the close of the first term of the College year and we feared disastrous results for the enrolment of the second term, but a close analysis of the records has led to the conclusion that in only two single instances did the attack affect our enrolment, while undoubtedly the public discussion brought the name of the University into the limelight.

The second incident causing a further attack in the Moslem press had a most peculiar origin. A Palestinian Moslem boy, Abdel Kader, who was due to graduate this June, failed in his examinations and could not be given his B. A. degree. To relieve his disappointment he was allowed to go to the platform to receive a certificate of such studies as he had completed. Irritated and disappointed, having brooded over his condition, he burst forth in a brief but public denunciation of the University as he was coming down from the platform. He denounced the institution as the enemy of both Islam and Christianity. He then issued in the papers a series of articles emphasizing the missionary antecedents of the President and Dr. McClenahan. He also put into print numerous translations from books in the University library on Comparative Religion which discuss Islam in an unfavorable way, and then he accused the University of undermining the faith of its students, especially Moslem students. The attack, following as it did the first attack earlier in the year, has been reported as having had serious results in undermining the confidence of the Moslem public in the friendly character of the University and even in its impartial and judicial scientific approach to truth. It is too early to speak with assurance on this point, but certainly the time has come for clarifying the University's position and policy, first so that all staff members can know where we stand, and secondly so that the University's position and policy can be made clear to the Egyptian public. I have placed this on my program as a major service to be rendered through staff conferences and a campaign of education, hoping that ^{thus} we may turn disadvantage into advantage and seeming reverses into advance. The most serious result issuing from this incident is the withholding by the Ministry of Education of the subsidy hitherto granted us, amounting last year to L.E.500 (\$2500 at normal exchange), unless we engage to allow religious liberty as defined by the Ministry. What this means remains to be explored. The withdrawal of our subsidy, if the Government carries out its threat, will mean that L.E. 250 in the coming year's budget will have to be secured from some other source or the

work out commensurately, and that L.E. 250 counted on for scholarships for poor boys will no longer be available.

Among the questions to be explored by study and conferences during the coming fall are these; To what extent are these attacks political and without religious significance? How is it that the University which prided itself on its friendly relations with Moslems has become the object of religious attack? To what extent is the University in a different position from that of a regular mission and in what way should its policy differ, i.e., how does the scientific scrutiny and appraisal of religion expected in a University differ from mere propaganda? Are any of our courses or teachers open to the charge of uncharitable and unChristlike attacks upon untruth in a non-Christian religion or inadequately appreciative of the good points in other religions than their own? Assuming certain religious goals and aims which the University should keep in mind by virtue of its Christian character and purpose, what are the best methods of achieving these ends in view of a Moslem mentality and psychology, and especially in view of the mass psychology in Egypt?

I now pass to a review of our activities by departments.

1. The College of Arts and Sciences.

It was most gratifying and perhaps something of a surprise to have a larger enrolment than ever before in the history of the institution. There were 385 enrolled the first semester, and 323 in the second semester, making 388 different individuals enrolled during the year. These figures are in contrast with 355 for the preceding year, 1930-31. The distribution by departments was 220 in the Government course; 72 in the Preparatory department and 96 in the College proper. By