

Rifā'ah Badawī Rāfi' at-Ṭahṭāwī : The Egyptian Revivalist.¹

By J. HEYWORTH-DUNNE

RIFĀ'AH'S CAREER

RIFĀ'AH BEY, for by this name is he generally known, was born at Ṭahṭā, in the province of Girgā, in 1801. His genealogy goes back to Muḥammad al-Bākir b. 'Alī Zain al-'Ābidin b. al-Ḥasan b. Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad. His ancestors had been well-to-do but when Rifā'ah was born, his parents were in great pecuniary difficulties. They were apparently affected by the confiscations by Muḥammad 'Alī of the *iltizamāt* during the early part of his reign. Rifā'ah's father was compelled to go from one place to another in order to seek hospitality. At one time the family stayed with relations at Mansha'at an-Nīdah, near the town of Girgā, they also stayed with relations at Kena and later at Farshūṭ. During these peregrinations, the young Rifā'ah began to memorize the Ḳor'ān under the care of his father. The family eventually returned to Ṭahṭā where Rifā'ah completed memorizing the Ḳor'ān and began to learn the various compendiums (*mutūn*) in use in the mosque of al-Azhar. He appears to have carried out these studies under the care of his maternal uncles who were all '*ulamā*'. Rifā'ah's father died in 1817 and shortly afterwards he was sent to al-Azhar to study; for a year or two he appears to have found it difficult to settle down, for he made several journeys to Ṭahṭā. When he finally made up his mind to take to his studies seriously, he made rapid progress under the best teachers of his age. Under al-Faḍḍālī (d. 1820-1) he read *al-Bukhārī*; under Ḥasan al-Ḳuwaisnī (d. 1840) he read the *Mashāriḳ al-Anwār*. Shaiḫ Aḥmad ad-Damhūjī (d. 1830), Rector of al-Azhar for a year, taught him *al-Ashmūnī*, an-Najjārī taught him *al-Ḥikam*, under 'Abdal-Ḡhanī ad-Dimyāṭī, he read the commentary *al-Jalālain* on

¹ This account has been based on Ṣāliḥ Majdī's *Ḥilyat az-Zaman fī Manāḳib Khādīm al-Waṭan*, a MSS. in my possession and on 'Abdar-Raḥmān ar-Rāfi'ī's account in the 3rd vol. of his *Ta'riḫ al-Ḥarakat al-Ḳaumiyah*, pp. 470-514. The article in the *Encyclopædia of Islam* omits the latter reference and gives only the more popular works. There are also several errors in the article; Rifā'ah was never paymaster to the education mission and al-'Atṭār's name is Ḥasan not Ḥassān.

the *Ḳor'ān*, while under Shaikh Ibrāhīm al-Baijūrī (d. 1860), Rector of al-Azhar from 1846 to 1860, who was one of his favourite teachers, he read several works including the commentary on *al-Ashmūnī* and the *Jalālain* commentary. He read the *Muḡhnī al-Labīb* and the *Jam' al-Jawāma'* under Shaikh Muḡammad Ḥubaiṣh (d. 1852) and under Shaikh ad-Damanhūrī (d. 1869), he read the commentary of Ibn 'Aḳīl on the *Alfiyah*. Shaikh Ḥasan al-'Aṭṭār (d. 1834) was his intimate friend and teacher and appears to have had most influence over him during this period. Al-'Aṭṭār was the son of an apothecary of North African origin. He had come into contact with the French during their occupation of the country but he fled when they began to persecute the *shaiḳhs* and '*ulamā'*'. During his absence he travelled in Islamic countries extensively and taught at some of the larger towns such as Damascus. On his return to Egypt he soon became the friend and supporter of Muḡammad 'Alī, who made him Rector of al-Azhar. Al-'Aṭṭār was very sympathetic towards the educational reforms introduced by Muḡammad 'Alī and probably for this reason he was nominated as Rector of al-Azhar, as normally he would never have been elected. Through his friendship with al-'Aṭṭār, Rifā'ah began to learn something about geography, history, and literature, subjects which were not included in the curriculum of al-Azhar.

As a student Rifā'ah began to show great promise; he had established contact with the best kind of teacher and he soon began to make a name for himself as a teacher in Azharī circles. He first practised teaching in his grandfather's mosque in Ṭaḥṭā during his visits to his native town; his lessons attracted some attention and encouraged him to begin to teach in al-Azhar itself. This need not have been very difficult for him from a social point of view as he had many relations who were '*ulamā'*' who would have supported him in his attempts to assert himself as a teacher in the system which then prevailed in al-Azhar. His specialities appear to have been *ḥadīth*, logic, rhetoric, poetics, and prosody and he soon became quite a popular teacher, even with men who were his seniors in years. During this period he was very needy; his mother had sold her jewellery and what little property she had possessed in order to keep her son while he was studying. Rifā'ah was able to earn a little money by giving private lessons to the sons of the well-to-do and, through some influence, was asked to teach in the *madrasah* built by Muḡammad Lāzughlī. The new regime under Muḡammad 'Alī gave him an opening and through the influence of Ḥasan al-'Aṭṭār, he was chosen

as an *imām* in 1824 to one of the recently formed regiments. This meant a great change in the life of the Azharī shaikh ; he now abandoned the *madrasah* life to come into contact with the new military organization which was controlled by Turks and where Europeans had already begun to assert their influence through the demands made on them for the " new learning ". By 1824, numbers of European instructors (*ta'limjīs*) had arrived in Egypt, including Sève, Dussap, Marie, Tarle, and many others. A military mission had been sent from France under General Boyer and several military schools had been opened. The Būlāk Printing Press had been set up in 1822 and a number of books had been printed in Arabic and Turkish. It must have been quite obvious to such men as al-'Aṭṭār that the " new learning " had to be taken seriously and it was through al-'Aṭṭār that Rifā'ah took an interest in all these new things. The fact that poverty forced such men as al-'Aṭṭār and Rifā'ah to pocket their pride and to seek employment in the new institutions must not be overlooked. Al-'Aṭṭār used to visit the new schools and give speeches to the students in order to show that Muḥammad 'Alī was a progressive Moslem ruler and that his reforms were not against the faith.

In 1826 Muḥammad 'Alī sent a mission of forty-four men to Paris to take up various studies in French schools and he asked al-'Aṭṭār to select some shaikhs as *imāms* to the mission. Quite naturally, al-'Aṭṭār's choice included Rifā'ah. He was not sent as a student and most of the members were non-Egyptians ; they included Turks, Circassians, and Armenians. Only five of the mission were Egyptians and four of these were *imāms*. These men were sent to study military science, agriculture, engineering, administration, and medicine. As can be imagined, they had very little time for themselves, especially if it is considered that the students had to learn French before they could begin their studies seriously. With Rifā'ah it was different. His duties allowed him plenty of time to take an interest in those subjects which were congenial to him and for which the other members of the mission had neither the time nor the inclination. He began to learn French from the day he embarked at Alexandria in order to be able to read French works. He never paid very much attention to the pronunciation of French ; Majdī states that he could never speak the language fluently because his object in learning the language was simply to translate the books he read into Arabic. He was possibly the only member of the mission who ever read a book on history. The extraordinary part about his reading was the fact that he

translated into Arabic nearly every book he read. There were three other *imāms* but not one of them attempted any task beyond his duties.

Rifā'ah's attention was first of all drawn towards history and geography; he then studied philosophy and French literature. He read Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Racine. He was particularly fond of Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*. He read works on mineralogy, military tactics, mathematics, hygiene, astronomy, law, and mythology. During his stay in France he wrote and translated a number of works which were afterwards published in Egypt. His *chef d'œuvre* was his *Takhḥiṣ al-Ibrīz fī Takhḥiṣ Bārīz*, generally referred to as the *Rihlah* "The Journey", the only human document of the age. In vain does one seek a book worth reading which was written during the Muḥammad 'Alī period, one only finds scientific translations from works written by Europeans. It is true these works have their linguistic interest but they are wholly devoid of any literary value. The *Rihlah*, which will be discussed in some detail below, is an important piece of work, for it reflects the mentality of an Azharī who suddenly finds himself in a new world, in a world entirely different from that in which he passed his youth. He lived for about five years in France, but French life and manners hardly affected his behaviour; Majdī, his biographer, states that he never neglected to perform his religious duties, his prayers, and fasts; he never ate or drank that which was forbidden by Moslem law. He continued to study and to recite the Ḳor'ān and to read other religious works.

During his stay in France he became very friendly with De Sacy, Jomard, and other French scholars who appreciated his learning as an Arabic scholar and his interest in French literature. They undoubtedly foresaw that his enthusiasm would make of him a carrier of French culture and ideas in his own country and that he would serve as a far more effective instrument than the many Frenchmen who were employed by the Pasha.

On his return to Egypt in 1831 he was employed as a translator in the School of Medicine at Abū Za'bal with Shaiḫ 'Umar at-Tūnīsī and the Syrian, 'Anḥūrī. 'Anḥūrī thought a great deal of Rifā'ah and even suggested that he should be allowed to take the post as Head Translator in the School of Medicine instead of himself. There is little evidence, however, that Rifā'ah did anything extraordinary during the two years he was employed there. In 1833, he was transferred to the School of Artillery at Ṭurah in order to translate

works on geometry and military science. In the following year there was a serious outbreak of the plague and he travelled to Ṭahtā without leave, where he stayed until it was over. During his absence he completed a part of his translation of Maltbrun's work on geography and on his return to Cairo, presented it to Muḥammad 'Alī who promoted him to *Şāghakūl Aghāsī* as a reward.

Rifā'ah suddenly came to the fore in 1836 in connection with the reorganization of the Schools Administration which, until that time, had been a department of the *Dīwān al-Jihādīyah* (War Department). He was deliberately chosen as one of the permanent members of the Council, possibly on account of his acknowledged abilities as a translator and writer, but more probably because he had been a member of the education mission to France and was on friendly terms with the French group which was sympathetic to these "new men". There were two schools of French thought in Egypt at the time. The strongest was the Saint Simonite party under Père Enfantin, who had a large number of French followers with him in the country; he was also supported by a few Turks in high positions such as Adham, who was employed in the War Department. The strongest supporter of this group was Sulaimān Pasha (Sève) who encouraged the "new men" to push forward their claims in the face of the opposition of the old Turkish die-hards and against those Frenchmen and others who were antagonistic to Sulaimān and the Saint-Simonites. It is significant to note that Rifā'ah stayed for a very short while with Clot Bey at the School of Medicine and he was certainly discontented at the School of Artillery. Both Clot Bey and Seguera (the head of the latter school) disliked the Saint-Simonite group, and it is highly probable that Rifā'ah took part in the intrigues that were going on at the time and his support of the new party headed by Mukhtār resulted in his being chosen as a member of the Council of the new Schools Administration. He was the only Egyptian on the Council, the other members were Turks and French.

He is generally credited with having been the founder of the famous School of Translation, later called the School of Languages, but this is not true. The School was opened in June, 1836, in the palace of Alfī Bey in the Azbakiyah quarter under a certain Ibrāhīm Efendī. The Council reorganized the schools in 1836-7, and Rifā'ah was appointed director of the School of Translation in January, 1837. It was now called the School of Languages, but it would be misleading to think of this institution merely as a place where languages were

taught. Rifā'ah, now at the head of an independent school, proceeded to show his countrymen what he could do. He brought together a number of students from Upper Egypt and later from other parts of the country, and had a staff of European and native teachers who taught French, English, Italian, Turkish, Arabic, mathematics, history, and geography. This syllabus suggests that Rifā'ah's school was the only one in which the studies were arranged so that the students could acquire a general education which was not necessarily dependent on military requirements. In 1842, after certain retrenchments had been made by the ruler and some of the schools had been closed, Rifā'ah's sphere of activity was extended. A School of Islamic Law and Jurisprudence was added to his charge and, a little later a School of Accountancy. All these schools were amalgamated and called the School of Languages and Accountancy. Here, for the first time, a useful combination of subjects was taught whereby the students could learn both Islamic and European branches of learning. The advantage was obvious; a student could still learn French, history, and mathematics without losing touch with his own culture. The greatest drawback of modern education in Moslem countries is the fact that the curricula of Western schools have been slavishly copied and the native learning and culture have been allowed to drop into the background. Rifā'ah appears to have considered this aspect of modern education in Egypt. He employed several well-known Azharites on his staff, including Muḥammad ad-Damanhūrī, 'Alī al-Farḡālī al-Anṣārī, Ḥasanain al-Ghamrāwī, Muḥammad Ḳuṭṭah al-'Idwī Aḥmad 'Abdar-Raḥīm aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī, 'Abdal-Mun'im al-Girgāwī, Naṣr al-Hūrīnī, Muḥammad al-Marṣafī, Muḥammad al-Manṣūrī, and Khālil ar-Raṣhīdī. They taught grammar, prosody, language, and law. The results of this experiment proved the success of the institution as Majdī preserves the names of his students; they include Abū's-Su'ūd Efendī, the editor of the Wādī an-Nīl; Ibrāhīm Marzūḳ, a poet; Shahātah 'Īsā, a well-known administrator; Ṣāliḥ Majdī, poet, writer, translator, and teacher; Ismā'il Sirrī and Murād Muḳṭār, famous calligraphists; 'Uṭmān Jalāl, a writer and translator of importance, and Muḥammad Ḳadrī, a first-class teacher and a pioneer worker in the reform of the legal system. There were many others who formed the new teachers and translators *cadres* in the government schools and administrations. Rifā'ah's work had thus a far more permanent and beneficial effect on the country than that done by his colleagues who were employed in the ephemeral military schools. That his

services were appreciated by Muḥammad 'Alī can be proved by the fact that he promoted him to the rank of Ḳā'im-maḳām in 1844 and again to Amīr Ālāi two years later and from this time, he became known as Rifā'ah Bey instead of Shaikh Rifā'ah.

Under 'Abbās Pasha his luck changed, for not only did the new ruler close the school which Rifā'ah directed, but he sent the unfortunate director to al-Ḳharṭūm in order to take control of a Primary School which had been opened quite recently. This meant exile for Rifā'ah ; it is hard to understand the point of view of the new ruler unless he was urged to get rid of him by certain '*ulamā'*' who did not like Rifā'ah and who looked upon him as a heretic. Whatever were his reasons, Rifā'ah performed his duties most conscientiously and continued his literary work just as he had done while at the School of Languages. Several others were sent to al-Ḳharṭūm with Rifā'ah, some never to return to their native country.

When Muḥammad Sa'id Pasha became ruler in 1854, he immediately recalled him and gave him the post of director of the European Department of the Cairo Governorate under his old friend, Adham (now Pasha). In 1855 he was put in charge of the Military School in the Ḥauḍ al-Marṣūd and later was made director of the new military school in the Citadel. This school, however, was far more than a military school as it included a department for Accountancy, another for Translation, another for Civil Engineering, and still another for Architecture. Sa'id Pasha was probably very keen on encouraging Rifā'ah to run his new school on the same lines as he had run his old School of Languages but, unfortunately, it was closed in 1860 and, as there were no other schools open at the time, Rifā'ah was on the unemployed list until the reign of Ismā'il Pasha, who reorganized the Schools Administration and reopened the Translation Department which he put under the control of Rifā'ah who kept the post until his death in 1873.

(To be concluded.)