

# Tells the Far-Reaching Implications of Cleanliness in Sudanese Society

By Sister Christine

A visitor in the capital of the Sudan, Khartoum, may wonder at the similarity in the appearance of the Sudanese men. It is very difficult for one to distinguish one man from another by their clothing, for the majority of the men wear a white turban and a gelabia.

**THE GELABIA** is a white garment which reaches the ankles, and has long loose sleeves. The gelabia is the national dress of the Sudanese men.

A unity among black men in the Sudan can be seen easily by observing this similarity in the male's costume. I have heard Europeans, who hate to see unity among blacks, say that there is no individualism, in the Sudan — that besides the Sudanese's inability to do or say anything without the consent and agreement of the whole family, village and country, they all even dress alike.

The Sudan is a very hot country, and the whiteness and brightness of the costumes of the Sudanese not only reflect the intense rays of the Sun but also show the cleanliness of that society.

**THE MEN** take much pride in wearing clean white garments. The whiteness of the man's gelabia and shirts and the neatness of the ironed finish of his clothing reflect the conditions existing in his home. This may seem far-fetched to some, but reflect on the conditions which may cause a married man's clothing to be dirty or untidy.

The neatness and cleanliness of the man's clothing in the Sudan reveal how well a man's family is in order. It also shows how well the man's authority is respected

in his home, and how well a woman is performing her duties as a wife.

When one is clean and orderly, one is respected by those who observe him.

**A DIRTY** or a badly ironed shirt or gelabia shows a loose relationship between husband and wife and reveals the fact that a woman is not keeping her duty as a wife.

If a man wears dingy clothes, both the man and his wife will be in the disfavor of their society. The wife will be scorned for not keeping up her duties as a wife, and she will not be respected as a good wife. The man also will be scorned for not demanding that his wife keep up her duties. He will not be respected as a grown man.

In the Sudan—where automatic washing machines are hard to come by and laundromats are unheard of—one will find that the women wash their clothing in small amounts daily. In the morning after the husband is at work, and the children are in school, she performs her chores so that she is available and free from these chores when her husband comes home, enabling her to devote her time to him when he is home.

**A MAN'S** shirts and gelabias always are ready for his use in the Sudan. If there is a sudden emergency and he must travel, or leave home for some time, the Sudanese

wife does not have to rush to wash and iron to prepare his clothing for a trip. She only has to pack the articles he wishes to take with him on his journey.

If the man was to go away suddenly at the end of the week here in America, I am sure there might have to be some rushing to do his laundry. But in the Sudan, there would be no rushing to do the wash, for the supply of clean gelabias and shirts is in the end of the week as it was in the beginning—complete.

The wealth of a man really has no effect on his cleanliness. Soap and water are not expensive commodities in the Sudan. A man may have few shirts and gelabias, but what few he has are always kept clean.

**I HAVE** written here of the average Muslim family in the Sudan. In families where the wife works, the man's clothing is sent out to be done at a laundry. In families which have a good substantial income, there is a houseboy, servant, who does the laundry. One will not find a man washing his shirts in the Sudan. This is considered "woman's work."

The condition in which a female keeps her husband's clothing reflects the interest of that female for her husband.

The cleanliness of a Sudanese man's gelabia or shirt is symbolic of that man's wife, and is like a badge seen by all.

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