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AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DOCTORS



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This is the fourteenth feature article on physicians in various parts of the world, picturing their endeavors and their achievements. In each case the physician is interviewed on the spot by a member of MD's editorial staff.

Photography by Al Woolley

Dr. Nabih Shabb of Sidon, Lebanon

Dr. Nabih Shabb sits on a low wall on a hillside from the base of which Saida, ancient Sidon, stretches toward the Mediterranean. The town, not far from Beirut, is a center of light industry with a population of about 40,000.



FROM HIS BALCONY, Dr. Nabih Shabb gazes over lush valleys where Canaanite farmers once guided their ploughshares and woodsmen cut the great cedars of Lebanon for Solomon's temple. Below him spreads the harbor where Phenician mariners set sail for Carthage, Cadiz and the far Cornish coast, and Christian Crusaders a millennium later landed to do battle with the Saracen. When he strolls through the winding ways of the old town, the women bob and smile, the men touch their foreheads and call out greetings to the *hakim*, the wise man.

Dr. Shabb is a skilled farmer, a collector of antique rugs, a dead shot with a pistol, a fair musician and a formidable chess player. But to his neighbors in modern Saida he is the wise man who has liberated them from medieval medical practices, the good physician who has set their broken bones, relieved them of growths and stones, healed the bullet wounds of proud men quick to defend their honor, and safely delivered two generations of their children. This year they share with him a twin celebration, of the 40th anniversary of his unique hospital and his own arrival at the biblical age of threescore years and ten.

The Land. On Dr. Shabb's study wall hangs a portrait of him at twenty as a dashing lieutenant in the Turkish Army of World War I: in his lifetime he has seen his country reborn from a neglected province of the Ottoman empire into a thriving 20th-century republic. He explains with pride how Lebanon's political stability has made it the Switzerland of the Middle East as a refuge for capital; its problems are of labor shortage rather than unemployment, its people are well nourished on a land unique among its neighbors for well-watered fertility.

He rejoices in his country's generous beauty, reminds the visitor that this was the Bible's land of milk and honey. That it is still so today leaps to the eye: in the arid Middle East, tiny Lebanon gleams like an emerald baguette in a pale setting of sun-baked desert. Along its 120-mile length the coastal plain slopes from the Lebanon mountains in a verdant fall of farms and orchards crossed by evergreen hedgerows of cypress and fir; apples, pears and peaches ripen on the heights, olive trees silver the foothills, banana and citrus groves crowd to the Mediterranean shore. Behind the Lebanon range rises the Anti-Lebanon mountains; between them stretches a broad level plain threaded by two rivers, where the red earth yields grain for man and fodder for goats, sheep, camels and dairy cattle.

Lebanese soil has been hospitable to the husbandman and his animals for 5000 years of history and during millennia before that: Stone Age man left his traces at Byblos (modern Djebail) to the north; later came Canaanites, Egyptians, Phenicians who threw off Egypt's yoke and became the traders and shipmasters of antiquity. Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Romans coveted the land, Byzantium held it for more than 1000 years; Crusaders, Mamelukes, Turks and finally the French by mandate

governed Lebanon until it won independence in 1943.

Dr. Shabb lives in the midst of this fabulous past, 30 miles from the cacophony of Beirut, with its banking house skyscrapers, Riviera-like hotels, casinos and neon-lighted night clubs. Sidon, now Saida, with 40,000 inhabitants is a quiet town of light industry where men still build boats, mend fishing nets and sails and have time to sit over cards in the coffeehouse. The doctor looks out daily on a monument recalling that Jesus once preached in Sidon; two Crusaders' castles brood over the harbor, and a hill of murex shells as high as a house testifies that from Sidon, as from Tyre, came the Tyrian purple to dye the robes of ancient royalty.

About half of Saida's population, including many of Dr. Shabb's patients, live in the medieval Arab town where wall leans upon wall and no cars penetrate; the narrow streets wind under arches built designedly low to sweep the marauding Kurd and Tartar horsemen of other days from their mounts. Worn stone steps and sometimes ladders lead to cell-like rooms, windowless and unfurnished; a bed is a pallet on the bare stone floor. But the floor is cleanly scrubbed, an electric bulb hangs from the ceiling, an electric hot plate cooks the family's dinner and the housewife gets her water from a rubber hose at her door instead of carrying it in jugs from a well. Sewers lie hygienically sealed under the ancient pavings and refuse is strikingly absent; the air is redolent with good cooking smells.

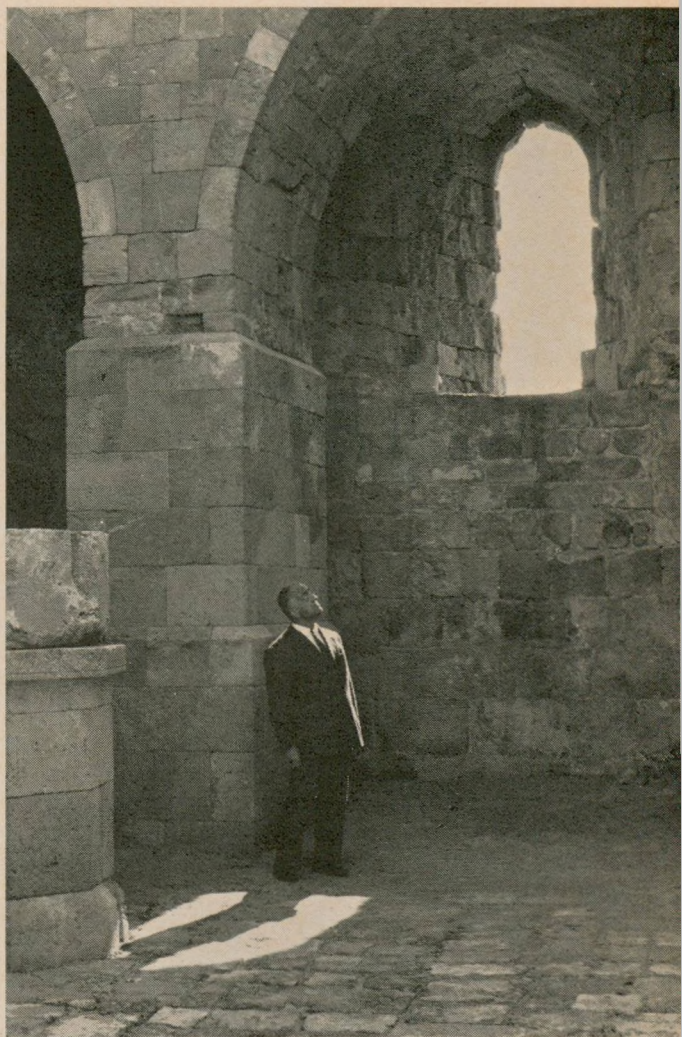
In open-front shops a tinsmith mends pots, artisans make furniture, the butcher carves and grinds his meats; the year-round harvest yields mounds of onions, radishes, fruits and vegetables in tempting variety; a vendor weaves among the pedestrians, balancing trays of baked stuffed Arab bread rolls, golden brown. The children who swarm out to greet the physician and his visitor are well fed but pale. Comments Dr. Shabb: "No Lebanese goes hungry today and no Lebanese sleeps in the street, but these people are lacking in sunshine."

The government is gradually moving families from this dark stone bee-hive to a new housing project on the city's outskirts; the debate is whether to raze the old town and use the stones for land fill and the site for modern buildings, or to keep the picturesque honeycomb of dwellings as a historic monument. Razing would bring the government immediate profit but tourism is one of Lebanon's profitable industries; the doctor wonders aloud: would western visitors find a new town interesting?

The Physician. Dr. Shabb at 70 is a patriarchal figure, as strong in growth as a Lebanese cedar. His hair is grizzled above a high forehead, his face with the powerful lineaments of an Old Testament prophet breaks often into illuminating laughter. Lebanon is unique among her neighbors in having a slender Christian majority, a historic accident stemming from the 6th-century Maronite sect and a century of American and British missions to the Holy Land. Dr. Shabb's grandfather was a schoolteacher and the first ordained Lebanese minister; his father



Dr. Shabb watches local fishermen along Saida's waterfront. Millennia ago, from the harbor here, Phenician mariners and traders set sail for Carthage, Cadiz, the Scilly Isles, the Cornish coast. The city was famous throughout the ancient world for its purple dyes, and glass blowing is said to have begun here.



At top right and right, Dr. Shabb is seen among the ruins of Crusader castles. From 1107, the city played a role in the wars between the Crusaders and the Moslems and was repeatedly devastated and rebuilt until it was abandoned after the fall of Acre in 1291. It became important again in the 17th century.



followed the same calling. The boy Nabih and his two sisters grew up in a small country town at the foot of Mt. Hermon, went to American schools in the family tradition; at the American University of Beirut,* student Nabih Shabb was an athlete and a musician: he played the clarinet in the university orchestra, held the high jump championship until his youngest son Cameel recently broke his record.

The First World War transported him to a field hospital near Gaza where his medical experience was limited to first-aid treatments; lacking books, he practiced swordsmanship, spent his evenings playing the piano while his bored superior officers sat drinking. Many medical officers in the Turkish army succumbed to typhus; to fill the vacancies the army brought medical students back to complete their training. Lieutenant Shabb finished the war in Beirut at the Turkish medical school set up in occupied Saint Joseph university; at the war's end he returned to the American University medical school, took his degree and went to France and England for postgraduate training in surgery and orthopedics. As Lebanon's first orthopedist he returned home to teach the specialty at the American University.

Beirut under the French mandate was already relatively modern and well served with hospitals and physicians; to the idealistic young surgeon, the people beyond its radius were more urgently in need of his skills. His dream was a small modern surgical hospital of his own; his chosen site was the coast town of Saida, only 30 miles distant but medicinally centuries away from the capital.

First he pursued a more personal quest: he sought a young woman named Henaineh ("little Jane") who had been head nurse at the university hospital and had left for a similar post at a tuberculosis sanatorium; inquiry revealed that she had gone to Mothers' Hospital in London for further study. Mrs. Shabb was also born in a country town, her father too was a clergyman; today she recalls that the handsome young orthopedic surgeon paid her little mind when they worked together. His letter proposing marriage reached her while studying in London and considering a nursing post at Bellevue Hospital in New York; she answered with a demurrer, he persisted, she sailed for home and in 1926 they were married and moved to Saida to set up the hospital. Mrs. Shabb undertook not only the nursing supervision but administration of the housekeeping and kitchen; for 30 years she was also the hospital's anesthetist.

During the busy years that followed, the Shabbs reared four children: Ramzi and Samir are physicians, Samira is married to an anesthetist in Beirut, Cameel is an engineer with Canada Dry International. Of their 11 grandchildren, four live in Charleston, West Virginia, where Samir and his American wife, whom he met and married when she taught school in Beirut, went for his postgraduate studies at Memorial Hospital; he remained to become successful surgeon.

*Founded 1866; Beirut also has French Jesuit University of Saint Joseph.

Ramzi as firstborn has followed his father into the hospital: he studied medicine at the American University, went to Oxford for his postgraduate work with the British surgeon Anthony Till. Ramzi also serves as physician to an American oil refining company (Medreco) and a number of insurance companies. A general surgeon, he recently obtained his F.A.C.S. and F.I.C.S.; Dr. Shabb says modestly of his son, "Ramzi is well trained."

Ramzi's slender brunette wife Salwa, a Palestinian by birth, studied nursing and anesthesia at the American University; like her mother-in-law before her, she supervises the nursing staff, performs the anesthesia and administers the housekeeping and kitchen and the hospital records.

Medical Pioneer. After four decades Dr. Shabb's patients, including even the Bedouin shepherds, take for granted his aseptic surgical methods and the modern magic of x-ray, anesthesia, endoscopy and diathermy. But they are still unimpressed by hospital rules: the patient's family comes to visit at all hours and en masse, bringing the children. Dr. Shabb bends the rules reluctantly; with no cases of infectious disease in the hospital, he considers the risk minimal and no longer tries to explain to patients why they should not see their young children.

Forty years ago he faced the far graver difficulties of bringing modern surgery and obstetrics to a population still sunk in medieval medicine. In those days a woman in labor was placed in the smallest room in the house and the windows and doors stopped up, in the belief that her organs would suck in air and become poisoned. Crowded in with her were all her female relations and friends, to encourage her with exhortations and ply her with hot spiced drinks. She would be covered with cloths of doubtful cleanliness; the midwives used no disinfectants and might or might not wash their hands, with the consequence that puerperal fever was not rare. The newborn was sprinkled with salt before swaddling, traditionally to prevent excessive sweating in later life.

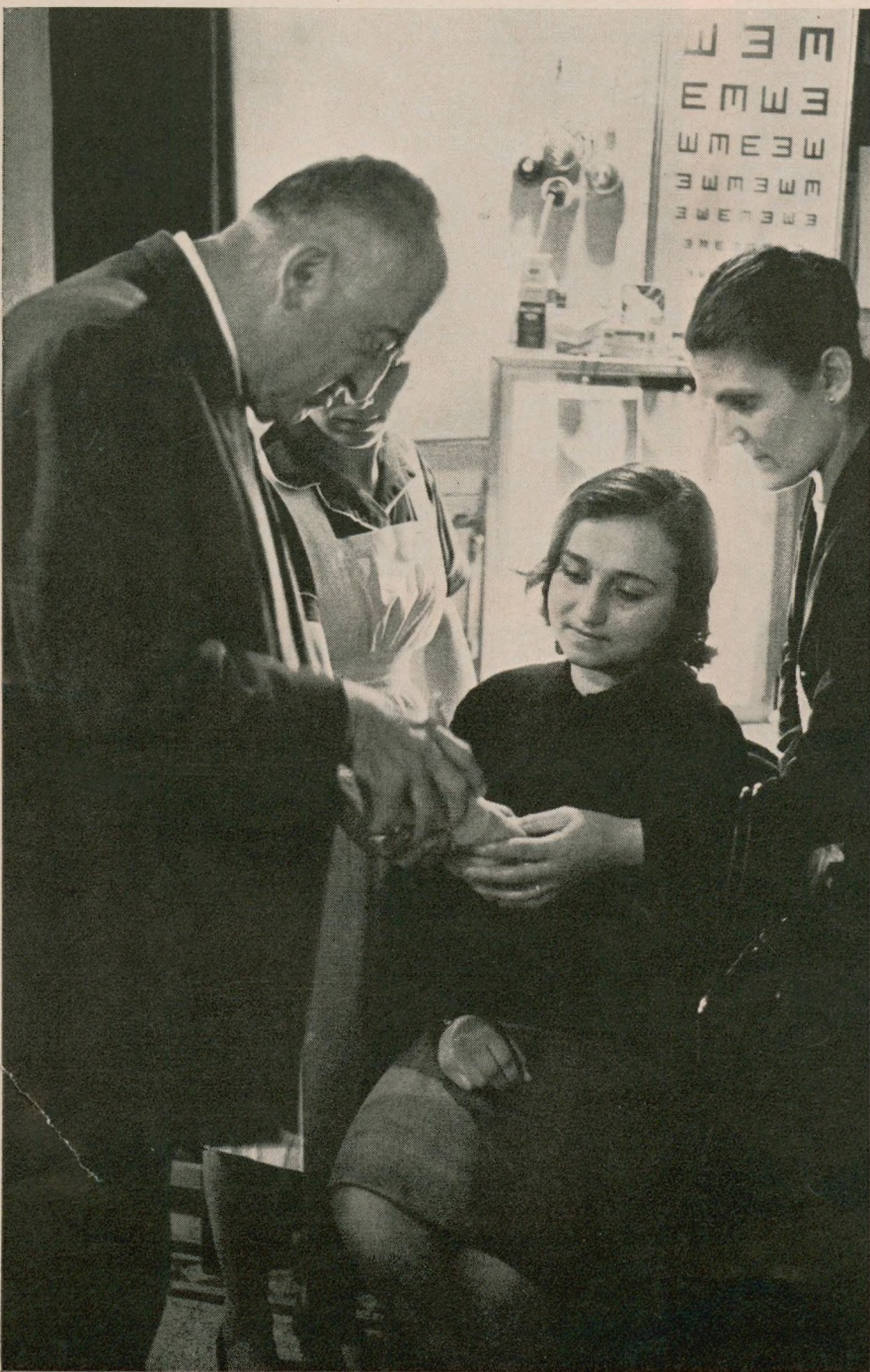
Equally traditional was the treatment of fractures: even in Beirut with its two medical schools and several hospitals, the people put their faith in bonesetters. The trade was handed down from father to son; often a bonesetter was a goatherder who had once set a goat's broken leg and applied the same technique to a human limb. A recent case in the hospital was an arm fracture in a bonesetter's cast of mastic, alum, flour and white of egg stiffened with thin strips of wood or cardboard: the cast had been applied too soon, the arm had swelled, gangrene set in and it was necessary to amputate the hand.

As a former professor of orthopedics and bone surgery in Beirut, Dr. Shabb came to Saida with some prestige, but custom was a powerful opponent; he opened his campaign by distributing circulars throughout the city and its environs, offering to treat fractures without charge for rich and poor alike. He continued this policy for 20 years; the hospital still charges only cost price for x-rays and plaster.

His fame as Lebanon's first orthopedic specialist

Shabb Hospital, a white stone and stucco building with iron grill gates and railings rises around an entrance court. Typical of Mediterranean and Arab architecture, the rooms are designed to receive light and air.

Observed by a nurse and the patient's mother, Dr. Shabb, below, examines a young woman's broken hand which he treated by wrapping it around a tennis ball. He was first orthopedic specialist in country.



A patriarchal figure at 70, Dr. Shabb who often breaks into illuminating laughter recently impressed a visitor who likened his good looks with those of the Italian cinema actor-director Vittorio de Sica.

brought to the Shabb Hospital from all parts of the Middle East cases of clubfoot, scoliosis, congenital dislocations of the hip. He established and the hospital still maintains a reputation for conservative treatment of fractures and many of the patients cannot pay for operative treatment. About 15 percent of cases admitted to the hospital are obstetric; the balance is about equally divided between traumatic and general surgery.

The Hospital. Behind its iron grill gates the white stone and stucco building rises impressively around an entrance court; separate entrances to left and right lead to Dr. Shabb's and Ramzi's living quarters, the hospital with its 24 beds occupies the top story extending over both. The reception room is full of visitors chatting in neighborly fashion on the well-worn benches, gazing at specimens in a wall case. These graphically illustrate the hospital's history: kidney and bladder stones, fibromas including one weighing 8 kilograms (17.6 lb.), coins and small objects from children's bronchi and esophagi, bullets extracted from a hot-tempered male population given to carrying firearms, Siamese twins taken from a patient after six days of labor at her house (she returned for her next delivery, went home rejoicing with a normal infant).

Young children clamber over their mothers in the five-bed women's ward, in the men's ward the barber is trimming a patient's luxuriant black mustache. Along a high-ceilinged, tile-floored corridor are light, sunny private rooms with baths; de luxe rooms have telephone, television, air conditioning against summer temperatures in the 80s. Space heaters are adequate for Saida's winters, which rarely drop to freezing. Dr. Shabb can gauge the rise in Lebanese living standards by the increasing demand for private rooms: the new wing has more of them and he and Ramzi have plans for a new building with improved facilities and several additional beds.

Doors open on Ramzi's office and examining room, a trim operating room with suction machine, anesthesia equipment, an American operating light (interpolates Dr. Shabb: "Rather old, of medium size and illumination"). The hospital has x-ray machines for radiography, radioscopy, and a new bedside unit useful in fracture cases and in the operating room since it eliminates moving the patient.

The nursing staff numbers six, the service staff eight. The nurses' living quarters are in the new wing; in the evening, nurses off duty join the family to drink coffee, watch television and play with the grandchildren. During a family meal one of the fresh-faced Lebanese girls in her starched uniform may run in with a problem: if it is a hospital matter Salwa goes to deal with it; if a medical emergency, Ramzi excuses himself. In Ramzi's absence Dr. Shabb stands in as acting director; he performs some 10 percent of the surgery. He still acts as physician to the two American high schools in Saida, one for boys, one for girls, most of whose graduates go on to the university.

Farmer. For Dr. and Mrs. Shabb the focus of life



On his farm outside Saida, the name of which translated from old Syriac is Refuge Hill, he takes time out from his chores to examine a cut suffered by a woman who works there. Three families live and work on the 200-acre farm and extra hands are hired when needed.

Not a gentleman farmer, Dr. Shabb and his wife both work on the farm, relish the work and the quiet. Opposite, he supervises the unloading from a truck of a water pump. Water comes from two artesian wells and reservoirs provide irrigation by pump and gravity.



Dr. Shabb, below, supervises farm workers. Although he once kept a dairy herd, he now concentrates on the production of fruits, vegetables, almonds and olives. His physician-son Ramzi has a small farm nearby where he raises chickens and specializes in egg production.





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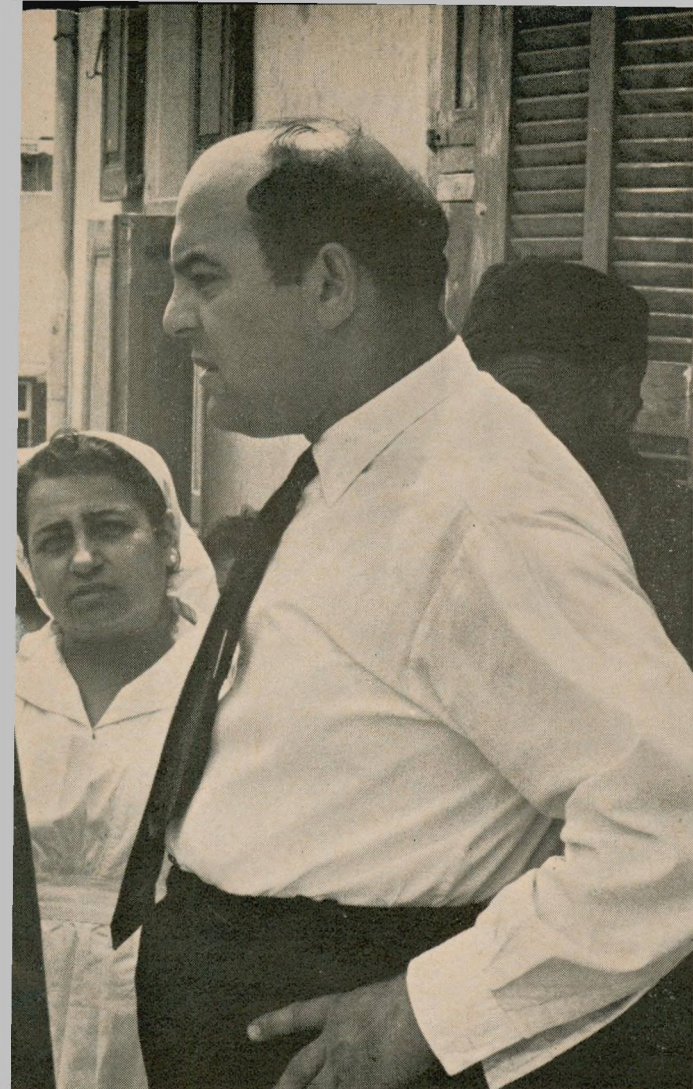
Dr. Ramzi Shabb, in shirtsleeves, followed his father into the hospital and his wife, Salwa, succeeded Mrs. Shabb there. Ramzi, a general surgeon who recently obtained his F.A.C.S. and F.I.C.S., did postgraduate work at Oxford with British surgeon Anthony Till.



Mrs. Shabb, whom the physician married in 1926, was a trained nurse. When they set up Shabb Hospital, she supervised nursing, administration of house-keeping and the kitchen, and was the hospital's anesthetist. The Shabbs have a daughter and three sons, two of whom are physicians, and 11 grandchildren.

Dr. Shabb, right, with a daughter-in-law and two of his grandchildren. On the wall behind them are seen two of his collections of rugs, one of his greatest enthusiasms, which include Kurdish, Herez, Laristan, Anatolian, Daghestan, Lebanese, Sultanabad examples.





has shifted from the hospital to a green hillside some eight kilometers from Saida; its name in old Syriac is Zaghdraya, translated by a scholarly friend as Refuge Hill. Dr. Shabb began to buy farmland when Ramzi was born.

On the highway the doctor's 1960 Zodiac passes open-front markets opulent with produce; there are few donkeys, little Arab dress, a steady stream of cars, trucks, tractors. Once on the farm road, Mrs. Shabb scans the orchards heavy with oranges, lemons, loquats, grapefruit; at a word her husband stops the car and she jumps out agilely, comes back in a moment with a basket of pomegranates and tangerines, ripe from the trees, for the home table.

The farm spreads over a V-shaped valley between two foothills of the Lebanon range; from the apex the farmhouse looks down the green, widening walls horizontally striped with their limestone outcrops, all the way to the shimmering blue of the sea. The house, of stone and sun-colored stucco, is simply furnished, with wide airy rooms, high ceilings, tile floors; it is cool by day, cold enough for blankets at night. As in many Lebanese houses, there are two bathrooms, one western, one Arab style, e.g., with slots for the feet and a trough in the floor. Comments Dr. Shabb with a chuckle: "The western toilet seat is the cause of worldwide constipation."

Refuge Hill's 200 acres are a large holding in Lebanon but they represent a lifetime of patient acquisition; the tract is a mile wide, one and a half miles long, all under intense cultivation and yielding a full spectrum of fruits and vegetables. Its olive trees alone give between four and six tons of oil per season, almonds are another cash crop. New vineyards will give a crop of market grapes: the young vines still stood against their stakes on the terraces; wires were strung between the stakes on which the vines will spread and hang their clusters to be gathered from underneath.

Below the parents' tract is Ramzi's "garden" as they call their son's smaller farm; its name is Jordat, meaning "emblem." He has made a specialty of egg production, importing improved white Leghorn strains of White Sterling from England and De Kalb from the United States; Lebanese chick hatcheries are only now beginning to produce. His flock at full number reaches 3000; daily production ranges from 800 to 1500 large eggs, many with multiple yolks.

Water is no problem, two 200-meter artesian wells and cement reservoirs provide irrigation by pump and gravity; Ramzi has experimented with the California spray system of irrigation and finds it saves manpower in the building and maintenance of earth basins around tree roots, but uses more water and pumping. The doctor formerly kept a dairy herd but he now concentrates on fruit production; the animals are limited to a donkey for carrying burdens and an ox team to work areas where the two tractors cannot operate. Three families live and work on the farm; during busy seasons extra workers are hired from nearby villages, sometimes 10 or more.

Plump olives, ranging from ripe black to pale green, lie spread on an upper floor of one of the