



# Student Prince at Harvard

by Theodore Irwin

ANY DAY IN THE WEEK, a husky young man in baggy slacks, green tweed jacket, and unshined shoes can be seen striding briskly across the Harvard Yard at Cambridge, Mass., books clutched under his arm. Rarely is a head turned to stare at him, though he is the most celebrated undergraduate—with the strangest and most important “part-time job”—on any campus in America.

The shy, handsome 22-year-old senior is His Highness Prince Shah Karim el-Huseini, better known as the new Aga Khan IV and at Harvard merely as “K” or Mr. Khan. He is the Imam or lifelong spiritual leader—a kind of Pope—for 20,000,000 Ismaili Moslems scattered through 18 countries. After a year’s leave of absence for his coronation after his grandfather’s death in July, 1957, Karim is now back at Harvard to complete his studies toward a bachelor’s degree.

How does this Prince of Islam get along with Joe College? How does the exalted Aga live on a democratic campus?

On a recent visit to Cambridge for *Family Weekly*, I first encountered the Student Prince as he emerged from the hotel suite of his secretary, white-haired Mme. Gaetame Beguel, who had held the same position with his grandfather, the fabulous Aga Khan III. It was 11 in the morning and already Karim had spent three hours on affairs of state. The tremendous burden of responsibility was reflected in his deep-set, brooding dark eyes. In addition to his spiritual role, he is the custodian of some \$100,000,000 a year contributed by members of his sect, making him one of the world’s richest businessmen.

At 4 that afternoon, I watched the Aga, stripped to a soccer uniform, practicing with the varsity team on a field across the Charles River in Boston. Fast on his feet, he dashed around kicking the ball, yelling exuberantly. Three times he was dumped on his ear, bounced to his feet with a laugh, and kept going tirelessly until dark.

The striking change in Karim’s demeanor, from morning to afternoon, pointed up the contrasting poles of his personality.

“K is just one of us,” a teammate, John H. Mudd, told me. “We never think of him as a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed.”

Shunning ostentation, the Aga doesn’t own a car at Harvard—“I see no need for one”—and takes a subway to Boston like any other straphanger. Modest about his wealth, he comments with an

engaging grin: “What I really inherited were all the mosques and burial grounds.”

The only apparent sign of his illustrious position are two gold rings on the little finger of his left hand. One resembles a wedding band and the other, the Imammate ring, has engraved symbols. There’s nothing illustrious, however, about his preference for sweatshirts, sweaters, and a worn leather jacket. Polite, self-effacing, he doesn’t smoke or drink since tobacco and liquor are prohibited by his religion. But he can cuss as uninhibitedly as any Harvard man, using the most unprintable epithets.

His one weakness nowadays is a tendency to overeat. On a long bus trip to Williams with the soccer team last October, there was a five-minute stop during which Karim consumed a pint of ice cream, six chocolate bars, an apple, and an ice-cream cone.

“You’ll be catching up with your grandfather,” a teammate twitted him. The Aga Khan III weighed some 300 pounds; Karim’s 5’9” frame hits the scales at 175.

Karim’s home at Harvard, the spiritual headquarters of the Ismaili sect, consists of a single Spartanlike room at Leverett House, one of seven upper-class dormitories. In the dreary halls, the paint is peeling. Besides a desk, bookcase, bed, and hi-fi, his room has a couch and two upholstered chairs, impressionist prints on the walls.

Unlike most of his housemates, the Aga lives alone. His meals, taken at the barnlike Leverett dining hall, cost him \$590 a year. Like other students, he stands in the chow line with utensils in his breast pocket, a plastic tray in his hands. For each of the flustered women in the serving line, the Aga has a polite bow and a pleasant remark.

TALKING TO KARIM’S classmates and professors, I met with a variety of appraisals of the Student Prince. Some find him aloof, a somewhat “ascetic character,” while others say he mixes well socially.

“K is not at all stuffy,” said one Leverett resident. “He doesn’t throw his weight around.”

His professors call him “Mr. Khan,” consider him humble, highly disciplined, “not at all condescending, purposeful, his feet planted firmly on the ground.” To many Harvard men, the Aga is “just a nice guy whose name is Cohen or Kahn or something like that.”

“From his freshman to his junior year,” a senior

observed, “he was probably best known to us as being related to Rita Hayworth—who married his father, Aly Khan. Now there seems to be an aura of mysticism about him. I think fellows are a little afraid of him. We’d like to meet him, but we hold back. It has become something of a gag to say, ‘I’m going to invite the Aga home for Christmas.’ If somebody did, maybe he’d accept.”

Good-naturedly, the young Imam occasionally has to submit to college-boy riding. Recently, when he received a huge package, an acquaintance cracked: “Ah, money from home!” One classmate offered him a beer: “Have a lager, Aga?”

At Leverett House, photographs of its residents are posted on the bulletin board but Karim Khan’s is missing. In its place is a cartoon clipped from a humor magazine showing a tramp puffing on a cigar. “K must see it, but he never protested,” said one of his housemates.

As a student, Karim has been on the Dean’s List although he is somewhat less than a straight-A man. Majoring in Oriental History, he is taking five courses and must write a thesis to graduate with honors. Most Harvard undergraduates take only four courses.

“Mr. Khan has a tough major,” one of his professors remarked. “I think he seriously wants to learn so he can help his people.”

Grinding away at his books, Karim can keep studying all evening, take a coffee break at midnight, then hit the books again until three in the morning. Even on out-of-town trips with the soccer team, he has taken books along. On the five-hour trip to Dartmouth a few months ago, the bus lights had been turned off under protest.

“You Harvard boys are the only ones who want the lights on,” growled the driver.

It was Karim who called out, “Yeah, we like to study. Put ‘em on, will you?”

With the bus lit up, Karim spent most of the trip buried in his books. “My studies,” he says gravely, “have a direct bearing on the work which faces me in years to come. I decided to return to Harvard because I didn’t want to lose any chance to equip myself for the future.”

He chose Harvard originally, in preference to Oxford, partly because his favorite uncle, Sadruddin, had been a Harvard man; partly because here—where snobbery is by brains, not by blood—his privacy would be respected. Clubwomen and social climbers “dying” to meet the Aga are firmly dis-