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THE PROBLEM OF MINORITIES
IN SYRIA.

by

Yusuf Kamal Husein Ibish

Being a thesis presented to the
Department of Political Science
at the American University of
Beirut in partial fulfilment for
the requirements of the Degree of
Master of Arts.

A.U.B.

June: 1951

TO MY FRIENDS

Munah Sulh and Munir Takeydin

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

"The Cancer in modern society is not class-war, or nationalism, or communism, or fascism; it is the refusal of the minority to share civilization and its advantages with the majority".

INTRODUCTION

I. THE PURPOSES OF THIS THESIS:

The present thesis deals with the minorities in Syria, their origin and historical development, and the problems that have arisen therefrom. It is written with the intention of exposing the problem of the minorities in its correct setting in order to arrive at an appropriate solution. The thesis has, therefore, been written to view the problem from a practical angle and to avoid any theoretical or metaphysical approach, as the latter approaches may increase the confusion rather than help reducing the tension.

The major difficulty I encountered in my study was that of 'finding' an adequate bibliography. Books seem to be scarce, and the authenticity and objectivity of those that are found, are doubtful. Some of them are written by authors who belong to a minority and are, therefore, biased, while others are written by hostile writers with ill concealed bias and neither can be regarded as scientific. We should not, however, forget those books that have been written by travellers and orientalist. Even those cannot be fully trusted, as many of them have been written to serve political ends. Facts have thus been distorted to suit the political or colonial needs of the day. Despite these difficulties, I hope that I have clearly stated the problem. The thesis has a twofold aim: an immediate aim, namely the statement of the problems of religious, racial and social minorities through a historical survey of the minorities in Syria; and an ultimate purpose

which is an attempt to find a solution for the problem of group tensions among ethnic, racial, religious and social groups in Syria. In other words, the thesis aims at exposing the minority problem in its historical setting, and at finding a solution that will turn the existing tension into a cooperative sympathy.

The major minority group in Syria is the religious one. This has been divided, for the sake of clarity into two categories: a) the compact religious minorities and b) the scattered religious minorities.

To the first category belong the three major religious groups in Syria, namely: i) The Alawis who inhabit the mountainous region known by their name - Jebel Al-Alawiin - and who have for a long time been a source of trouble and a cause of dissension. ii) The Druzes who inhabit the Hauran region. iii) The Ismai'ilis, who are settled in the region between Homs and Hama.

To the second category belong all the Christian sects who are scattered throughout the Syrian cities. But they have their own quarters in certain towns. The other scattered groups are the Shi'ites, the Jews and the Yezidis. And here we must make it clear that the latter category, namely, the scattered minorities, are not so much a problem as the compact minorities. For their influence is seldom significant.

Besides the religious minorities there are two equally important groups - the social and racial minorities.

To the first belong the Bedouin tribes who are unique in

their mode of life. They have received adequate consideration as I am personally acquainted with them. They are still 'raw', for they have not been subjected to the "adulterations" of civilization, and they can, therefore, be an excellent social laboratory.

To the racial minorities belong the Kurds, Armenians and the Circassians who speak Arabic as a second language. The history of these minorities has been outlined, and their problems discussed as thoroughly as the scope of the thesis permitted.

The second main purpose of this thesis, the ultimate aim, is to find a solution by means of which the tension now existing can be reduced, and the welfare of society further advanced. The practical solution I reached after settling the nomadic tribes, is socio-economic. For the problem of the minorities is essentially one of social behaviour and economic interdependence. Thus an attempt to reduce the tension must start by educating the masses of both the majority and minority groups, then by abolishing feudalism and its evils. Then through sanitary measures and the reclamation of land by irrigation and drainage we can raise the standard of living. These I have found to be practical measures which, if adopted, in addition to a common civil law, will reduce the existing tension into a fruitful cooperation among the different groups. But the problem is not only socio-economic: it is also psychological. I have insisted on that because I believe that no solution, no matter how scientific, can be effective if the antagonistic groups themselves do not understand its

urgency. Thus all the economic proposals that may lead to the settlement of the Bedouins or the assimilation of the Alawis, are useless, if the groups concerned have not got rid of the fears which warps their vision.

In implementing the two major purposes of this thesis, the historical background of the minorities will be surveyed, and an attempt will then be made to set up a list of assumptions and working hypothesis concerning the techniques for controlling hostilities and conflicts.

In this connection, it should be pointed out, that the ultimate objective of the thesis is not based upon an implicit value-premise - that of regarding the reduction of group hostility as desirable in itself regardless of other considerations. My position, as regards this problem, is based on the assumption that under some circumstances certain individuals and groups find it desirable to attempt to reduce whatever hostility or conflict between them. It is, therefore, a choice between alternatives. And thus the solution is not final; it is a dynamically developing compromise.

II. GROUP HOSTILITY AS A "PROBLEM":

But our study shall not be complete, if we do not look at the minority problem in its universal entity. For it is through such a general view that we can place our own minority problem in its right setting. Minorities exist because of certain essential human diversities, the study of which takes us into metaphysical realms which the thesis does not deal with. But there are certain characteristic traits such as the origin of hostility, types of hostility,

and the reaction of minority groups, which may apply to all existing minorities. It is to these that we must turn now before we end this introduction.

The foundation on which the minority problem rests is group hostility. This may be defined as a common attitude which consists of tendencies to insult, disparage, or even inflict physical or social injuries upon members of a group. Thus wherever we find such a kind of hostility that may lead to injuries, social or physical or disparagement, we must be sure of the existence of a minority problem.

How has this hostility originated? To this question there is but one answer: essential human diversity. Man is not a uniform, standardized being. He is different from everybody else; and it is this individualism of thought which characterizes his being. Yet that does not make him separate from everybody else; for he shares many characteristics with the rest of his fellow-men. Thus it appears that group hostility will persist and defy solution. That may be so as long as man is essentially diversified. However, the manifestations of hostility vary greatly among individuals, groups, and social systems. If we can limit it we would have effected that compromise capable of turning the hostile tension into fruitful cooperation.

No one can tell how the compromise can be effected if the type of the hostility is not disclosed. For hostility directed from the ego may operate at many levels of intensity chief

among which are the following: ¹⁾

- a) generalized aggression
- b) fixation on specific individuals
- c) fixation on social categories of persons

The major factor which intensifies hostility is frustration. Thus when we want to attenuate the hostility and pave the way for a possible compromise - the reduction of hostility tension - we have to do away with the causes of frustration itself. If the minority is secure, it does not feel frustrated, hence it is not hostile.

To achieve this "security" we must do away with the reasons that lead to the reactions of the minority groups. Among these are marked self-consciousness, militancy, coupled with prejudice against ethnic groups (like the Kurds and the Armenians, for instance). Such an attitude is likely to be vigorous among such groups that have gained considerable rights and are thus able realistically to hope for more. Thus minorities which are an object of aggression by the dominant majority may be hostile to each other, e.g. anti-Semitism among the negroes in America; or they may combine in mutual support against ²⁾ prejudice and discrimination on the part of the majority groups. Such an attitude, or the conditions that determine it, are not clearly understood. And it is here that the psychological element has its bearing.

1) Williams, R.M.: Intergroup Tensions, pp. 50-60.

2) Williams, R.M.: Intergroup Tensions, p.61.

It is thus well to note that the problem of the minorities is of extreme importance, as it is capable, unless carefully handled of undermining the social structure. For this reason, I have avoided theoretical approaches that start with the basic premise that man is a diversity not a unity. For the practicality of the problem and its strict relation to life defies any universal panacea. It is with this view that this present thesis has been written.

CHAPTER II.RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

"The Middle East is a mosaic of
religions"

Zurayk

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

It is very painful to declare that the problem of Religious Minorities is one of the acute problems that color almost all the aspects of life in Syria - social, educational and political. It makes, as it had made elsewhere, for dissension in public opinion, and has, for that very reason, made it impossible for democracy to grow and develop. Its speciality is always the breeding of bigotry - the deadliest enemy of progress - and is the inevitable accompaniment of frustration and aggression.

To speak of the existence of Religious Minorities contending for power, and thus breaking the national unity, is to deny the existence of toleration - the major fruit and legitimate son of the rationalisation of Modern Times. For, to belong to a particular religious group would mean to try to break a homogeneous balance of national unity, to usurp power, and to lose interest in the general welfare of the nation. Such was the case of the Europe just emerging from the trammels of the Middle Ages and the shackles of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Such is also the case in modern Syria and the Lebanon (more so in the latter), for both these countries resemble, to a large extent, and are in the Spenglerian sense, contemporary with the Europe of the early seventeenth century. The problem of Religious Minorities is, as it has always been, the greatest of all obstacles for the achievement of social solidarity.

There is no doubt that the problem of Religious Minorities in Lebanon is of wider portee than in Syria. For there has arisen in Lebanon a certain specific tradition - that of an asylum - where "remnants of sects....., driven for one reason or another from the plains of the interior, have found refuge in the previously almost impenetrable valleys of Lebanon, where they could worship and live unmolested from outside." (1) But this very principle, however, has accentuated the problem, for there is no single sect that commands a sufficiently strong majority all over the country. That is why the tendency is always towards finding a modus operendi, rather than a modus vivendi which is liable to appear every time an issue is discussed.

In Syria, the Religious Minorities' problem, as we shall presently see, is more potential than actual. For, although there are some scattered and compact minorities all over the country, there is on the other hand, a strong Moslem Sunni majority that renders the ^{minority} majority problem somehow emasculate and in certain national issues almost non-existent.

The uniqueness of the majority problem in Syria springs from the historical fact that this land has been the cradle of both Islam and Christianity. The problem is not one of differences within the same church, as was the case in Europe, but one of diversity and dissension in the very principles of belief. It is thus an inward and outward struggle. It portrays in its clear presentation an

(1) Hourani, A. Syria and Lebanon, pp.129-130

incessant struggle of dogmas and religious ideas. But modern politics have used religion as a shield to cover more material interests. In fact, the minority problem in Syria today, would never have been a political one - though it may still be a social problem - if the minorities shared the national feelings of the majority. For when an individual feels that he is different from the multitude in his own outlook on religion, he may, if he has not received a lay education, believe that he is categorically different. He would then become a hindrance to social cooperation and national solidarity. But if, even with a lay education the final solution is not reached, then a modus vivendi must be found; otherwise their life would be extremely handicapped.

To turn to Syria. The Religious Minority problem is not acute in the urban regions because education has dispelled many an inveterate misconception, and its rationalism precipitated toleration. However, that is not the case in those places where certain compact minorities have had their historical abode. Such groups having had their own theories, beliefs and experience, have cut themselves off (in a sense) from the general experience of life followed by the majority. They have thus created their own atmosphere, guarding themselves against the possibility of assimilation.

From the foregoing paragraph, we notice that there are two kinds of Religious Minorities in Syria - scattered

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION ACCORDING TO RELIGION & SECT

M U H A F A Z A T

Sect or Religion	: Total	: The City									
		: of Damasc.:	: Damascus :	: Homs :	: Hama :	: Latakia :	: Aleppo :	: Jazira :	: Euphrates:	: Djebel Druz. :	: Hauran
Sunnis	:2,137,602:	254,477	: 296,342 :	155,440	: 114,059:	94,186	: 772,015 :	102,478	: 230,164 :	1,519	: 116,922
Shi'ites	: 13,355:	153	: 224 :	2,997	: 211:	1	: 9,383 :	327	: - :	56	: 4
Isma'illis	: 31,813:	25	: 8 :	19	: 23,185:	8,507	: 34 :	16	: 19 :	-	: -
Alawis	: 344,362:	102	: 4,121 :	24,380	: 15,877:	296,050	: 3,107 :	139	: 120 :	96	: 370
Druzes	: 97,795:	680	: 15,325 :	-	: - :	7	: 1,712 :	-	: 6 :	80,064	: 1
Yazidis	: 2,888:	7	: - :	-	: - :	-	: 1,321 :	1,560	: - :	-	: -
Orthodox	: 149,705:	11,331	: 14,432 :	21,223	: 18,387:	65,363	: 10,416 :	393	: 186 :	4,927	: 3,048
Jacobites	: 106,294:	17,309	: 57 :	1,578	: 650:	6,126	: 70,080 :	8,322	: 1,759 :	382	: 35
Syriac Orth:	: 43,652:	1,066	: 115 :	15,020	: 736:	12	: 6,000 :	19,794	: 850 :	-	: 59
Melchites	: 50,423:	10,602	: 11,361 :	4,048	: 416:	2,662	: 12,878 :	79	: 26 :	2,940	: 5,411
Armen. Cath:	: 17,706:	2,203	: 109 :	1,516	: 49:	738	: 10,048 :	2,089	: 657 :	152	: 109
Syriac Cath:	: 17,830:	2,285	: 1,278 :	3,322	: 290:	-	: 6,637 :	3,278	: 740 :	-	: -
Latins	: 6,323:	445	: 58 :	451	: 13:	956	: 4,274 :	38	: 88 :	-	: -
Maronites	: 14,797:	1,082	: 178 :	614	: 47:	8,720	: 3,896 :	65	: 85 :	105	: 5
Kaldeans	: 5,022:	220	: 2 :	27	: 2:	70	: 2,353 :	2,116	: 232 :	-	: -
Protestants	: 12,433:	978	: 771 :	1,807	: 569:	3,907	: 3,426 :	500	: 31 :	413	: 31
Nestorians	: 9,690:	-	: - :	-	: - :	-	: - :	9,690	: - :	-	: -
Assyrians	: 3:	-	: - :	-	: - :	-	: - :	-	: 3 :	-	: -
Jews	: 31,005:	14,286	: 8 :	-	: - :	5	: 14,527 :	2,078	: 91 :	-	: 10
GRAND TOTAL:	:3,092,703:	317,251	: 344,389 :	232,441	: 174,491:	487,310	: 932,143 :	152,962	: 235,057 :	90,654	: 126,005

and compact minorities. Most of the Christians who number about 409,754 (1) are of the scattered minorities, whereas the Druzes and the Alawis live in distinct regions, and are thus called compact minorities. The former are more educated and have a higher standard of living, the latter are more potentially liable to weaken the national unity of the country.

In Lebanon, the same feature appears but with one major difference - that there is no single majority group. Therefore, the compact and scattered religious groups have always to come to an agreement with one another if ever anything is to be accomplished. That is why the problem is more acute in Lebanon than in Syria.

1) Historical Background.

The population of Syria, according to religious sects, is distributed as follows:- (2)

(1) Statistical abstract of Syria, 1949.
(2) Statistical abstract of Syria, 1949.

From the foregoing, we notice that Moslems in general and the Moslem Sunnis in particular have an overwhelming majority over any single minority sect - a fact which makes for the potential existence of the problem. But these minorities may be divided into two categories - the compact and scattered minorities. It is to the former that we must now turn.

The main minority groups in Syria are the Christians, the Alawis and the Druzes. The Christians belong to the scattered category, since they are not concentrated in any one region of the country. Nevertheless they exist in compact groups in most of the Syrian towns. Thus they have a separate quarters of their own in Damascus, Homs etc. But that, of course, does not include them among the regionally compact minorities - the Alawis and the Druzes. As to the role they have played and are destined to play in the Syrian social and political life, reference shall be made in due course.

ii) Compact Religious Minorities.

A. The Alawis.

Alawism is a Moslem sect that is a ramification of Shi'ism. It is sometimes referred to as Nussayrism, or Nussayriyah - an unorthodox sect of Islam. Its founder was Mohammad Ibn Nussayr (3rd. century Hijrah) who broke with Shi'ism and started a new religious school that came to have a number of followers whom we now call the Alawis.

These people differ from the bulk of orthodox Moslems not only in their interpretation of the Quoran, but also in their outlook on religion as such, though at bottom, they are still considered as fundamentally Islamic.

This sect has been severely attacked by the orthodox Moslems, and labelled as heretical by many of the Ottoman Caliphs on the ground of its falsified interpretation of the Islamic Dogma. Accordingly they could not remain where they used to be - in the towns where they were so vulnerable to attack. And as every minority conscious of its numerical inferiority does these people finally left their towns and fled to the high coastal mountains of the north where they found a haven of refuge, By then the hatred of the Moslems - i.e. Sunnis - was inculcated in the young offspring by the steadfast belief that every-one of their misfortunes was due to the Moslems.

They hated the Ottomans not only on national grounds, but because the Ottomans were Sunnis. In fact, these people never had any experience in nationalism. They had always thought of themselves as a distinct group within the Syrian Nation. That feeling, however, had so alienated them from the people that they became estranged, in fact, almost foreign. It is only of late that the national spirit has infiltrated into their midst. The most learned of them, who have had a truly lay education, have found that their fears are baseless and unfounded, and that the desire for a national life coupled with the

modern means of living are capable of making life possible with the Sunnite majority. But not many of them have reached that degree of education, for most of them still lead a very low and primitive life, governed by their extremely backward social customs.

Their social life is basically tribal and feudal. The main tribes now existing in the Latakiah district are four:

The Khayatteen, the Haddadeen, the Metawerah and the Kalbiyah. Many of the modern Alawis are tribe-minded and fall easy preys to their leaders. (1) This tribal classification which rises as a superstructure over the religious base is the greatest drawback to their progress and final assimilation in the wider national context of their existence.

Added to this is their secret practice of worship. For, unlike the Shi'ites, they do not implicitly hold the same beliefs as the Moslem majority, though they openly profess that they do. It is, therefore, this secrecy that accounts for their alienation, and this fact stands in the way of any attempt towards general assimilation. Like the Druzes they remain somehow fossilized. Their rank and file are estranged from the general majority that surrounds them - a fact that was greatly exploited by the French Mandatory. For, like every minority in a dependent or weak nation, they were

(1) The revolt of salman al-Murshid

used by France to widen the breach which separated the nation. France harped on this note quite effectively. (1)

Following the declaration by the League of Nations, and incomplete accord with the Sykes-Picot agreement, the treaties of Sevres and Lausanne, France became the Mandatory Power over "Semi-civilized" Syria. Lebanon had by then become "L'Etat du Grand Liban", and Syria was divided into five states (Etats). The Alawis' (Nussayriyah) mountain became a state, to which a French commissioner (2) was appointed. The French - who had been interested in the Alawis long before they came to Syria - introduced themselves as the protectors of the minorities. Thus by widening the schism between the Sunnite majority and the minorities they were aggravating the causes of potential conflict. By so doing they proved that they did not differ much from their predecessors and enemies: the Turks. Indeed, they followed suit and excelled in applying to the letter the policy "divide and rule".

The French succeeded in winning many of the Alawis to their side. They even succeeded in alienating them from the rest of the country. Many of their leaders were bought with money or by the offer of high positions in the Government Service. The French knew they could rely on the ignorance of the Alawis, on their backwardness and their suspicion and inveterate fear of the Sunnites.

(1) (divide et impera)
(2) Accountable to the Haut Commissaire at Beirut.

The mandatory fanned the fire of jealousy into a flame of hatred between these two groups stressing the Alawis' independence under French protection; The Druzes were also played as a useful pawn on the mandatory's chess-board.

But France was not destined to remain in Syria, for the international situation was soon to force her hand. In 1943 Syria was declared independent - ready to stand alone, although the French lingered in the country until 1945. During these two years they tried to strengthen minorities, including the Alawis in order to foment trouble in the country. For with troubles in the country, France could hope to see the term of the mandate prolonged. But the French had failed and their agents were not likely to do better. A rising by the Alawis was soon quelled by the central government which was strong enough to deal with them. The French had lost the game. With this initial success, Syria had done away with the possibility of a revolt that would have endangered its independence. (1)/

The Alawis must understand that they belong to the nation just as much as the majority or any other minority. It is only on such an understanding that social solidarity can be achieved.

B. The Druzes.

Another strong compact minority is that formed by the Druzes. Like Alawism, Druzism is affiliated to Islam. The founders of the sect were Moslems. It is also an unorthodox

(1) Salman Al-Murshid.

sect that draws on the interpretations of many Islamic and non-Islamic theological schools. It got its name from Darazi, who is thought to be the founder of the sect.(1)

Like the Alawis, the Druzes first lived here and there and everywhere in Syria and Lebanon, until they finally settled down in a region of their own - The shuf in Lebanon and Jabal-ud-Druz in Syria. Originally, however, they were living at Wadi-al-Taym which is thought to be the birthplace of their religion and the distributing centre of the Druze people, although one cannot be so sure. For the Druzes of Syria are a unique community not to be found elsewhere in the world. Like social fossils in an alien environment, these people have survived for hundreds of years in that land rightly described as a "Babel of Tongues" and a "Museum of Nationalities".(2) They do not have clear records that tell of their origin either as a people or as a sect. Their origin, ethnographical and religious is shrouded in mystery. They first appeared at Wadi-al-Taym as theologians during the reign of the sixth Fatimite Caliph in Cairo, 996-1020 A.D. and afterwards migrated to Lebanon where they lived their semi-independent lives secluded in their mountain pastures, unmindful of the progress of the world around them, and almost entirely forgotten by the outside world. (3)

What makes investigation into the Druze religion difficult,

(1) Hitti, Ph. The origin of the Druze People and Religion.p.12.

(2) Ibid p.1.

(3) Hitti, Ph. The Origin of the Druze People and Religion, p.1.

if not impossible, is the secrecy in which it is shrouded. Not every Druze is privileged to acquire religious wisdom. It is only a very small group - the chosen few - who attain that degree of wisdom, that is very much like the absolute good of Plato. What we know, therefore, of their religion is the fragmentary leakage handed down to us by inquisitive historians.

One historically proven fact, however, is that the Druzes first appeared on the pages of history as professors of divinity in Wadi-al-Taym, at the foot of Mt. Hermon. But as to their racial origin very little is known. Some historians have accepted the theory of Druze descent from the remains of the crusaders.(1) Others connect them with the Druids; and in fact many freemasons' lodges have claimed relationship with the Druzes whose "ancestors were none other than the original subjects of King Hiram of Tyre, the builders of Solomon's Temple".(2) Another theory is that of Miss Gertrude Bell in the Encyclopedia Britannica (eleventh Edition, Article "Druzes") that they are a mixture of different races in which the Arab predominates. Most of the modern Druzes agree with this idea.

Yet we should not overlook the fact that there had once been at Wadi-al-Taym a strong Persian nucleus. In fact, the founders of Druzism were all Persians; Darazi

(1) Richard Peacock: A description of the East and some other countries p.94, quoted by Hitti: The origin of the Druze People and Religion, p.12.

(2) Springett, B.H.: Secret sects of Syria, Chapter 25, London 1922

himself was of Turco-Persian origin. So was Hamzah the teacher of the Darazi and the brains of the whole movement. (1) So also were some of their feudal families, who were either Kurdish or Persian, or of Iraqi or Persianised Arab origin. (2)

This introduction about the racial origin of the Druzes will help us to understand their problem. For, apart from being religiously different from the bulk of the population in Syria, they are, to a large extent, racially different. That has accentuated the problem and made the Druzes a strongly compact minority that can easily threaten the social and national solidarity of the country.

Like the Alawis, the Druzes suffered much at the hands of the Mamelukes of Egypt and the Ottoman Turks. Many of them were killed, and a great number had to flee from their original place and disperse in the mountainous regions of Lebanon. But early in the seventeenth century there appeared a very powerful Druze - Amir Fakhr-Eddin-Ben-Ma'n II - who stood against the Turks and succeeded in liberating a part of Lebanon. His religious tolerance won him many friends among the feudal lords, and before long the boundaries of his principality reached the very periphery of Turkey itself. Finally, he was defeated and taken to Constantinople where he was sentenced to death.

(1)Hitti,Ph. The Origin of the Druze People and Religion,p.19.
(2)Ibid, p.21.

Since the days of Fakhr-Eddin II, the west had become interested in what was taking place on this side of the Mediterranean, and the Druzes, being so much molested by the followers of the orthodox sects, wanted an assurance of their existence and of their freedom and thus were ready to react to the offer of foreign help and support. That in itself was a major cause which led the Druzes, in the early days of the 18th. century to favor foreign help which the West, particularly England, was ready to give. The latter part of the 19th century may be regarded as the period of western infiltration into Lebanon and Syria under the pretext of giving a breathing space to the otherwise "doomed" minorities. This abnormal situation culminated in the massacres of 1860 which intensified the hatred, already existing, among the religious minorities. The "Sick Man of Europe" was getting very ill, and the self-imposed heirs, all too numerous, were eager to see him collapse.

By then the Yemanite Druzes had left Wadi-al-Taym and the Shuf district and emigrated to the Houran region in southern Syria, after their defeated by the Quaysites at Ayn-Daraa in 1711. These were the people who laid down the foundations of the Druze community there and who gave the mountaineous region the name of Jabal-ud-Druze. ~~Abu~~ Jabal-ud-Druze thus became, and still is, the Druze stronghold in Syria - and that is what makes of them a strong compact minority.

But why did they not chose to live in the towns of Syria? For this question there is but one answer: they are a minority and have a minority persecution complex. The Druzes, like the Alawis, are very suspicious of the great Moslem majority, and it is only when they are together - when they form a compact group - that they can actually hold their own. Such conditions of life create a mentality that can be termed as a "Minority Complex". In the case of the Druzes it was unfortunate that religion should shield politics. This fact is mainly responsible for the horrible massacres of 1860, which is reminiscent of the massacre of St. Bartholomew of 1572. After the massacre, Lebanon was granted a measure of local autonomy, guaranteed by the larger European Power under a Christian governor - selected by those Powers and appointed by the Sultan.

Although the massacre of 1860 were between the Christians (Maronites) and the Druzes, they did not spring from purely religious causes; politics exercised a dominant influence. It was the outward manifestation of the implicit struggle between France, England and the Ottoman Empire.

Thus, those who fled to the Huran region and established themselves there, with the rest of the Druze community, sought freedom, in that secluded place, to manage their own affairs without control or interference. They now constitute an overwhelming majority of the population in that region

for they are estimated at 80,064 Druzes out of the total population of 90,654. The remainder are largely Melchites and Orthodox. (1) Despite the fact that the Druzes held aloof from the Sunni Arabs until the World War of 1914-18 and had always doubted the good will and intentions of the majority, yet they felt as nationalistically bound to Syria as the Sunnite Moslems. In the revolt against the French in 1925, the Druzes were among the most zealous leaders, although the French had used them in the same way they had used the Alawis, namely, as an instrument to widen the breach between them and the Sunnite majority. French policy was thus based on the theory that the Druzes were not to be treated in the same way as the ordinary members of the Syrian Arab people. What they needed, the mandatory officials thought, was a strong administration drawn from their own great feudalistic families strengthened by French Advisors. For this purpose, France created - but for a short time - L'Etat du Djebel Druze. (2)

Today the majority of the Druzes of Syria mean to share the benefits of civilisation with the majority in the country. Even their compactness does not segregate them as it used to before the first World War or even during the days of the French Mandate. The secrecy of their religion has ceased

(1) Hourani, A. Syria and Lebanon, p. 137. See also Rapport du Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, pp. 220-21.

(2) Arrete No. 1641, 24/10/1922.

to be a major issue and had not accentuated the problem because of the 'Taqqiyyah' principle whereby a Druze may profess any creed if that helps him to live and prosper. Thus the Druzes are adjusting themselves slowly but inevitably to their environment and the 'Taqqiyyah' principle is becoming the incentive for toleration and brotherhood. With all this, fusion with the majority is not likely, because their traditions, as reflected, in the particular pattern of their social life, are deeply rooted. Unless that pattern changes - and there are no indications of that now - except in very few individual cases - the Druzes will remain a distinct minority, though by no means a hostile group.

Among the Druzes themselves there are two parties, the first wants Jabal-ud-Druze to be wholeheartedly Syrian, and the second wants neither protection nor interference. - They dream of being left alone.(1)

There is, in certain sections an awareness of the necessity for a closer national cooperation; and for the first time "they are beginning to question the feudal system under which they have lived for so long". (2)

The modern means of communications and education (3) are helping and will help hew down the obstacles that stand in the way of their progress; and the new Druze generation has to break out of the cocoon in which they

(1) Hourani, A.Minorities in the Arab World. p.78.
(2) Ibid, p.78.
(3) Ibid, p.78.

live because they cannot preserve a closed and an unchanged society in an ever developing world."

C. The Isma'ilis.

Another compact minority are the Isma'ilis. They live practically in one region around Salamyah of Hama. But they differ from other compact minorities in one major issue, namely: they have no political claims whatsoever. Their only wish is to be left alone.(1) This has arisen from the fact that they believe that the Sunnite are at the root of every misfortune they had had in their history.

Their movement, as a Moslem sect, cannot be understood without a sketch of the original sect from which they sprang, namely, the Shi'ites. Shi'ism began as a purely political movement on the day Mohammad passed away, and the partisans of Ali claimed the Caliphate for him.(2) They argued, that Mohammad appointed Ali as his successor in the famous farewell speech, and this is why they are known as "Ahl-An-Nass Watta'yin".(3)

Having failed as an Arab movement, after a few decades of Islamic expansion in the more cultured lands of the Near East, the Shi'a strove to obtain

(1) Ibid, p.85.

(2) Huart, Ch. Isma'iliya. Enc. of Islam, Vol. II.

(3) اهل البيت والشيعة

victory as a Moslem sect. (1) New conditions confronted Shi'ism and it had to adapt itself to new environments which ultimately changed the identity of this sect to something entirely different. The grievances, miseries and discontent of the non-Arab Moslems (Mawali) provided big prospects for any revolutionary movement against the snobbishness of the Umayyad Arabs. Thus Shi'ism appealed to the Mawali and soon they became alarming in the Moslem Empire. But we should not forget that these Mawalis were superficially Islamised and thus they were apt to make new fundamental changes in the Shi'i doctrine. In fact a number of strange beliefs, borrowed from Christianity, Iranian and Babylonian heresies had access into Shi'i theology.(2) The mere appearance of the Mahdi (messianic idea) changed the status of the Imam from being a political candidate for power to a highly mysterious figure of great religious importance. The idea of the Mahdi might be attributed to a Persian origin, as Lewis points out, but on the other hand it could be of Christian origin based on the idea of the return of Jesus. But one fact should remain clear in our mind that all the dramatic setting necessary for the appearance of the Mahdi was there, the murder of Ali, the martyrdom of Hussein at Karbala and a considerable social change.

(1) Huart, Ch.Isma'iliya. Enc.of Islam, Vol.II.
(2) Lewis, B. The Origin of Isma'ilism p.24.

THE HOUSE OF ALI

Ali, d. 40/661

Hasan, d. 50/670

Hussein, d. 61/680

Muhammad b. Al-Hanafiya d. 81/700-1

Hasan

Ali Zain Al-Abidin, d. 94/712

Abdallah

Muhammad Al-Baqir
d. 113/731-2

Zaid, d. 125/743

Ibrahim

Muhammad An-Nafs
Az-Zakiya
d. 145/762

Yahya

Isa

Jaafar As-Sadiq d. 148/765

Isma'il

Musa Al-Kazim, d. 183/799

Muhammad

Ali Ar-Rida, d. 202/817-8

Ahmad

Muhammad Al-Jawad, d. 220/835

The Hidden
Imams of the
Isma'iliis

(Hussein (Al-Mu'11)

The Imams of
the Twelver
Shi'a

Ali al-Hadi, d. 254/868

(Muhammad Al-Qa'im

Hasan al-Askari, d. 260/873-4

The Fatimid Caliphs

Muhammad al-Mahdi
disappeared 260/873-4

The Shi'ites argued that Mohammad was the last of the prophets and that Ali is the last of the executors.(1) Thus Abu Bakr, Omar and Othman were usurpers and some of the Shi'ites went as far as saying that Ali is God himself; these were known as extreme Shi'ites.(Ghulat).(2)

These Ghulat also held that the Imam might "suffer temporary occultation" (ghaybah) but he would return one day and save the world.

But soon a schism, as to the number of Ali's successors divided the Shi'ites. The "Twelvers"(3) held the view that there were twelve Imams and this sect is known today as Shi'a. On the other hand, the "Seveners"(4) acknowledged only seven legitimate Imams. This sect is known today as Isma'ilis, because they considered Isma'il as the last of the Imams.(5)

The Isma'ili movement is of historical and social significance. One look at it and the question arises: why did the movement spread so widely? The general feeling, especially of the Sunnis, is that it represented the efforts of pre-Islamic religions, to embrace Islam and, eventually to replace it by destroying it from inside.(6) This tendency is clear because "the object of the Batiniya was to convert the Muslims to the religion of the Magians with the aid of the method of allegorization by which they interpret the Quran and the Sunna...." (7)

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- (1) Huart, Ch. Isma'liya, Enc. of Islam, Vol.II p.1.
 - (2) Abdallah Ibn Saba' and the Ghulat.
 - (3) Al-Ithna - 'Ashariyah
 - (4) Al-Sab'iyah.
 - (5) See the House of Ali.(Family Tree).
 - (6) Ghazali and Baghdadi.
 - (7) Lewis, B. The Origin of Isma'ilism, p.90.

But there is another tendency which regards the Isma'ili movement as national and racial rather than religious. It was a movement of the Indo-European against the semitic character of Islam. (1)

The ninth and tenth centuries mark a commercial and industrial activity in the Abasside Empire and social problems became more and more acute. The revolt of the Zanj marks a danger signal to the coming of the more important Carmatian revolt of 822 which was based on the precept that "for those who understand, there is no need to obey".(2)

Isma'ilism appealed to the multitude of races and religions because it stressed "interconfessionalism", by means of which the relative truth of all religions was recognised.(3) This view is eloquently expressed in Rasa'il Ikhwan As-Safa, which horrified the Sunni jurists. We should not forget also that one of the charges brought against Isma'ilism was communism because they believed that "riches must be shared and distributed according to need".

The origin of the Fatimid movement is to be sought among the Isma'ilis, whose center was the small town of Salamyah between Homs and Hama.

The Isma'ilis number 31,813 in Syria today, they are almost all occupied in agriculture. Their social structure

(1) The writings of Carra de Vaux and Blochet.

(2) Lewis, B. The Origin of Isma'ilism. p.93.

(3) Ibid " " p.93.

is tribal and feudal which spell poverty and ignorance. We should note also that they are not molested on religious grounds although they hate the Sunni majority intensely as the source of their troubles. Right from the beginning, the Sunnis were usurpers and never gave Ali a chance to save this world from injustice. For all this their allegiance is divided. They have another spiritual leader, Agha Khan, representing the Imamite in his fat, gouty and unromantic personality. The Isma'ilis believe that Agha Khan is the descendant of Ali and that he embodies the spirit of the Imam and hence he is their leader par excellence.(1)

But what keeps them fast together is the idea of the Hidden Imam who suffers temporary eclipse and who will return one day as a Mahdi (the guided one) to fill this earth with justice. Everything they do is tempered by the Mahdi's return and it is practically their only hope in life. This is why, I think, they have been fossilized and this is why they are averse to every new idea. Whatever they are doing or whatever their condition is can last but temporarily. To them everything had stopped on the day their Imams went into hiding and life, as it ought to be, will not be resumed until the arrival of the Mahdi. They are waiting. In the meantime let us see what we can do.

(1) Interview with Amir Merza of Salamyah.

111) THE SCATTERED RELIGIOUS MINORITIESA. The Christians.

The Christians of Syria fall within the category of the scattered minorities. Unlike the Druze, Alawis and the Isma'ilis they are not concentrated in one particular region, though they are somehow compact in the districts and towns where they are found. But they have never been cut out from the stream of national life, on the contrary, they have always been ready to share the fruits of civilisation with each other. That is why they do not constitute a major problem in Syria and I am positively sure that they will not in the future. On the contrary, they have always been among the leaders of political, educational and social reforms.

The Christians have had a characteristic role to play. Being composed of many different sects - Maronites, Roman Catholics, Melchites, Greek Orthodox and Protestants - they never had a policy of their own. They were much too weak to cause trouble by themselves if it had ever occurred to them. But unfortunately, Foreign Powers made the utmost use of them during the latter part of the 19th. century and the early decades of the 20th. The Maronites, for instance, considered themselves as the "Proteges" of France. Russia was the champion of the Greek Orthodox community, while the Protestants - a very scant group of recent origin - looked towards the U.S.A. The relations of these groups with the Sunnite Moslems have been largely formal, (1) and this is particularly true in the case of

(1) Hourani, A. Minorities in the Arab World. p.82.

the older generation brought up under the Ottoman rule, because of the "Millet System". The essence of that system was in the treatment of the minority as an entity in itself, organised under the rule of its spiritual heads, which had specific powers to deal with matters that were directly and intimately the concern of that particular minority group. This in itself accounts for the formal relation existing between the Christian sects on one hand and the Moslem majority on the other.

Some of the Christians in Syria argue that the "Millet System" should be revived on the ground that it is a sound system. But I think, that they are forgetting one major and fundamental fact. The "Millet System" implies that we should base our social structure on religion thus creating a number of social structures within the State. Instead of minimising differences it will widen the gap and divide the nation into sects.

Because the Christian sects had been a "Proteges" of one power or another they have never had a well formulated policy as one single group. On the contrary, they have accepted their position and are now trying to live with the majority and to share with them the fruits of civilisation.

The Christians of Syria can rightly be considered as the enlightened group in the country. Many of them belong to ardent national circles and they have shared the strife against France when the integrity of the nation was at stake. If some of them have been used by Foreign

Powers to further their ends, those who have been so used are the few exceptions which go to confirm the general rule.

Though there are so many close links between the Arabic speaking Christians and Moslems in Syria, nevertheless, there are certain sharp differences which the majority must obliterate. They differ from one another only in religion, but also in certain intellectual, economic and social characteristics. For instance, it is important to notice, remarks Hourani, that "32% of the Christians students attended schools controlled mainly by foreign Christian missions, 61% attended private schools mostly maintained by religious communities, and only 7% attended official schools".(1)

Such educational diversity is reinforced by social difference. The Christians lead a social life of their own, though this has no direct bearing on the relations existing between them and the Moslem majority. This difference, however, is dwindling especially as the Syrian Moslems young men are seeking, in an increasing measures, the opportunities of education. In Syria today, one can notice the beginning of a new social life, progress and civilisation have finally found their way to homes in Syria. Thus one can feel confident in declaring that national consciousness in Syria has greatly weakened those differences and is making for the creation of a new, healthy and stable society.

(1)Hourani, A. Syria and Lebanon, p.143

See also Rapport du Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, 1938, p.91.

In spite of such incidents as those of 1860, the history of Syria has been, on the whole, one of toleration. In Syria we cannot speak of religious persecution. All minorities, and especially the Christians, have enjoyed freedom of worship. I believe, that national consciousness will shortly bridge the social differences which as hitherto kept the Christians and the Moslems majority apart.

B. The Yezidis.

One of the social "fossils" which decorate the great "Museum of races and religions " in the Near East are the Yezidis, the so-called "Devil-worshippers".(1) Most of the Yezidis belong to the Kurdish race and live in the upper part of the fertile Crescent in Mt. Sinjar between Iraq and Syria. A few of them live in Killis and Ayntab, in the Aleppo region. Almost all are rural and work in agriculture; a few - the Kojjer tribe - are still in the primitive nomadic stage.

Although many historians and orientalists have studied their life and religion; yet they have not come to a final agreement about them, because the Yezidis have no clear records of their own religion. They are estimated to be 2888 in Syria. It is believed that in certain regions they have been depleted, and that their number has been greatly decreased owing to their massacre (by the Turks) during the 18th. and 19th. centuries.

(1) Chol, Beg Ismail: The Yezidis Past and Present, edited by Zurayk, C.K., preface Beirut, 1934.

Scholars have also differed as to the origin of their name, Some of the Yezidis believe that their name is derived from Yezid (the son of Mu'awiah, the first Ommayad Caliph). But some scholars think that it was Yezid-Ibn-Unayssah, (1) a leader of the Kharajite sect. Others are of the opinion that the name is derived from Ized which means "worthy to be worshipped". The Persians used it to mean - the angels - who are the intermediaries between God and the people. Hence either of the last two derivations is probable. Thus we can gather that the meaning of the term "Yezidis" would be "the worshippers of God", or "the worshippers of the Angels".

Not much is known about the origin of their religion. While some of them believe that they are the direct descendants of Adam, others trace their origin to the marriage of Mu'awiah I to an old woman who was miraculously converted to a youthful girl to give birth to Yezid. (2) But some scholars think that the origin of this community is Christian (Nestorians). (3)

However this may be, one may reasonably conjecture that the origin of this sect is Persian and that it borrowed its beliefs from the mosaic religions of the Near East, for some are easily traceable to Hebrew, Christian and Moslem origin. (4)

The Yezidis believe in the existence of an almighty God who created this universe but he is not "managing" it any more. The management has been turned over to the

(1) يزید بن ابيہ

(2) Empson, R.H.W. The cult of the Peacock Angel, p.29

(3) Isya Joseph, Devil Worship, pp. 97-103, Boston 1919

(4) Chol, Beg Ismail, The Yazidis past and Present, edited by Zyrayk, p.66

Peacock Angel, God's executive agent, whom the Yezidis have raised to the dignity of a godhead.(1) This angel had once disobeyed God's command, so he was banished from the Almighty Presence and remained crying for seven thousand years until his tears had filled seven jars, which he threw into hell and thus extinguished its fire. Later he was restored by God to his original office. The followers of other religions make a mistake in considering the Yezidis as devil-worshippers because instead of cursing the devil, the Yezidis pray to him and try to please him. But the Yezidi devil is not the traditional Satan of other religions, for he is not that power that creates evil and has a lust for it, but he is that power which manages and directs the Universe.

The prophet of this religion is Sheikh Adi whom the Yezidis consider to be on the level as the Peacock Angel. But some scholars think that this man is no other than Sheikh Adi-Ben-Musafer, a Moslem, who was born near Ba'alback in Syria and later migrated to the mountainous region to the east of Mousul. He established there a school and had quite a large following, until he died in the 6th century of the Hijrah.(2) Yet if we examine his books and his notes we find that they have no connection with the teachings

(1)Empson, R.H.W. The cult of the Peacock Angel, p.136

(2)Chol.Beg Ismail, The Yazidis past and present, edited by Zurayk, C.K., p.7.

of the Yezidis. And that is what keeps the relationship, between the two names - if ever there had been two different persons - vague and mysterious.

God, the Peacock Angel and Sheikh Adi are thus the trinity in Yezidism. The connection between this trinity and man is made through lower angels. But our knowledge of the Yezidi religion is fragmentary so that our conception is ambiguous and disconnected.

As to their social life and customs something can be said. Most of them are of Kurdish origin and speak the Kurdish language in all its dialects. Some of them also speak another language akin to Turkish or Arabic. The Yezidis are known for their honesty, industry and love of freedom and independence. Their social structure is still tribal, and each tribe is divided and subdivided into smaller groups. They also have the caste system, marked by a sharp cleavage between the common people and the clergy. The former are just one class in which economic hierarchy is unknown. The latter, however, are divided into different classes: The Sheikh, the Pir *الپير*, the Faqir *الفقير*, the Qawal *القوال*, the Kojk, and at the end of the social ladder come the Farrash *الفراشي* the Shawish *الشاويش*, and the servant of the shrine of Sheikh Adi.(1) Each class wears a particular dress and performs specific duties; the Yezidis are very conservative and stick to their

(1)Empson, R.H.W. The cult of the Peacock Angel, pp.89-102.

socio-religious classes. They even think that such a conservatism helps them live and survive in this hostile world. According to this caste system no one is allowed to marry from outside his caste nor even to be promoted to a higher one. Each individual has to live and die a member of a certain waste. These castes are governed by two persons: one is a temporal ruler, the other a spiritual ruler who is the highest authority in matters of religion.

The Yezidis have suffered a great deal because (it is said) they refused to publish their religious books - a fact which made the Ottoman Moslem rulers to suspect them and believe that theirs was a pagan religion. The massacres of 1781, 1791, 1802, 1809, 1837 and 1892 in which many Yezidis were slaughtered and their towns plundered, are an evidence of their suffering through the 18th. and the 19th. centuries. Yet despite all privation, destitution and suffering they remained steadfast to their religion, a steadfastness which compels admiration.

CHAPTER III.Racial Minorities.

The stranger within my gate,
He may be true or kind;
But he does not talk my talk,
I cannot feel his mind.
I see the face and the eyes and the mouth,
But not the soul behind.

Kipling.

How can a nation preserve its homogeneity when it is subject to infusion by streams of immigrants or invaders? And the question of the mixing of races is not a simple one which answers to a formula. We do not have a blue print according to which the process of social transition may be worked out. But we have a sufficiently clear idea of the basic elements of the problem.

Unification of races is based on assimilation. Biological assimilation is based on the fact that the taking organism remains constant - in essence - while the taken-in change; it is thus a one-way process. Social assimilation is not a one-way process except in very rare cases, it is a process of give and take.

Here a reasonable question obtrudes: Are race and nationality closely interwoven? Race may change while nationality remains the same, but on the other hand, nationality also may undergo fundamental modification upon an unaltered race basis.

By the force of political circumstances, a single nationality may be divided among two or more states. The situation of Canada and the U.S. might serve as an example. Again racially, the people of northern France are much more akin to the people of southern Germany than to those of southern France. Yet as Frenchmen and Germans

they took up arms against each other and fought many bloody battles.

On that basis, we can say, that a nation can be a blend of races, and that loyalty or devotion is the result of a sense of "belonging" to a nation and of sharing a common destiny with its members.

Now we turn to the Racial Minorities existing in Syria in order to study their problems.

I. The Kurds.

"Look at our dashing horsemen who know neither fear nor retreat. Look at the speed and the irresistible thrust of their mounts. Our men fire their rifles at the enemy and aim actually at the gallop; they can fight even while slipping below the girths of their saddles and firing between the forelegs of their horses. We can, by Allah, conquer the world with such men and no nation in the world can resist us for very long."(1)

Such was the picture of the warlike Kurds drawn by Musto Ahmad Agha, one of the chiefs of the Kurdish tribal confederation of Batwan inhabiting a region to the north of Mosul. With the full belief that, if given the chance, they could conquer the world with their men. Such chieftains as Musto Ahmad Agha aim at securing territorial integrity for their tribes in what they commonly called Kurdistan, and it is thought

(1) Safrastian: Kurds and Kurdistan, p.7.

that the efforts of such chieftains - some of whom are still alive - are stirring the Kurdish race to national consciousness, but unfortunately in a world which has ceased to attribute a meaning to national and natural boundaries. The awakening has come too late. There is no indication that it will ever crystallize into the creation of a nation-state. But many Kurds still believe that they can conquer the world and that "no nation can resist them for very long."

In the mountainous region between the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf lies Kurdistan - a part of the west Asiatic heart-land. It is a highly "relieved" country of 500,000 square Klm. which comprises almost all the south eastern part of present-day Turkey, the northern part of Iraq and the north western part of Iran. It has a population of 8 million(1). That may not, however, be the exact number of the Kurds existing today; for no earnest attempt has been made by the Turkish, Iranian or Iraqi Governments to take an exact census of their Kurdish subjects. Any information published by them is tempered by their tendency to minimize the Kurdish problem. At any rate 8 million is the figure published by the "Centre d'Etudes Kurdes" as an approximation; I take their word for it.

Race - Language - Religion.

The Kurds belong by race and language to the Indo-European stock, and that was one of the obstacles to their

(1) Bulletin du Centre d'Etudes Kurdes.

assimilation. Linguistic difference between the Kurds and their neighbours has closed the door in the face of evolutionary fusion and assimilation. The Kurds boast of their language and do not seem, when they can help it, ready to lose it. Due to this, one can safely say, that all measures that have been taken to enforce a new language on the Kurds - Turkish in Turkey - Iranian in Iran and Arabic in Iraq - have met with failure. Even in towns, the Kurds continue to speak their own language at home and among themselves. It is only in very important circles in Turkey that they refrain from using it, because Turkish is the language of the Elite(1).

Kurdish, however, is not a unified language, although some Kurdish scholars are trying to unify it. It is, as Hourani describes it, "a group of dialects differing widely among themselves and akin to Persian."(2) Culturally, Kurdish has no importance because there is no record of any outstanding written literature. The Kurds have been and still are tribes with no national consciousness and if any consciousness is ever to be found, it would be that of belonging to the tribe - an awareness not sufficient to create a tradition of nationhood.

With the exception of a few Christians, some Jews and a number of Yezidis, the Kurds are Moslems mostly of

(1) Interview with Amir Jeladet Bedirkhan in Damascus on October 25, 1950.

(2) Hourani, A. Minorities in the Arab World, p.4.

the Sunnite sect. The interested States, namely Turkey, Iran and Iraq have demanded assimilation on the basis of the similarity of religion. But the racial and linguistic differences that exist between the Kurds and their neighbours have rendered this common denominator ineffective. The elements of disunity, as the Kurds claim, are more powerful than those of unity. Nevertheless, the interested countries are trying to assimilate forcibly the Kurdish minorities. Should this prove feasible in Turkey where the people are Sunnites it does not follow that it will ever be successful in Iran, where the majority of the population is Shi'ite.

Historical Background of Kurdistan.

It is rather obvious that in this part of western Asia no other "genuine" ethnic group has been more persistently abused than the Kurdish race. Their main fault is assumed to be "their unsubmissive way of life, always intolerant and hostile to any higher authority, whether it be conqueror, legal sovereign power, or imperial neighbour."(1) Unaccustomed to molestation from outside and having led for centuries a wild self-rule and enjoyed a measure of territorial independence, Kurdish tribes do not understand why they should submit to foreign rule. As long as the weapons of warfare were the bow and spear, the Kurds

(1) Safrastian : Kurds and Kurdistan, p.15.

held their own against mighty empires and conquerors. Now with modern inventions and the various uses of gunpowder and explosives, the Kurds can no longer withstand the onslaught of their enemies who have stolen a march over them.

From time immemorial, the Kurds were always associated with the empires that rose in the Middle East. "Some of the most ancient kings of Sumerian cities, kings of Akhad and Babylonia down to Xenophon, the Commanders of the Ten Thousand, have described their dealings with those invincible mountaineers in simple and matter of fact language."(1) They had been hard and rude, but no clear details of their development can be traced. And the attempt made by Safarastian, in his book "The Kurds and Kurdistan," to bridge the gaps in their ancient history, has failed. It served to increase the confusion by the addition of a few more names and dates. It can thus be safely said that the ancient history of the Kurds is both confused and confusing; until we come to consider them as peaceful mountaineers far from any foreign intervention except in such major historical events as the expansion of the Moslem Empire or the Mongol invasion.

The modern history of the Kurds is less complicated however. It sets in with the occupation of Kurdistan by Sultan Selim I - the first Ottoman Caliph - in the

(1) Ibid, p.15.

realization of his Pan-Islamic-Policy. More than once the Kurds came to the help of Sultan Selim in his wars against Persia. This cooperation was later established on a firmer basis as the Kurds were accorded recognition of independence under the suzerainty of the Sultan. Thenceforth, the Kurdish Princes participated in all the wars of the Sultans as loyal vassals.

With the evolution of Turkey from a confederation of vassal States under Ottoman leadership into a national State, Turco-Kurdish relations received a fatal set back. It is from that moment that the struggle began, and it continues to the present day. It started with infringements of the rights of the Kurdish Princes, and Prince Bedirkhan revolted between 1842-1847 and revolts continued thereafter in ever increasing number until they comprised the Kurdish nation as a whole. The massacres of Dersim in the summer of 1938 are a living example(1).

Since the Kemalist regime, the Turks and Persians have increased their efforts to suppress the Kurdish people. The obvious evidence is the Treaty of Sa'adabad signed on July 8, 1937(2). Iraq had later joined the Turco-Persian convention which laid down the main lines of the policy to be followed against the Kurds working in Iraq, Turkey and Persia for Kurdish independence. As a

(1) "Delenda est Dersimo", Dersim is no more, see Safars-tian, p.87.

(2) Clause VII.

result, the new policy found expression in Turkey by prohibiting the use of the Kurdish language. Large scale deportations, on account of insurrections in 1925, 1928, 1930 and later in 1937-38 was undertaken. These rebellions were of such a magnitude that the "Turks had to bring the whole Army Corps and aircraft into action." (1) But that did not help the Turks to solve the problem at all, for the Kurds cannot easily forget the massacres and mass-killing both before, during and after the first world war. The Allied Powers at the Peace Conference in Paris realising the frame of mind of the Kurds agreed to provide a solution for the problem. That was to be guaranteed by the Treaty of Sevres.

The Treaty of Sevres: 1920.

Signed in August, 1920 by both the great powers and Turkey, the Treaty of Sevres recognized the fundamental rights of the Kurdish Nation as follows:-

Art.62 "A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft, within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south south of the southern boundary of Ammenia as it may

(1) Prince Kumaran Bedirkhan: Memorandum to the Great Powers, August, 30, 1943.

be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia The scheme shall contain full safeguards from the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas."

Art.63. "The Turkish Government hereby agrees to accept and execute the decisions of both the Commissions mentioned in Article 62 within three months from their communication to the said Government."

Art.64. "Stipulated that if within one year the Kurdish people as defined in Article 62 could show that their majority desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council of the League of Nations then consider that these people are capable of such independence..... Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas."

But alas! such recognition was still-born and the independence that was guaranteed to the Kurds did not materialise. The Treaty of Sevres was superseded by that of Lausanne in which the high sounding phrases of Kurdish independence found us place. The Allies thus betrayed the Kurds and left them alone in a world that recognized the strong and revered the mighty, accused them of backwardness, primitiveness and unreadiness for self-government. The indifferent world left Kurdistan divided between Persia, Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

But the Kurdish chiefs did not remain silent; they understood that they could not fight for their independence unless they organised themselves. In the best sense of the word they can be described as realists. They knew by instinct that real national freedom is not granted, but must be wrested by force from those who deny it. The revolutions of 1925, 1930, 1937 are salient proof that the Kurdish leaders have understood this truth.

The Treaty of Sevres, though never implemented, is of great significance to modern Syria and to the Kurds in this country, for it recognised the right of the Mandatory Power to organise the relationship between the minorities. On the basis of the Treaty of Sevres some Kurds in Syria asked for local autonomy in Jezira. The demand was resisted.

In Syria, the Kurds are considered to be well over 200,000(1). Most of them inhabit the northern parts of Syria - Jezira district mainly in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains. There are about 20,000 of them in Damascus, most of them living in a particular quarter of their own.

The majority of the Kurds have been in Syria for generations. Some have emigrated, fled rather, from Turkey, in the last half century. It is very difficult to ascertain from documentary evidence how many Kurdish

(1) Safrastian, p.91.

officers and chieftains of Sultan Saladdin had settled in Aleppo, Damascus and other Syrian towns after the death of the Ayubi Sultan. No doubt, some Kurds have lived in Syria before Salaheddin was born - as some cuneiform tablets prove(1). But the largest influx of Kurds to Syria took place a little time after the persecution of the Kurds was started in Turkey.

The majority of the Kurds in Syria speak Kurdish, but many are bilingual as they speak Arabic as well, and "some, particularly in Damascus, speak only Arabic." (2) There is, however, a gradual process of assimilation going on among the Kurds, because they are living among Arabs and have no facilities of education except in Arabic.

In spite of this they have little or no national loyalty to Syria. Their social stratification is mostly tribal and they are fundamentally loyal to their chiefs; and it is the latter who are now the leaders of the national movement. The Kurdish intelligentsia is small in number and the masses have no national consciousness at all. They hate the Turks and at the same time they are very suspicious of Arab nationalism because they are afraid it might become intolerant and chauvinistic.

In Syria, Kurdish nationalism is strong among some

(1) Ibid, p.89.

(2) Hourani, A. Minorities in the Arab World.p.85.

groups particularly those in Damascus. "Indeed, Damascus and Beirut were the main centers of Kurdish national and cultural movements, directed largely by the Badrkhan Brother."(1) The nationalists - expect full independence. It is only the ultra-nationalists among them who look towards a united Kurdistan. The former, for the most part, expect and claim autonomy in the Jezira, or "at least the right to live as Kurds, immune from attempts to force them to assimilate(2).

The French Mandatory power in Syria was considered, ever since it took the reins of government into its hands, as the champion of the minorities. The Kurds, no less than any other minority in Syria, favored France and were grateful to her for the good treatment they received. That was, indeed, the reason why a section of the Kurds of the Jezira caused disturbances. Those who revolted then were doing so not only for their own benefit as much as for the interest of the mandatory authorities who wanted to widen the gap between the majority and the minorities. But many of the Kurdish leaders were against such a policy and time and again they helped to reduce the tension between Arabs and Kurds and urged the latter to consider themselves as Syria nationals, ~~and~~ a foot of equality with the rest of the population.

(1) Amir Jeladet Bedirkhan and his brother Dr. Kamuran Bedirkhan, see Hourani, Minorities in the Arab World p.85.
(2) Hourani, A. Minorities in the Arab World, p. 86.

Indeed, according to the Syrian Constitution all the races and religious sects in Syria are considered Syrians having equal rights and opportunities. The Kurds have representatives in the Syrian parliament, public offices are open to them - provided they know Arabic - as freely as to any other Syrian. As things stand today there is no indication that the Kurds in Syria will ever contemplate, by themselves, to oppose the national government. For they do not aspire any longer at forming a state of their own, but at living unmolested as Kurds. But how far can such an aspiration be guaranteed? This is the burning question and every Kurd is interested in the answer.

The Kurds in Syria are not only a racial minority but also a linguistic minority and, therefore, a cultural minority. The similarity of religion which exists between them and the majority is off-set by a number of divisive factors such as race, language, and culture.

Hence, when the Kurds ask for their national and territorial integrity, it is with complete disregard of the interests of other Moslem communities that they do so. Their interests are national not religious; and since they differ both in race and language, they must not and cannot be trusted aside as an insignificant minority.

Thus far we have acknowledged the problem of the Kurds in Syria as being one of a group not ready to submit

to the majority. "The present phase of the problem arises from the persistence of traditional suspicions and resentments; the entanglement of nationalism with religion; the differing social customs of different sections of the population; and the pervasive instability of administrative and political life."(1) On the one hand, such a description befits the conditions in which the Kurds have been living in Syria. For the Syrian government has only recently taken to govern itself by itself. On the other hand, this does not negate the existence of the problem of the Kurds as a racial minority.

The Kurds have the right to live in Syria and this is guaranteed them by the constitution. I believe that, through the performance of civil, social and political duties, the Kurds are getting nearer to assimilation than before. For daily contacts, a common destiny and participation in public and civil duties are binding factors stronger than any working for disunity. The Kurds in Syria will soon find themselves to be as good Syrians as the Arab themselves.

II. The Armenians.

Like many of the homogeneous ethnic groups in the world, the Armenians have developed a specific type of countenance, yet it is not easy to distinguish them from

(1) Hourani, A. Minorities in the Arab World, p.109.

others by sight, though many of us claim to be able to do so. They are a hybrid in their physical appearance as any Near Eastern people and this accounts for the marked differences now existing between the Armenians of the mountains, the rural areas, and urban districts. But at the time when they were first heard of in history, the Armenians were undoubtedly not so much different ones from the others.

It is in the annals of Assyria that we first come to know of them, living in the Armenian plateau and raided, though ineffectually, by the Assyrian armies from the lowlands of Mosul(1). For a time, Van, a city in north Anatolia, was the citadel of the Armenian kings who fought Assyria for more than two centuries. Their language was at first cuniform; but then "they adapted the foreign script to their native tonguewhich is considered .. to be neither Semetic nor Indo-European, nor to have any discernible affinity with the still obscurer language of the Hittites further west."(2) The only valid assumption, however, is that the people who spoke the language were indigenous in the land and could further be considered as the chief ancestors of the present Armenian race.

Curious, as it may seem, the modern Armenian language is Indo-European with some affinity to the Iranian language. This is an evidence of the fact that the Rartian (old Armenian) language was supplanted by the new tongue after considerable displacements of the population.

(1) Fallodon, Viscount G.of : The Treatment of the Armenians, p.593
(2) Ibid, p.597

Whatever the cause, we are left with the bare fact that "Armenia - in the classical form, of which the spoken language of today is a development - was the established language of the land by the fifth century A.D."(1)

Like other languages, the Armenian language might have perished before the more vigorous Greek, were it not for the simple fact that it had already become the canonical language of a national church long before Greek penetrated into the peripheries of Anatolia. Thus the conversion of Armenia to Christianity was as important a factor in the evolution of Armenian nationalism as the introduction of the national language. The Christian faith was a state religion; and it was thus, the church through its nationalism that led the Armenians to hold fast together. It was this too that made them a distinctive part of the Near Eastern World.

The Armenians continued to rule themselves until the seventh century. The mastery of Byzantium and Persia over western Asia was transferred to the Arabs. But as the Abbasid Caliphate started on its decline, the outlying provinces detached themselves one by one from domination and set up principalities which, however, were not destined to remain unmolested for long.

In the eleventh century, a new power appeared in the East - Turkey. In a short time, the Seljuks became the masters over Asia, and the whole of Armenia was under

(1) Fallodon, Viscount G. of : The Treatment of the Armenians, P.598.

the Seljuks' mercy. But the Armenians were much better off under the Seljuks, who at least, had a liking for civilization - than under the Mongols, who in the thirteen century ravaged Armenia and destroyed civilization wherever they found it.

The Ottomans who followed were unable to check the progress of the anarchy which the Mongols had begun. And when the dawn of the sixteenth century began to break over the whole of the Near Eastern countries including the Balkans - from the gates of Vienna to those of Tabriz - Armenians found themselves under the masterful hand of one single government. Thus from about the beginning of the sixteenth century and onwards the majority of the Armenian nation was subject to the rule of the Ottoman Turks. I said, the majority, because the province of Erivan was recovered by the Persians in the seventeenth century and was ceded to Russia in 1834. The Province of Kars was also appropriated by Russia following the Turco-Russian war of 1878. On June 4th., 1878, the British Government and Turkey signed a secret treaty which, however, was published shortly afterwards, a little while before the signature of the Treaty of Berlin. It is commonly known as the Anglo-Turkish Convention:

Art. I. "If Batum, Kars, or any of them shall be retained by Russia, and if any attempt shall be made at any future

time by Russia to take possession of any further territories of His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan in Asia, as fixed by the definitive Treaty of Peace, England (sic) engages to join His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan, in defending them by force of arms. In return, His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan, promises to England to introduce necessary reforms, to be agreed upon later between the two Powers, into the government and for the protection of the Christians and other subjects of the Porte in these territories. And in order to enable England to make necessary provision for executing her engagement, His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan, further consents to assign the Island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England."(1)

By an Annex to this convention, signed July 1. 1878, it was, inter alia, further provided: "That if Russia restores to Turkey Kars and the other conquests made by her in Armenia during the last war, the Island of Cyprus will be evacuated by England, and the convention of the 4th. June, 1878 will be at an end."(2) It is from then that the most sinister epoch in the history of the Armenians starts.

As Christians, the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire belonged to the "Millet", which maintained for the Armenians their religious individuality. The features of

(1) Bryce, James: Transcaucasia & Ararat P.P. 448-49
(2) Ibid. P.449.

the "Millet System" was summarised by H.Luke as follows:-

"The heads, both central and local. of the Millets were chosen by the "millet", but the choice was subject to the Sultan's approval, communicated in the form of an Imperial "berat", which alone enabled the nominees to assume their offices and take possession of their temporalities ... (They had) their place - a high one - in the official hierarchy of the State, of which they were regarded as functionaries ... they were ex-officio members, in the provinces, of the provincial administrative council, while those at headquarters had the right of audience of the Sultan. The Heads of the "Millets" represented their flocks in their general and personal affairs vis a vis the Sublime Porte.

The autonomy of the "Millets" was based ... on ancient custom, which was reinforced in the nineteenth century by specific edicts ... Their government was conducted by the head of the "Millet", generally assisted by a council composed of clerical and lay members. The "Millets" were autonomous in spiritual and in certain administrative and judicial matters. Their jurisdiction embraced, in the religious sphere, clerical discipline; in the administrative sphere, the control of their properties, including cemeteries, education and churches; in the judicial sphere, marriage, dowries, divorce and alimony, civil rights and, in some "Millets", testamentary dispositions. Sentences pronounced by the courts

of the "millets", if within their competence, were executed on their behalf by the State."(1)

The relations between the Turks and the Armenians were favourable until almost the beginning of the latter part of the 19th. century. Suddenly we notice that, as more American Missions were established among the Armenians, intellectual and economic renaissance of Armenian life began.(2) The question we are to answer is this: Was the Armenian revival of the nineteenth century an inevitable menace to the sovereignty and integrity of the Ottoman State? Every evidence points to the fact that the Turks had suddenly decided to put the blame on the Armenians for every revolutionary movement in Turkey; and the Armenians were dispersed almost all over the Ottoman Empire. The alternative for the Armenians was not an Armenian State but rather a partition among the Powers. But England stood dead against this idea; the Sick Man was to be cured and not killed. Russia should not reach the Dardanelles and the warm waters of the Mediterranean. Ill-luck was pursuing the Armenians.

In the Congress of Berlin 1878 which met to revise the Treaty of San Stefano, the Big Powers engaged the Ottoman Government, in general terms to introduce "ameliorations" in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, without demanding any guarantees at all(3).

(1) Luke, H. The Making of Modern Turkey. pp 97-8.

(2) Bryce, p. 619.

(3) Article 61 of the Berlin Congress.

The Porte had no intention of enforcing them at all, and "the seeds of the 'Armenian Reforms'" had thus fallen upon stony ground, except in the mind of Abdul Hamid where it lodged and rankled till it bore the first of the 'Armenian Massacres!'(1)

The first step he took was to ~~crush~~ them by resuscitating the Kurds, whom he armed, while he systematically disarmed the Armenians. The only retaliation open to them was the formation of underground societies. This fitted perfectly into Abdul Hamid's plan for it gave him the necessary open justification for his sinister program.

In 1893 the Armenians, after being cornered, started their revolutionary activities, which were soon followed, namely in 1894, by the massacre of the inhabitants of Sassoun by the Turks. By 1896, the number of Armenians killed has risen to 100,000. The atrocities subsided for a time, owing to the intervention and mediation of the great Powers, especially England! But Russia was the greatest winner of all. This marks the beginning of the friendship between Russia and the Armenians.

In 1908, after the Young Turks had overthrown Abdul Hamid, the Armenians paid lip-homage to the new constitution, but were ready for revenge. No sooner had the First World War started than the massacres and deportations

(1) Bryce, p.622.

started again. The first batch of Armenians were deported from Zeitoun on the 8th. April, 1915.

".... We are informed that 150 Armenian from Dort Yol and 1.350 from Hassan-Beyli have been deported to Aleppo."(1) The same process of deportation was later applied to one Armenian center after another throughout the Ottoman Empire; meanwhile many were massacred on the way(2).

All through the war, massacres and deportations were carried out on a large scale. Many of the Armenians came to live in Aleppo, Jezirah and Deir-el-Zor. They had nothing with them and had to start from scratch. They settled wherever they were allowed to do so, and there they still await another turn of the wheel of destiny.

When the war came to an end in 1918, 1,200,000 or more Armenians had been deported or massacred.

It is estimated that those who were deported to Syria amounted to 450,000 people. Recent statistics show, however, that the Armenians in Syria amount to 120,000(3). The difference is accounted for by the mass migration to the U.S.A., Egypt, Lebanon and the U.S.S.R.

The Armenians in Syria may be considered as a semi-compact minority because they settled in the two largest

(1) Document No.138,139.140, The Treatment of the Armenians.
(2) Bryce :
(3) Ibid pp.650 and 664.

cities in Syria, namely, Aleppo and Damascus - 80,000 and 21,000 respectively(1). Many of them entered in successive waves after the First World War, fleeing from persecution, or "from the expectation of it" as in 1939 after the session of Alexandretta to Turkey."(2)

In general, they are town dwellers and yet they have remained a distinct group - almost "a half-isolated community, centred around their churches. They retain to a large extent, their strong sense of family and national solidarity. They cling to their language and maintain their own schools. They have their own charitable organizations, press and cultural life."(3)

At times, majority opinion has been against them, because they gave rise to an additional minority problem and because they were, at times, instruments of foreign interference(4).

Their difficulty in mastering Arabic has helped to keep them away from the Arabs. Again the influence of certain factions amongst them - the Tashnak, for instance - who are opposed to assimilation as representing the nationalists movement with the object of preserving their culture and customs with a view to returning to an independent Armenia, has militated against fusion. Other factions, like the Hanshak, are not so stern against assimilation. Their liberism, we must not be misled,

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- (1) Statistical Abstract of Syria. 1949.
(2) Hourani, A. Minorities of the Arab World, p.66.
(3) Ibid, pp.66-67.
(4) They served as irregulars in the French "Troupes Specials" during the Syrian Revolt of 1925.

is due to their avowed profession of Communism.

Like the Kurds, the Armenians are not a racial minority only, but a cultural and linguistic minority as well. The similarity of religion existing between the Sunni majority and the Kurds makes it easier for their assimilation. But the Armenians are a two-fold minority, a racial and a religious one, and that is why their assimilation seems to be slow and complicated. However, the Armenians seem to be ready to help the nationalist government. This is clear from the willingness of many Armenians to cooperate with the majority, even at the expense of losing their own individuality. They are very willing to work with the Arabs in general because of their fear of Turkey. Today they seem to be very cooperative, and indeed, during the Franco-Syrian crisis of 1945 "the Armenians as a whole, threw in their lot with the nationalists and resisted all attempts of the French Authorities to make use of them." (1)

However, there is one imminent danger - the communistic tendency of a group of them. To a large extent the center of gravity of the Communist Party in Syria has been the Armenians. They find in Russia the sworn enemy of Turkey and this might be as good a reason as any to join the party. We have also seen how Russia had adopted their cause long before it turned communist. The danger resides in the fact that the Communists -

(1) Hourani, A. Minorities in the Arab World p.84.

including the Armenian Communists - do not respect nor do they care for the interests and rights of the majority. The Armenians who joined the Communist party are in a worse position. They have become a political minority also.

Yet the problem of the Armenians remains one of compromise. Excluding the Communists, we can safely say, that the majority of the Armenians are willing to compromise. Those who are aware of the international situation have come to the conclusion that it is to their good to carry a Syrian citizenship. They have come to realise that Syria could be their new "home" provided they (the Armenians) perform the duties as citizens. They are guaranteed all the rights and privileges of the citizens and the freedom they enjoy in Syria is greater than any conceived in their wildest dreams.

It is in this context of freedom that the Armenians are now helping, through the application of their racial genius, to build the new Syrian State for prosperity and progress.

III. The Circassians.

The name Cherkess or Circaassian, in a general form, is given to the group of people who, at one time, in-

habited the Kuban territory in the north western district of the Caucasus. The Kuban territory spreads from the coast of the Black Sea (Taman Peninsula) southwards as far as Abkhazia(1).

After the Russian conquest of the Kuban area in 1864, most of the Cherkess tribes migrated to Turkey(2). According to Lulier, who is considered to be the best authority on the Cherkess, these tribes are divided as follow(3) :-

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. Abadzekh | 6. Moklosh |
| 2. Shapsug | 7. Kembui |
| 3. Notkuadjji | 8. Khatukai |
| 4. Kabertai | 9. Bzhedukh |
| 5. Beslenei | 10. Zhan |

The Cherkess have a number of languages but according to Dirr only the Kabardin and the Abkhazian are known to us. The phonetic character of these languages is very harsh, sharp aspirates and "strong glottal stops." The grammar is very strange and can by no means be fitted into any of the known systems. The Cherkess had, and I suppose still have, only an oral literature; they have no alphabet(4). Their literature is that of folklore and is mainly of two categories, the heroic legends and historical ballads, normal among people of warlike nature.

As to their history, we do not have reliable records

(1) Enc. of Islam, Vol. II. p. 834.

(2) Bryce, J. p. 60.

(3) Enc. of Islam, Vol. II. p. 838.

(4) Enc. of Islam, Vol. II. p. 834.

due to the literary difficulties and the oral mode of handing down the information.

Anthropologically speaking, the Cherkess are a mixture of fair and dark races, namely, northern and southern, "Subdolichocephalic." (1) They might be described as handsome men but the beauty of the Circassian women is proverbial.

Cattle breeding and farming are the main occupation from which the Cherkess derive a living. As horsemen, they are world famous. They are simple but brutish in nature and often blood thirsty. Hospitality is regarded by them not merely as a desirable quality but also a sacred duty. "The host is responsible with his life and property for the safety of his guest." (2) Their social structure was tribal and feudal but it was broken down as far back as 1826 when Hassan Pasha, the Turkish Ser-Askar of Anapa withdrew the privileges of the nobles. The democratic tendencies in Islam played a great role in the breaking down of the feudal organization.

J. Stanislaus Bell in his "Journal of a Residence in Circassia during the years 1837, 1838 and 1839" called the Moslem Charkess then, the "Radicals". (3) Yet Islam is not more than two hundred years old among them and

(1) More light than dark-eyed.

(2) Enc. of Islam, Vol. II. p. 835.

(3) Quoted by Dirr, A. See also Bryce, p. 54.

they are only superficially islamized. The first among the Cherkess to adopt Islam were the Kabardins but religion does not seem to be deeply rooted among them.

Christianity flourished for a while among them but faded away and the ruins of churches are to be found in the Kuban district. They had no priestly class. (1)

The administration of justice is commonly conducted according to tradition and custom, there is no clear caste of judges. Blood vengeance for murder is an absolute right and duty that society required. (2) However, it was also possible for a murderer to escape vengeance by paying a fine which resembles the "diyah" of the Arab Bedwin tribes.

A Cherkess usually buys his wife from her parents, but if for one reason or another they refuse, the suitor carries her off by force. It is a matter for pride for a man to carry his wife off by force. Up till the present day bride stealing forms an important part of the marriage ceremony.

Circassian have a strange way of raising up their children. They hand them over to strangers "directly after birth" to be brought up. These strangers are treated with great respect and they usually hold a better position than the real or actual parents. This has contributed to

(1) Enc. of Islam, Vol. II, p. 835.
(2) Ibid " " p. 835.

the solidarity of the Cherkess tribes by creating a kind of "foster-kinship".

An outlaw can enter any house and become a member of the family provided he succeeds in touching the breast of the mistress with his lips. The head of the house would consider the safety of the new member of the family as a sacred duty.

Another factor in social solidarity among the Cherkess is the system of "swearing brotherhood", it is a ceremony in which breast touching plays a major part; usually swearing on the Koran is the last item of the show, These Cherkess have greatly influenced the people among whom they lived.

When the Cherkess tribes fled from their homes in the 19th. century, after the Russian conquest, some of them were settled by the Ottoman Government along the edge of the Syrian Desert to act as a buffer people against the incessant Bedwin attacks and "encroachments". (1) They are estimated to be about 20,000 people but no actual census has been taken. (2) The bulk of the Cherkess in Syria are found in the region of the Hauran, Kunaytra and along the Turco-Syrian frontier.

They are still a separate group preserving their own language and traditions, their inter-marriage is one of the difficulties of their assimilation. But they are not

(1) Hourani, A. Syria and Lebanon, p.122.
(2) Ibid " " " p.127.

very popular among the Syrian Arab nationalists because they served as irregulars in the "Troupe Speciales" of the French Army during the Syrian Revolt of 1925. (1) At times they even demanded "local autonomy" which naturally added to their unpopularity. (2)

But the fact that they are Sunni Moslems, living in a region where they are completely cut off from their own people and land, they will logically be assimilated in time.

(1) Alef-Ba 2/9/25.
(2) Ibid, p.145.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOCIAL MINORITY - BEDOUIN TRIBES

"To him, the desert is more than a habitat,
it is the custodian of his sacred tradition,
the preserver of the purity of his speech
and blood and the first and foremost line
of defence against the outside world".

Hitti

THE BEDOUIN TRIBES IN SYRIA

Aneze - Rwala and its Satellites.

- Mashagea	}	Grouping of Dana Moslems.
- Sawalime)		
- Abdele		
- Wuld Ali		
- Hassane		

Sha'a) - Bteinat
) - Ebede

Fada'an) - Khorsa and Wuld Sliman
) - Wuld

Shammar) - Shammar Zor
) - Shammar Khorsa

Hadidine

Mawali Shamalin & Goblyin

Bani Khalid

Fawara

Abu Khamis

Ghayar

Wahab

Umur)	- Maharshe
		- Khorsan
		- Harb

Liheb

Ghiet

Sleib

Bdur

Tribes of Jabal Druze.

Massaid
Hassan
Sherafat
'Admat
Shenable
Sardieh (3)

Geographical Importance.

Man is partly conditioned by the geography of the land on which he lives as affecting those qualities which are utterly beyond his control. Culture cannot entirely escape the shadow of the environment in which it flourishes. (1) The Desert determined the nature of Bedouin^{life} and culture.

The Arabian peninsula was a fertile land, and recent excavations in Southern Arabia prove that there had been a great civilisation based, paradoxically enough on agriculture and trade. (2) Even in Al-Rab'ul-Khali there had been cities, and Bertram Thomas who had explored that arid area, tells of the Bedwins pointing out to him the place where the old city of "Ubar" is buried under the sand.

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- (1) Me. Iver, R.M. Society: Its structure and changes p.352
(2) Excavations.
(3) This table has been arranged with the help of the "Directory of Asha'ir" in Syria.

As a result of gradual climatic changes, Arabia was turned into a dry hot country which can hardly offer a means of support to its inhabitants. Even "desert vegetation is scanty. It consists of widely spaced plants which can grow and ripen quickly. Most of the vegetation appears like a magic carpet after a shower and then quickly withers".(1) As a result, the inhabitants were compelled to resort to a nomadic life, with its hardships, its disadvantages and its hard struggle for existence. It is a death or life battle for the bare necessities of life: water and pastures. Raiding one another to make up for the deficiency in food provisions became a recognised mode of acquisition; and Gertrude Bell rightly remarks: "The truth is that the Ghazu is the only industry the desert knows and the only game".(2)

The Syrian Desert

Northern Arabia was divided, according to Arab writers, into the Deserts of Al-Iraq, Al-Gezire and Syria.

Ibn-ul-Faqih suggests that the name Ash-Sham is derived from Ash Shamat, the name given to any red and black hills. According to Ibn-ul-Faqih, the traveller from the mountains of Aya' in the domains of the Tay tribe, to Gaza in Palestine, to the Jordan and to Damascus passes through Ash-Sham District (Syria).

(1) Brettell, L. Social and Economic Geography p.198.
(2) Bell, G.L. The Desert and the sown. p.66.

Syria spreads from Al-Kufa to Ar-Ramle and from Balis to Akaba (Ayla). The name Ash-Shamat is frequently used in northern Arabia to denote a range of hillocks composed of roseate or dark yellow rocks covered here and there by a black crust of lava. The southern boundary of Syria forms a straight line drawn from Al-Kufa to the sand desert of the Nefud proceeding thence westward to the Sinai peninsula.(1) According to Ibn-ul-Faqih, therefore, Arabia Deserts adjoins Syria.

For Al-Istakhri, the Syrian desert comprises the territory between Balis and Ayla (Akaba). The southern boundary of the Syrian desert is a straight line drawn from the district of Tebuk to the pasturage of Tay. At the time, the entire Nefud desert belonged to the Tay tribe; and the straight line of Al-Istakhri should be shifted to the northern fringe of the Nefud. Al-Istakhri does not say that the boundary line starts from Tebuk itself, but from the district of Tebuk. We may conclude that the boundary line led from the district of Madyan and ran in a north-easterly direction towards the Nefud.(2)

This interpretation is supported by Ibn Hawkal (3) and by Abul Feda (4) according to whom the Syrian desert spreads from Balis on the Euphrates to Ayla (Akaba) on

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- (1) Ibn-al-Faqih Buldan (De Goeji) p.91
 - (2) Al-Istakhri Masalik (De Goeji) p. 55. Leiden 1927.
 - (3) Ibn Hawkal Masalik (De Goeji) p.19.
 - (4) Abdul Feda Taqwim (Reinand and De Slane) p.80.

the Red Sea, and beyond to the northern boundary of the district of Tebuk. Thus, the southern boundary of the Syrian desert would form a straight line running eastward from Ayla (Akaba) along the southern base of the range of As-Sera' to Balis on the Euphrates.

Al-Kazwini attributes to Syria the entire region between the Euphrates and Al-Arish.(1)

It follows from the foregoing that parts of present-day Transjordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia form the homeland of the Bedwins of Syria. And the Bedwin is not aware of the political moves that ripped the country and divided his homeland between three different States, nor can he understand what actually took place. The necessity for political frontiers is beyond his conception. From early history to the present day, the Bedwins of the Syrian desert have remained politically and economically independent; and they have always looked upon the desert as their own land and felt secure in their possession. It is their belief and confidence in their ownership that has led them to resist encroachments. This same feeling lies at the bottom of their refusal to pay taxes to the Ottoman Government. They still resist payment to the Syrian Government until they are compelled to pay manu militari.

Furthermore, their seasonal migrations tend to foster the feeling that they stand alone - apart from the settled population. A look at the map (opposite ^{Cover} p. 7)

(1) Al-Kazwini 'Agaib (Wustenfild) vol. 2, p.137.

will give a clear idea of the constant movement, instability and restlessness of the Bedwin tribes.

Material life of the Bedwin

The aridity of the soil (or rather sand) on which he lives reduced the material wants of the Bedwin to the minimum: the irreducible minimum necessary for keeping body and soul together. His home and clothing, food and drink are all conditioned to fit his hard nomadic life.

The pivot of the Bedwin's material life is the camel. This animal seems to be the only one which is adaptable to human service under the exacting conditions of desert life. It can go for days without water and can endure the long marches across the sand with nothing more than the scarce vegetation of the desert for its food. It provides its owner with practically all the necessities of life. As the "ship of the desert" it is his means of locomotion or transportation, its milk often takes the place of both food and water thus staving off starvation and thirst, its wool is woven into cloth for dress or shelter and its dung is used for fuel and its urine is a valuable, though smelly, shampoo. With this knowledge, both the attention and care of the Bedwin for his camel are not surprising.

There is a variety of breeds of camels all known to the Bedwin and carefully classified. Some are valued for the quality and quantity of the milk they yield. Others are noted for their endurance in carrying burdens; and others are much in demand for their fleetness. Indeed, some camels are not only swift but fast: a good riding camel can make more than 200 Kilometres in twelve hours.(1) A man's fortune is valued by the number of camels; and an agreed number of camels is normally handed over by the bridegroom to his father in law in payment for the dowry of his wife.

Besides camels, some Bedwins possess horses, whose swiftness is invaluable to the Bedwin in raids where the surprise element often determines success. Although for endurance, the horse cannot be compared to the camel, the Bedwin bestows fond attention and care on this noble animal. The Arab horse is renowned all over the world for its swiftness and the elegance of its form. Great attention is paid by the Bedwin to horse-breeding and the genealogy of a horse has much to do with determining its price. It is not rare to find that one horse belongs to more than one person in varying shares from which partnership intricate problems often arise. Actually the

(1) Musil, A.: Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins, p.356.

possession of a horse is not an economic investment to the Bedwin because of the care he must give it which far exceeds that which he bestows on his children. But apart from its use in raids, the possession of a horse enhances the prestige of the owner. The more horses a tribe has, the more feared it is by its enemies.

Some Bedwins possess goats and sheep as well as camels and horses. Animals are of major importance in the economic life of the Bedwin. Dogs are faithful companions of the Bedwin tribes; they act as watchful sentinels at night against surprise raids, and they help the shepherds against thieves and wolves. Thus a good dog is of great value to the Bedwin. Yet if he wishes to insult someone he calls him a dog.

The Bedwin and his animals depend on water as do all living things, hence he moves from well to well followed by his bleating flock in search of pasture. The location of the well determines the length of his march (Rahil) for which he must carry a sufficient supply of water in goatskin bags. Wells are scarce and far between. The precious water is muddy, often polluted and unhealthy, yet it means life to man and beast alike, and it is not a rare occurrence for Bedwins to come to blows for the use of a well.

From early times, the Bedwin learned to trade with the settled population; and a primitive sort of trade still goes on between them. The Bedwin brings

to settled areas his surplus of camels, sheep, wool, butter and horses for sale and he buys grain, dates, simple clothing, copper and leather goods and household furniture made of wood. The Bedwin depends on townsmen for his supply of arms and ammunition, both as dear to him as life itself.

The Bedwin's home is his tent which he calls a "hair-house", normally woven from goats' hair, sometimes mixed with cotton. The quality and size of the tent vary with the status of the owner. The tent is divided into two compartments, one for men and the other for women. The men's compartment is furnished with a rug, and camel saddle on which they recline. Normally a rifle or two are conspicuously hung within easy reach, on a nail driven in the tent pole. In a suitable place, usually near the entrance, a coffee hearth is dug in the ground around which coffee pots and cups are invitingly displayed.

The women's compartment contains provisions in sacks, leather bags for storing water and butter, cooking utensils, a handmill made of two circular flat stones, a convex iron pan in the shape of a shield for baking bread and possibly a wooden trunk or a bag woven from home spun wool for storing extra clothes not in immediate use.

The food of the Bedwin is simple and he is trained from childhood to endure hunger and thirst.

His main staple consists of bread, milk and butter milk.

Meat and rice and "burghol" are luxuries and are served on occasions in honour of a guest. Dates and truffles are plentiful; and a much needed variety in diet is obtained when locusts are available - a delicacy known in the desert long before the times of St. John the Baptist. Sometimes a gazelle or a jackal is brought to bay, and later served at the Bedwin's table as a wholesome change.

Coffee is a favourite drink among the Bedwins. It is prepared by the men in their compartment. Customarily it is served in small doses, not more than a sip at a time, for, filling the cup is taken to mean that the host has had enough (his fill) of his guest, an intimation which may lead to unpleasant consequences. The Bedwin coffee is bitter, potent and liberally spiced with cardamon. Tobacco is another luxury that a Bedwin enjoys. He smokes a clay pipe called "Sabil". A gift of tobacco is valuable in winning the good will of a Bedwin; and it is not below his dignity to ask any passer-by for the gift of tobacco.

Clothes are simple, men wear a long shirt or gown (qamis) held in position at the waist by a leather belt often part of a studded leather ammunition strap which runs diagonally from one side of the waist to the shoulder across the chest and back. As an over-all

he wears a cloak called 'Aba. The 'Aba serves as a bed and cover at the same time. His head gear is the Kufiyeh and 'Igal: a large flowing cotton kerchief folded to form a triangle (Kufiyeh) is placed on the head and held in position by a black cord ('Igal) wound twice around the forehead and tied at the back, the ends of which float halfway down the back. In the dead of winter, when the severity of the desert cold seems to freeze his blood, he wears a sheepskin jacket with the fur inside.

The Bedwin woman wears a black gown or qamis, no 'Aba and instead of a Kufiyeh and 'Igal she wears a black head band to prevent the wind ruffling her hair. The children's clothes are simpler still: a shirt at best covers their nakedness.

The Bedwin goes barefoot as a rule. Sometimes he wears sandals or red riding boots when on horseback. On long treks women and children often carry their sandals on their heads.

Political and Social Organisations of the Bedwins

Physical and Moral Character:

The Bedwin is of middle-size standing about 5' 4½" in height. "His elliptical face is sunburned, his nose is fine and narrow, his hair jet black and his skull "dolichocephalic". (1) He is essentially sober and has

(1) Haddon, A.C. The races of man, p.25.

a physical resistance which is far superior to that of settled people. He is intelligent, has a keen sense of observation and is above all very cunning. Far from being fanatic he takes a broad view of religion. Volney quotes one as saying: "Comment faire des ablutions, puisque nous n'avons point d'eau? Comment faire des aumones, puisque nous ne sommes pas riches? Pourquoi jeuner le Ramadan, puisque nous jeunons toute l'annee? Et pourquoi aller a la Mekke, si Dieu est partout?" (1)

The Bedwin is hospitable, grateful for kindnesses received and always sensitive to questions of honor. He responds to politeness; but he does not forget or forgive personal wrong or injury. Though the Bedwin likes the "Ghazu" he is not bloodthirsty and avoids bloodshed as much as he can; outside the desert he does not like to fight or get into trouble. It is an emotional race and their thoughts "live easiest among extremes, a people of spasms, of upheavals of ideas, the race of individual genius".(2)

Political Organisation

The political unit is the tribe, and the Bedwin cannot think of any people except in terms of tribes: the English people, for example, belong to the English tribe and the French to the French tribe. He cannot

(1) Volney, Oeuvres Completes, p.207 Paris 1860.

(2) T.E.Lawrence's introduction to Doughty's: Travels in Arabia Deserta.

conceive any other political organisation.

For the Bedwin, society is either "Hadar" - town or at least house-dwellers or 'Arab meaning those who live in movable tents. Thus 'Arab is the name given throughout the desert to those who lead a peripatetic life striking camp wherever there is pasture and water. The word "'Arabna" (our Arabs) used by a Bedwin means his tribe. The phrase "Urban Ash-Sham" means the tribes of the Syrian desert. According to this Bedwin conception, the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula are not all 'Arab. Besides between the Hadar and the 'Arab, the semi-nomadic tribes form a class apart. They dwell in settlements on the margin between "the desert and the sown". Their perigrinations are limited to the territory where there is abundance of water and pasture. Living on the edge of the desert they maintain friendly relationship with settled villagers. The Hassan tribe, friendly to the Druzes in neighbouring villages, offers a good example of semi-nomadic tribes. Close observation of these tribes, as compared with nomads, shows an appreciable nature increase in the population. It would seem, therefore, that if the government would guarantee security of life and property to the inhabitants of villages, these herdsmen of goats and sheep would become active farmers.

A tribe belongs to a larger group, for instance, the Rwala belong to the 'Aneze group (see p.1.) which is scattered almost throughout the Arabian Peninsula. All the tribes and clans of the 'Aneze group claim descent from a common ancestor and therefore they are all cousins (abna' 'Amm).

Only blood relationship on the father's side bestows the right of "Ibn-ul'Amm.(1) The paternal blood relationship (A'mam) and not the maternal relationship (Khuwal) forms the kinship. The word "Ahl" means the father, the uncle or the elder brother. A Bedwin seeks refuge with his Ahl who are bound to protect him against injustice and they suffer for his guilt.

The expression "Ahl ul-bayt" denotes the wife of the tent-owner or the wife of his brother. This expression is intended to convey that the whole tent is under her control, i.e. that she is mistress of the tent.(2) Therefore the word Ahl, in its broader significance, denotes distinct tribes that are united by blood relation and bound by the necessity of mutual protection. Thus it is possible to speak of "Ahl-ul-direh" as inhabitants of a territory having a common interest confronted by difficulties common to all and determined to share a common destiny.

(1) 'Amamet 'Asab.

(2) Ma'zibeh

Chiefs.

As a group the Bedwins ruled by a chief are called "Qom". Thus it is current for an outsider to speak of "Qom ibn Sha'lan" meaning the tribes ruled by Ibn Sha'lan while the chief refers to them as "Jama'ti"; that is to say, those who obey his orders or hasten to his assistance.(1)

The Sheikhdom is hereditary and confined to a house.(2) The most outstanding member of that house or family, by reason of his mental and physical qualities is recognised as the Sheikh. He need not be the oldest in that particular house. The Sheikh of a tribe or a group of tribes is overthrown more frequently than an ordinary sheikh, and his rank passes to a kin. Whenever a sheikh is not distinguished by warlike ability, he is deposed from military command and left to direct the external affairs of his tribe as "Sheikh ul-Bab", (3) while defence and Ghazu are left to a man of reputed courage, cunning and prudence, though he may belong to a different family. Such a leader is known as "Sheikh Ashdad".

A sheikh may have property of his own, and when he has none he still derives revenue by leveying a tax on

(1) Yafza'um.

(2) Compare with a dynasty.

(3) Bab means door: compare with Sublime Porte.

the herdsmen of the tribe. Under compulsion, the bedwins pay taxes to the government which is collected by the Sheikh who normally collects once again as much for himself in order to meet the expenditure necessitated by his position. He keeps a depot of arms and ammunition for use in an emergency; he is bound to entertain daily on a large scale, to keep his tent in good repair, and to exchange gifts with other sheikhs with a view to maintaining friendly relations.

A weak tribe must acknowledge the supremacy of a stronger one for its protection for which it pays a tax known as the brotherhood tax (Khuwa). The brother (Akh or Khawi) is bound to restore stolen property and prevent encroachment by outsiders. The basis of "Khuwa" is force (Quwa); the strong exact Khuwa from the weak.

The Sheikh stands in high esteem among the tribe. He must be stout of heart (1) and brave. He should know how to challenge and face danger, (2) he should have a broad and far sighted outlook, (3) and should never act hastily. (4) But the most popular among the chiefs is "Saheb ul-Mruwa": the Sheikh who is kind and truthful; and who disregards trifles. (5) of a man possessing such qualities the proverb says: "At his hands the wolf does not go hungry nor does the flock perish. (6)

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- (1) Qalbu Qawi.
 - (2) Ma'eh Fetel.
 - (3) Ma'eh 'erf.
 - (4) Leh Sabr.
 - (5) Sahi.
 - (6) Old Bedwin saying.

A generous man is highly esteemed among the Bedwins, he is often visited and his guests carry his fame far and wide. Some say that it is easy for a wealthy man to be generous: he can afford it. Others lay greater stress on heredity. Magnanimity (1) is a quality which ranks second to generosity. A magnanimous person does not always insist on his rights. He will gladly yield to the weaker; he would refuse to take a thing although it is evidently his. Without this quality no man is perfect. A real man knows how to behave bravely (Rijjal). The statement that a tribe has Rejal, (2) signifies that its members are men of valour. According to bedwin traditions, noble qualities are inherited; and every bedwin aims at winning a wife from an old and honorable family who would get him a thoroughbred son. A man must be vigilant and energetic, he must seize the opportunity when it offers but he must be modest and self confident. Prudence is a valuable asset to a bedwin.

Bedwin Legal Procedure

The life of bedwins is controlled by rules of conduct imposed upon them by their environment and by traditional practices through generation long since dead. The bedwins do not realise the multiplicity of these rules and the irksomeness of their operation. They are accepted

(1) Ashime.

(2) Plural of Rajjal.

unconsciously and as a matter of course. When, however, we attempt to classify those rules of conduct we find that they represent, primarily, the adaptation of their conduct to their geographical surrounding or to their physico-social environment. But in the constitution of the human society ^{there} ~~here~~ are things that seem arbitrary because of their social complexity. T.E. Lawrence says of the Arabs "that they are a people of primary colours, especially of black and white; they know only truth and untruth, belief and unbelief without the European hesitating retinue of finer shades."(1)

"The desert is a place of passing sensation, of cash-payment of opinion. Men do not hold their minds in suspense for days to arrive at a just and balanced average of thought. They say good at once when it is good, and bad at once when it is bad".(2)

What Lawrence says of the bedwins is clearly illustrated in their judicial procedure. There are no courts in the modern sense of the word, any tent whose owner is of good repute and social standing is a satisfactory place. The office of a judge is hereditary and the dignity of being one passes as a rule from father to son provided the latter is mentally balanced and physically fit. Otherwise the office passes to the brother of the deceased or to some other member of his kin. Any sheikh, however, may pass a sentence on any matter submitted to him but may not interfere in any way with the jurisdiction of hereditary judges.

(1) T.E. Lawrence's Introduction to Charles Doughty's Travels in Arabia Deserta p.22.

(2) Ibid. p.21.

There is a variety of judges and the difference between them is based on the nature of the matters on which they are called upon to pronounce. The decision in cases where blood calls for blood, for example, lies with so-called "blood judges"; while questions of war and peace are decided by the sheikh.

The most common of all judicial procedure is the "Jaha", where slight disputes and quarrels between members of one and the same tribe are settled by friendly mediation. The mediator, a respected bedwin, with one or more companions calls on the chief of the offended faction and they settle the misunderstanding over sips of fragrant mocha. This method of settlement is also practiced by the settled people in villages, and there is hardly a village in Syria where "Jaha" is not a common daily occurrence. Misunderstandings are nipped in the bud and petty bickerings are not allowed to develop into major issues involving the families or clans which go to make a village.

Law Suits.

Written agreements are unknown in desert life; and whenever an agreement leads to litigation the only evidence is the desposition of witnesses who often decide a lawsuit in one way or another. Whenever this fails the assertion of the plaintiff on oath or the denial of the defendant,

on oath, will decide the case. The bedwins do not like to be put on oath which they call a "Black" oath because they consider it to be a disgrace to any man to take an oath, implying as it does that his mere word is not believed. (Besides, the man who swears is always subject to wrath of God).

i) Witnesses.


A man of good repute whose narrative is consistent may be admitted as a witness. Generally a court requires a minimum of two witnesses. It must be proved to the satisfaction of the judge that the witness is an honest man and that he bears no hatred for the man whose case depends on his evidence. A witness is entitled to compensation for leaving his daily business in order to appear before the court to testify; but an eye-witness testifying on the facts of the case does not, as a rule, claim compensation. The procedure is very simple, the judge asks the witness if he wishes to testify and on receiving an affirmative reply he asks him to speak the truth. After hearing all the witnesses judgment is passed.

ii) The Oath

A bedwin avoids taking an oath, and he is often offended by the person who urges an oath upon him.(1) But in the absence of trustworthy witnesses, the judge

(1) Al Yamin Muhim.

calls on the plaintiff and defendant both to swear. In simple matters, the man taking an oath calls on Allah to punish and to do him an injury equal to the loss of the loads of grain which he has bought, implying thereby that he would then die of hunger in the desert.

In serious disputes, the judge requires the "Msabba" oath, so called from the seven lines drawn with a sabre on the ground. The judge first draws a circle with a sabre, then its diameter; then he intersects the diameter with five vertical lines.  . Then the witness is asked to step inside the circle, to face southward and to swear. This oath is more serious than the previous one, because he calls on Allah to ruin his descendants if he is not speaking the truth. When the oath is taken and the deposition is made the witness jumps out of the circle and trembling from the ordeal, he rushes in revenge at the party that urged on him the oath. The people present at the trial hold him back until the passage of a few moments would have restored the equanimity of his ruffled soul. After administering the oath, the judge gives his verdict.

Murder Cases, Blood Feuds and Appeals.

If a murderer is afraid of avengers, he seeks refuge with a sheikh. As soon as the Sheikh takes him in, he sends a word to the avengers to appear before him for the administration of justice. The murderer has to pay a certain sum of money (Diyah) in money or in goods or cattle to the relatives of the murdered person. Each

party will then choose a sheikh or amir to stand surety for the good behaviour of the two parties.

Tribal blood feuds that have been allowed to stand for a long time are, as a rule, settled by simple mediation. The mediator (or mediators) is of the highest rank among the Sheikhs and Amirs. He calls on the two parties, hears their stories, administers oaths and finally passes judgement. His judgment consists of the award of compensation to the party injured. When compensation is paid, the judge "ties the flags" together in token of brotherhood implying peace has been restored. A banquet is held in commemoration of the occasion and the parties return to their homes satisfied with the day's achievement.

Appeal to a group of judges is done a litigant when he thinks that justice has not been done to him. In such a session, other people (notables) can also take part in the discussion. The legal experts or judges examine the case again, sift the evidence, and then they pass their verdict which over rules all previous judgments in that case.

Tendency towards Settlement

Bedwins look down on manual labor and on the peasantry settled in villages, but they are losing their disdain, gradually, as they are becoming more appreciative of the benefits of a settled life. Furthermore, sheikhs are helping to instill this spirit because

those of them elected to parliament must settle down to a sedentary life. Previous attempts by the Ottoman Government to settle the Bedwins around Beersheba by offering exemption from house and land tax had failed. The Bedwins would not barter their freedom for exemption from taxation, which they do not have to pay so long as they owned no property.(1) But inspite of this, those nomads on the fringe of "the sown" are slowly acquiring a feeling close to national consciousness the spreading of which will eventually lead to the acceptance of a settled life.

The transition from nomadic life to a settled life cannot be taken in one stride. It involves a process of evolution. It is interesting that the tribes in Syria represent all the stages of evolution necessary. Some are fully nomadic, others are semi-nomadic and some have actually settled down to tilling the soil. These latter live, for the most part, in villages, oasis which dot the edge of the desert.

This evolution is marked by the economic improvement of the condition of the Bedwin. With the possession of sheep and goats his wealth in camels decreases. Since sheep and goats depend on pastures and the availability of water because flocks cannot endure the long marches in the desert, the Bedwins are forced to remain on the edge of the desert where there is an abundance of water and the assurance of an annual growth of fresh grass for

(1) Abcarius, M.F. Palestine through the fog of propaganda, p.16.

pasture. These herdsmen are semi-nomads in the sense that they live in tents but in fixed places.

The second stage is sociological, because their social life changes. Instead of tents they build houses of their own. But they remain herdsmen though some of them might start tilling on a small scale. The little they make from their semi-sedentary life roots them to the spot and serves as an example for the others to do likewise. They finally resort to agriculture and this leads directly to the third stage, that of full settlement.

This third stage is economical, sociological and political. The Bedwins turn from herdsmen to be active cultivators whenever an enlightened government takes the initiative and provides irrigation canals or pumping stations to bring under ground water to the surface. It should be borne in mind, however, that the tendency towards settlement is proportional to the degree of security prevailing. At times of insecurity the tendency is negligible, but when security is assured the tendency is clearly marked. The bedwins regard their mobility as a tactical asset in attack and defence.(1)

(1) This theory is supported by Military Science and Tactics.

CHAPTER VA Socio-Economic Therapy for a Social Disorder.

"Primum Vivere, deinde philosophari" -

Live first and then discourse.

I. The Sedentarization of the Beduin Tribes.

The Arab tribal community in Syria forms a large percentage of the total population - about 1/7 - and constitutes all the various stages of transition from peripatetic to completely settled. This portion of the population has recently become the interest of politicians and social reformers because it plays a significant, economic, social and political role in the life of Syria. These politicians and reformers are facing the future of Syria with long-term plans of reconstruction and development. Their argument is that the tribe population is apt to fall an easy prey to foreign political influence and interference. Further, they constitute a distinct socio-economic organization, in which the Sheikhs take the law into their own hands. This decentralisation of power leaves public security in the hands of these in power.

From another angle, administrative difficulties result in the government not being able to collect taxes, to take a census or to enforce educational, social or health measures. This inability of authority of carrying out agricultural projects as originally planned, has resulted in modifying projects in some cases and in abandoning them in others.

Furthermore, no accurate or complete census can be taken of these wandering Beduins or of their animals. For a thousand and one pretexts, they refuse to accept willingly the enumeration, either of themselves or of their livestock, because the former implies military service and the latter taxation. But the most baffling problem is the inability of the Government to apply to these the law of the land. They insist on their tribal law and the Government has to yield.

With these general observations we reach the conclusion that the tribal community constitutes a big national problem and an incessant source of trouble which stands in the way of progress. So far the problem has been approached from a negative angle. It is high time that someone should attempt a positive solution, namely, the sedentarization of the Beduin tribes.

"The sedentarization of the Beduin tribes" is generally understood to mean a process by which the wandering herdsmen are transmuted to settled soil cultivators. It is also generally agreed that the tribes should be supplied with land for cultivation and settlement with these two measures the problem is shelved as one that has been solved. This attitude is dangerous because thorough investigation should

precede any step taken that would modify the life of nearly 1/7 of the population - about 450,000 souls.

In dealing with the problem of beduin sedentarization, we should remember, that the beduins play an important role in the economic life of the country. If there had been no nomads, the resources of the desert as a grazing ground for the vast herds of sheep and camels which actually form the meat reserve of the Middle East would be lost and alternative grazing ground would not be immediately available (1). But their contributions have been taken for granted, and no one gives them a thought. These contributions are tremendous because livestock is a major resource both for food and for export. Livestock supply the population of Syria with meat, dairy products, wool, hair, skins etc. etc. So far no one has thought of a substitute and hence the country might lose an important source of national income if the Beduins were converted into soil cultivators. "It must be remembered that the preservation of the beduin is not a worthless act based on sentimentality, but is essential in order to preserve for the use of man the vast resources of the desert as a breeding and grazing ground for sheep and camels, both of which are essential to national economy ". (2)

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- (1) W.G.Elphinston - The future of the Bedouin of Northern Arabia (International Affairs) Vol XXI No.3, July 1945)p.371
(2) W.G.Elphinston: The future of the Bedouin of Northern Arabia (International Affairs) Vol.XX No.3, July 1945) p.374

Pastoral economy is destined to play a big role in the economy of Syria as long as irrigation is not developed;

With all these facts in mind, an attempt is made to record a few suggestions which one should remember before and during the process of sedentarization;

A. "The establishment of a body of researchers in beduin organization and life." The necessity for this is due to the fact that no combined socio-economic and political comprehensive study so far been undertaken and no experiments, no matter have been carried out; The object of this body of researchers should be the building of a body of facts - gathered or deduced by scientific methods; These facts should be relative to the problem so that an adequate solution may be proposed; It is only normal that such a proposed solution would involve the planning of irrigation projects, animal breeding, pasture preservation, control of pests and diseases, dairy, agricultural and industrial development, and so on and so forth. Such a study should precede any attempt at sedentarization;

b. "Any project of sedentarization should have as an object the preservation and development of the Bedouin contributions to national economy".

Unless such an object is pursued, the plans would not be complete; and a diversion is apt to endanger national economy.

C. 'All plans should be transitional based on gradual evolutionary steps towards sedentarization'. A radical and abrupt change from nomadism to agriculture is dangerous and would not give the desired results. The Bedouins form a very old cultural group " with definite patterns of behaviour relative to various aspects of life ". (1) Prominent among these patterns is individualism, economic activity, family and tribal life. These are the outcome of long historical processes, involving centuries of struggle, adjustments, selection both biological and cultural. The tribal way of life has crystallised, throughout the centuries, into a definite pattern and the process of transferring these tribes from nomadism to sedentary life is a great adventure full of slippery abrupt curves and thin ice involving drastic consequences.

The eagerness of our social reformers measures they propose extempore, for which they are known, are as fatal to the problem as ignorance. Everything is taken for granted once these tribes are supplied with the "material necessities " of agricultural life and security, an erroneous attitude was brought about by the famous desert traveller Musil. (2) "To think that the future of the bedouin can be satisfactorily solved by land settlement alone is an over simplification of the problem." (3)

D. 'Sedentarization should be attempted only with the voluntary cooperation of the tribes concerned.' Unless the tribes concerned are willing to cooperate in solving their problems there is no hope for any sedentarization

(1) W. G. Elphinstone: The future of the Bedouin of Northern Arabia (International Affairs, Vol. XX. No. 3 July, 1945), p. 370

(2) Musil, A. :Manners & Customs of the Rwala Bedouins p.

(3) W;G.Elphinstone:The future of the Bedouin of Northern Arabia,p.374.

plan to succeed. Nobody can be forced to settle if he does not want to. Therefore the projects of sedentarization should be based on the tribes' readiness for settlement. The research-body suggested should make a list of the tribes willing to cooperate. They will serve as an example to the rest.

E. 'Any project of sedentarization should comprise private ownership of the land on which a family is settled.' It is essential to give settling Bedouins a feeling of security and stability at least equal to the one they enjoy as nomads. They should feel that because they own land they have all the rights to cultivate it and enjoy the fruits of their labour without being exploited. The French Mandatory Authorities, in Syria, made land available to certain nomadic tribes. This land was turned into private estates by the tribal leader, farmed not by their own tribesmen but by hired fellahin. (1)

F. 'Sanitation should be a part of the sedentarization project.' Settled life will expose the Bedouins to disease liable to destroy them; they usually fall an easy prey to tuberculosis.

G. 'The sedentarization project should comprise a post-sedentarization program.' The body of researchers, experts and technicians should be in touch with problems as they arise, because unless those problems are solved in a satisfactory manner, they are bound to cause intermittent troubles.

II; Rural Problems

Once the Bedouin tribes are settled, their problems in general would be those of the rural population of Syria.

Here one may propose an economic therapy for the social disorder existing in the rural areas of Syria. We are

(1) Ibid, p. 373

taking economic well-being as a psychological state of mind influenced by a multiplicity of factors, such as the standard of living, health condition, education, social life and conditions under which work is conducted.

Thus it is of importance to us to realize the intimate relation existing between economic and social elements. This relation is often misunderstood and is dealt with separately. "It is often forgotten, that malnutrition, poor housing, bad sanitation and disease are concomitants of poverty, and that they are, far more a result of it than a cause of it". 1)

A few examples might illustrate the impact of economic factors on social problems in the Syrian rural communities. The low, per capita, income of the fellahin is responsible for the low standard of living, and the low income, per capita, is the result of feudalism. This produces a vicious circle, inequality in the ownership of land accounts for low productivity; and low productivity is the cause of malnutrition which brings in its wake disease and again this accounts for low productivity.

It is evident, therefore, that because of this interdependence between economic factors and social problems, all effective reform policies should combine both economic and social measures. To illustrate this point: education creates new demands and wants but if the income remains constant the result would be frustration, discontent and aggression - a menace to social and national security. Hence education should be accompanied by an economic uplift and a raising of the standard of living.

1) Himadeh, S.B.: Basic Relationship of Economic and Social factors in Rural welfare and suggestions for solving the chief Economic Problems (A lecture delivered to the Social Welfare Seminar in Cairo, 1950)

It should also be noted that an increase in income alone does not mean a higher standard of living.

On the other hand, sanitation would reduce the mortality rate - especially infant mortality - and this in turn would increase the population. Already the cultivated areas are densely populated; therefore sanitation should be coupled with reclamation of land through irrigation and drainage(1). The possibilities of land reclamation are great in Syria, it has been roughly estimated that the total cultivable area is about 12.5 million acres, and that about 1/3 of it is under cultivation(2).

1) Rural Education and the reduction of extreme Inequality of Landownership.

a) Rural Education.

1. Among the most important means of rural development is the elementary school. In general we can say that Syria's primary need is elementary schools for its rural areas. That the existence of a school is insufficient because "peasants often fail to send their children."(3) This failure however, is due to poverty, for the children are needed as additional hands on the farm.

To provide educational facilities - even elementary - for a large portion of the population, and for the first

(1) Ibid
(2) Warriner, D.: Land and Poverty in the Middle East. pp.81-98
(3) Allen, H.B. : Rural Education and Welfare in the Middle East. (London 1946) p.4.

time gives rise to problems of considerable magnitude. The first of these and the most important is to find the funds for the heavy expenditure required. Teachers, adequately trained are not produced over night Buildings, equipment and supplies are not easily produced.

Another handicap, is the antagonistic attitude of feudal land-lords towards education in the rural areas. They fear that the fellahin might not be willing to live under the ~~old conditions~~ once they have received a modicum of education.

2. Meeting the Problem.

The question of the funds necessary should not be discussed here. This is a matter for parliament. We shall assume that we have the funds.

a. Elementary education in the rural areas should have two objectives, an immediate and an ultimate one. The immediate goal should be the provision of elementary education, no matter how lacking in details, to the large and growing number of the school-age population. The ultimate objective should be the reading of stage where village training is adapted to rural life in all its details. This latter objective cannot be attained unless there are specialised training-centres for the preparation of teachers.

Syria being predominantly an agricultural country, simple farm training for the village youth is indispensable.

It is the only effective kind of training for the class of inhabitants for which it is intended.

Rural education should be extended to the farms and homes. This extension should be undertaken by means of pamphlets, farm papers, movie pictures and slide projections based on farm activities. Another means of farm extension would be model farms and experiment fields.

Home extension of rural education consists in the care of infants and children namely the knowledge of foods, the prevention of diseases and the provision of sanitation which is terribly lacking. Education destroys the paralysing fatalism which reigns at home. "Quel contraste entre l'evolution politique que l'on proclame dans les journaux, que l'on affirme autour des tapis vert des conferences internationales, que l'on respire dans les villes, et cette immobilisation agressive des campagnes, accrochee au passe."(1)

b. Extreme inequality of Landownership.

The extreme inequality of landownership is the most difficult problem to solve. The present political structure of Syria is not adequate to meet this problem, chiefly because the landlords are in power. The concern of these landlords is to keep the status quo because they are powerful and they want to remain so. And the political power in the hands of the masses is not a

(1) Weulersse, J.: Paysans de Syrie et du Proche Orient (Paris, 1946) p. 313.

challenge to the land-owning class because the former are not aware of its significance. However, this potential contradiction threatens the security of the land-lords tenure. This is why they have been opposed to all educational reforms.

How to meet this problem? The reasonable solution would be "the expropriation by the State at reasonable prices of land possessions exceeding certain limits (calculated on the total value of the property in conjunction with the average income per hectare) and payment for it in bonds of long maturities bearing interest at 3 or 4 per cent, and the introduction of progressive inheritance taxes to be paid in land or in cash."(1) These two methods of acquisition would provide land for the government to be sold to the landless fellahin on the instalment system spread over a long term of years. Credit banks, a board of technical advisers and cooperative societies are recommended as are indispensable agents. These would also solve the notorious share-tenancy of which Syria is suffering a great deal in the form of high rents taken by the landlords and the chronic indebtedness of the peasants(2). This puts the fellahin in a "paradoxe qui paraîtra monstrueux ... l'Orient montre ainsi des populations paysannes dépourvues d'atavisme paysan; des terriers qui n'ont ni sens ni respect de la terre,

(1) Hamadeh, S.B.: Basic Relationship of Economic ...etc. ...

(2) Warriner, D. Land and Poverty in the Middle East, p.120.

des agriculteurs qui meprisent la culture, des
laboureurs qui on le degout de la charue et des
villageois qui renient le village pour rester
fideles a la tribu." (1)

II. Health programs and Land Reclamation.

Health and sanitation programs against Typhoid,
Dysentery, Trachoma, Smallpox and Malaria are badly
needed in Syria(2). Such programs would, in the long
run, increase the pressure of the population on the
land if the income remains constant, then the standard of
living is bound to decline. Therefore, such health programs
should be coupled with land reclamation, drainage and
irrigation and intensive cultivation.

The most accesible area in which development is
possible is al-Ghab, in the Orontes Valley(3). This
extensive marsh can be drained and it has been estimated
that some thirty thousand hectares of land would be
reclaimed - of which eight thousand hectares could be
irrigated from the Orontes. The Alawis might be settled
on this area.

Another area which may be developed is the Jezira
where the cultivable land is estimated to be 988,400
hectars whereas only 217,444 hectares are cultivated at
present. Thicknesse estimates that the Jezira can

(1) Wenlersse, J.: Paysans de Syrie et du Proche-Orient, p.66.
(2) Dodd, S.C.: Social Relations in the Middle East, chapter, 21.
(3) Thicknesse, S.G. : Arab Refugees, a Survey of Resettlement
possibilities, p.47.

absorb some 245,000 persons allowing something more than fifty acres for a family of six persons on an average.

A third area for development is the Khabrur Valley. A canalization scheme from the Khabrur river - 75 M3 per second - can provide irrigation for some 34,000 hectares which can easily take some 7000 people and up to 15,000 if intensively cultivated.

A fourth area which may be developed is the Euphrates Valley where it is estimated that 120,000 hectares might be made available through oil-powered pumping engines for irrigation(1). The newly reclaimed land can absorb a great number of people.

We can conclude from the above that Syria can absorb at least a million persons in a short time; and that, land reclamation, through irrigation and drainage in addition to the State Domain available can partially solve the problem of extreme inequality of land-ownership(2).

When the standard of living of the rural population - including the minorities - rises and when education spreads, they would eventually be freed from fatalism, superstition, traditionalism, frustration and aggression.

Urban Area.

1). Group Prejudice and Social Education.

So far we have urged that the problem of group

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- (1) Oil is expensive in Syria under the present fiscal policy.
 (2) 1,234,000 hectares have become the property of the State by the transfer of the ancient domain of the Ottoman Sultans - Mudawara Land.

prejudice is the key problem of modern Syria and it will remain, for the future, a permanent problem if not solved. By "Education" is meant, not only the formal forms to be gone through in school/s, but the whole of learning the attitude of mind which can help to conquer prejudice. There are ways and means towards this end, and both adults and children can learn; but the process is slow. The way to begin is to begin.

What I have been trying to say is this: Syria is facing the necessity for an intelligent organization on a wide scale. Organization calls for understanding between the Government and the people; and understanding will bring about harmony.

The first point towards social harmony is to "socialize" the children. The human being is fundamentally a group product and hence develops into a group member having the same characteristics of his environment group. Therefore, a newly born child comes into being to be a member of a group and thus, in a way, he is too "strong" to be handled. Imagine a baby born with the physique of a twenty year old adult and try to picture his reaction to a colic or a simple undiagnosed desire!

The child is born into a group which has its own ways and which he considers as the ways of "his particular group." The Armenian child plays Armenian games and learns the legends of Sasontsitavit, Dorkonkegh, Vahaken and

Arakighetisk; and a Kurdish child learns of "Jemshid"; and it is through such means that a child learns the ideal, ethical and social values of his group. These represent the civilization of the group. Loyalty, honesty, self-restraint, courtesy, self-sacrifice, disregard, robbery and killing are among the first things that a child learns from his community and group. It is these values that in the long run will decide what kind of a person he will be.

To remedy the complexity of this situation some people advocate joint group education, but they forget that close contact with different groups can, in the absence of a highly skilled management, result in increased group prejudice.

Therefore, what we need are national schools, directed by a skilled staff, with a view to reducing by a unified programme, intergroup antagonism.

Next to schools military training would provide the most hopeful field. The units should be skilfully blended, avoiding the creation of a feeling of inferiority, so that in the end loyalties would be first to Syria and then to the unit. Military training is doubly hopeful because of the age of the recruits - the fathers of the following generation.

ii) The Legal System and Group Prejudice.

It is very painful to admit that Syria has three systems.

The religious, the civil and the tribal. This legal system was inherited from the Ottoman Empire. The French Military Administration, and later the Civil Government under the French mandate floundered through this tripple legal structure; and the present "independent" State is not rid of it.

In the latter part of the 19th Century, the Tanzimat (reforms) were enacted by the Sultan. The Tanzimat were a part of the civil law known as the Mejelle which was nothing more than a collection of land and criminal law, civil and criminal procedure, and a commercial law. The Land and Criminal laws were based on Moslem Shari'a, while the others were adaptations of the "Code Napoleon." But after the Revolt of the Young Turks in 1908, a mass of legislation was enacted by the Turkish Parliament and these were naturally applied in Syria. The Turks believed, most probably, in the safety of the multiple tribunal system and, indeed, there were far too many courts and unqualified judges in Syria(1).

a. Civil Courts.

A great deal of simplification of the courts was carried out under the Mandatory system. The right of recourse to the Supreme Court of Cassation in Constantinople was abolished. However, the jury system was

(1) Usually laymen of some legal position - notables.

not introduced because it was not applied in France and because it was felt that in the circumstances it may be anything but an instrument of justice. Civil courts have jurisdiction over all the Syrians for civil offences.

b. Religious Courts.

Besides the Civil Courts, the old Ottoman system recognised the rule of the Religious Courts of the Moslems, Christian and Jewish Communities. These courts retain exclusive jurisdiction in matters of personal status and in questions concerning Waqfs. These are also the Supreme Councils of every sect and their function is to supervise the religious courts and to administer the Waqfs.

c. Tribal Courts.

Another variety of courts recognised in Syria are the tribal courts composed of Bedouin Sheikhs. These Bedouins never recognised the Ottoman Codes; they apply their own rules of justice. The French Mandatory Authorities sanctioned and adopted this tribal justice (see Chapter III). The Bedouin Courts are not bound by the regular rules of evidence and they use tribal methods for proof.

"The multiplicity and diversity of the legal system while seeming to secure the personal status of minorities have been an effective weapon against unity. Brought about by pressure exerted on the Sublime Porte by the "Big Five" of Europe at the time ostensibly for the protection of the minorities, the institution of ecclesiastical jurisdiction has served to keep the Arabs of the Near East divided among themselves.

The establishment of a civil law for the country as a whole, a law to which every individual, irrespective of his confessional creed, shall submit, is the first essential towards unity. The citizens would feel that they are all one, subject to the same law; and this feeling of oneness is bound to overcome the artificial differences set up to separate them.

It is about time that we realised that our salvation depends on our efforts, not on those who have posed and still pose as protectors of minorities. If we realise this elementary truth our first step should be, not only in Syria - though Syria's problem is the subject of this thesis - but all over the Arab World in the Near East, our first step should be a unified legislation and an assurance of impartial application of a national law."⁽¹⁾

(1) Abcarious, M.F. Lectures on the Near East Arab Governments.

CHAPTER VI

C O N C L U S I O N

It will be of value, now that a study of the minorities in Syria has been partially achieved, to remind ourselves of the difficulty inherent in the problem; that there is always a gap between theory and practice, and that a panacea is never a practical solution. It is with this reservation in mind that the possibilities of a solution are probed.

In Syria, the minority problem is only potential and its dangers are thus far from threatening. That is because the history of Syria has never been one of intolerance and oppression, and because there is an overwhelming Moslem Sunni majority. In fact, ever since the days of the early Ummayyads, minorities - Moslems and others - have been given fair chances to exist side by side with the majority. The majority has never been outwardly oppressive, nor has it ever seemed to be oppressive at all. One can thus safely say, that there has almost always been a modus vivendi between the majority and the minorities.

Intergroup tensions in Syria are thus persistent and widespread. But they are not at all serious. They remain potential. The majority is much stronger than any one of them, or all of them put together. But that does not mean that the majority can always remain dominant.

The majority has always to be on the lookout for any possible leak in its social structure.

Nevertheless, even as a potential danger, I do not believe that the problem of the minorities in Syria is really serious. In fact it can be a sign of "social health" rather than a mark of disintegration, if properly approached. To arrive at that a few recommendations have been made; and it is my belief that if adopted they will prove valuable in creating an atmosphere of fruitful co-operation.

Before discussing these recommendations, I should like to elucidate one point. Scientific solutions of any problem rest on scientific research and study of the problem in question. Otherwise the solution will be anything but scientific. Unfortunately, the problem we are discussing is one that suffers from the lack of scientific analysis. Thus the first obstacle that confronts any scholar working on this subject, is the lack of scientific references. For, as I have shown in the introduction, most of the books on the subject are biased, either pro or anti. Hence a scientific research committee for collecting data and information on the minority problem in Syria should be established.

To come back to the "recommendations" for the solution of the minority problem. These fall under three headings :-

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- a) Organized activity to reduce the existing tensions into fruitful cooperation.
 - b) Need for a change of attitude.
 - c) Ordering our multi-group-society.

a) Organized activity to reduce the existing tensions.

To every problem there are at least two sides. In the case of the minorities there are at least two solutions, and both are extreme. To eliminate a given group conflict the extreme solution is either complete isolation of the minority or complete assimilation, absorption by the majority. The first solution is detrimental to society for it weakens it; the second is aggressive and impractical.

These two approaches may thus widen the chasm instead of bridging the gap now existing between the minorities and the majority. We should therefore seek an organized activity to reduce the tension. To achieve this, the causes of frustration, insecurity and their attendant anxieties must be minimized. If our economic and physical situations are reasonably comfortable and secure, in other words, if we can derive adequate security from satisfactory communal relationships, all anxiety and frustration, which our social order may generate, will be reduced to manageable proportions.

The first step is thus through information and education which may induce the minorities to compete for excellence with the other social groups. This should remove the charge of preferential treatment of majorities. Such a competition can be achieved in almost all the fields of life, and chiefly in the social and economic fields. Thus, through productive competition the tension now existing among the groups will eventually give way to a fruitful cooperation.

Moreover, this tension may be lessened if there is an inter-group collaboration. For when different hostile groups collaborate on the basis of personal association of individuals, on a common task jointly accepted as worthwhile, the hostility among them will be lessened, as no one would then feel that he is maltreated by the other. It is thus a question of winning the confidence of one another. This may also be achieved through the establishment of clear and friendly relationships in personal daily contacts. For, if the minority group member is effectively assured against oppression, he can be as willing to cooperate heartily. Hence with an organized activity and the sincere desire to reduce the tensions, both minority and majority groups could achieve that atmosphere of social collaboration and interdependence which transcends group differences. It is only, when

both groups forget "their" differences and work for the preservation of a large community, on the basis of a common destiny, that hostilities can be transmuted into active and hearty collaboration.

b) Need for a Change of Attitude.

From the foregoing, it has become clear that hostilities cannot be reduced unless there is a change of heart. "It is not the differences between men, not the differences between groups or races, that create this problem. It is our attitude toward those differences".(1) To emasculate such inter-group tension, we thus need to discover in ourselves the natural inclination to live with others and to do away with our "consciousness of kind". Without such feeling we will not be able to think of our country as a whole, and our social existence will suffer from the diversity of our ideals.

What is needed, therefore, is enlightenment. For it is our enlightened attitude towards the minority - or the majority - and towards differences as such, that are cramping our life and limiting our horizon. We are blinded by the prejudices we have created and we are crippled by the weaknesses we have developed. We do not understand the needs of the other groups because we are prejudiced against them. We think that the contributions of the minority groups are completely worthless and of no value.

(1) McIver, R.M., Civilization & Group Relationship, p.s.

Such an attitude, will no doubt, estrange the groups and will make for a state of perpetual dissention.

We need to go back to ourselves in order to understand the social reality and to deliver our society from the dangers of disintegration. We, therefore, need a wide education for the uneducated and a re-education for the educated. For the problem of minorities is also a psychological problem; one of adjustment and adaptation. And the more we seek to understand, the more it becomes obvious, that the problem is deeply rooted in our individual and social relationships. It is, therefore, a problem of attitude before it becomes one of different religions or a variety of races.

And as we seek to understand our society, we shall notice how baseless our minority prejudices are. This means that the fears under which the minorities labour must be cast away. The majority must learn to look at the minority, not as an evil, but as a potential good. And the minority must understand that in such a world as ours, the only task before it is its readiness to share the fruits of civilization with the majority, and its desire to help in building a more cooperative society.

We see from the foregoing paragraph that "the

more we learn about facts, seeking to find their meaning, the more we shall see that they lead us from this imputation to groups of peculiar vices, to see that the real source lies in the differences that society creates for these groups." (1) If society can thus look at the situation in its entirety, and study the problem as affecting it directly, it can, through careful orientation and guidance, change its attitude towards the minorities, and hence, make for maximum social collaboration.

This may not be easy at all, but it is by all means essential. For man is a "group" product. And if this is of any significance, it must mean that, in as much as he is rational, he must be capable of transcending minor differences for the purposes of the ultimate social good.

He is a group product and he is also a social being, and it is by virtue of the latter that the former epithet has any meaning at all.

c) The Ordering of our Multi-Group Society.

Any society that fails to have its groups in order or its sides balanced, is one which is not socially healthy. Thus, if the Syrian society should persist in forbidding the different groups to freely merge together (marriage remains sectarian), it would eventually be working for its own social destruction.

(1) McIver, R.M. : Civilization and Group Relationship, p.10

For the separate existence of these groups inside the Syrian State is not only a political danger, but a social danger as well. It is, therefore, the duty of the Syrian society to take the first step by attempting a change of its attitude towards the minorities.

Moreover, the minorities themselves have to do their part. They can - as has been said before - be of use to the whole society. They can do much to improve the prevailing condition by exerting economic and political pressure, especially, if they have the advantage of possessing something which the majority needs desperately. It is a question of bargaining, but for the welfare of the whole. Such an attitude, on the part of the minorities will induce the majority to change its attitude, and to be ready to accept the differences not as constituting a drawback, but as making for a healthy competition within society.

Therefore, what we have to advance are the common rights of all the groups. This will constitute the first step towards the "ordering of the multi-group-society." For, while all groups everywhere are taken to be different (and they are) no sane person ever thought of abolishing these differences. Nor does the "ordering of multi-group-society" mean the assimilation of differences. It is rather their final reception into

the unity of the whole society, that must be our aim. Thus the final picture of our society is one of diversity within unity - but it is a multiplicity working for the welfare of society as a whole.

The trouble is thus, not with the differences themselves, but with us. It is we who misconceive what they are and what they mean, the reason being our group egoism and interest which hang around these differences. Hence, the assertion of differences is associated with claims of superiority, and denial of equality. The Nazis belonged to this group. For in admitting their superiority, they denied equality to other races, and set out on hating the world and loving- egoistically - themselves, until the war brought down their deity and smashed it. And history has thus given the world a lesson - difference in race does not mean superiority.

Solutions are thus possible if we are ready to apply them. For it is we who have to change our outlook on ourselves and start building something which may have many colors, but one single pattern; the differences that obtain in society are healthy if they are used for public welfare. But they are detrimental, if we look at them as landmarks of segregation rather than as milestones on the road to unity. They must be considered like torches lighting the dark way before us, rather than barriers obstructing our progress.

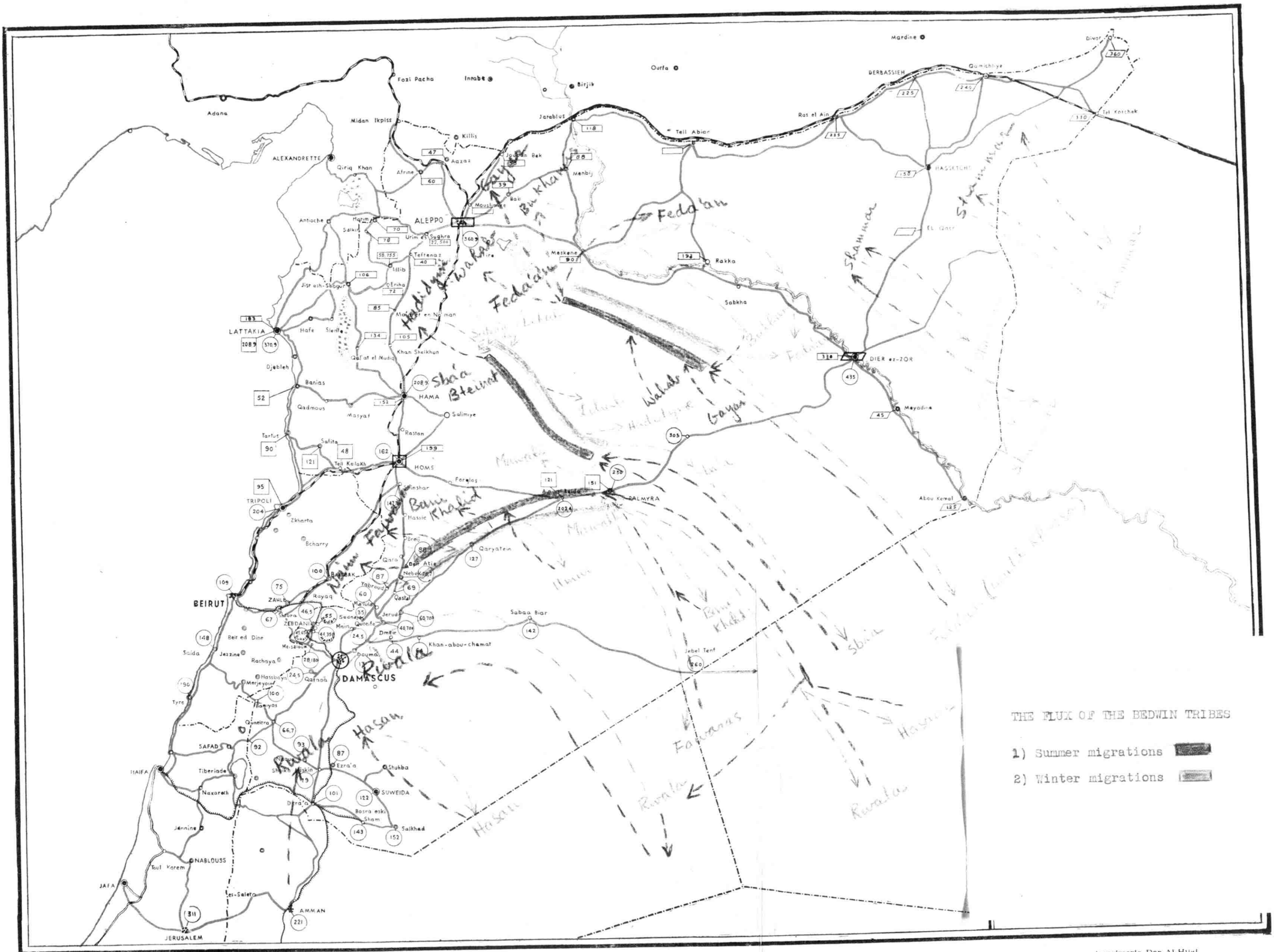
Our motto must, therefore, be Unity - deeper than our differences. To teach it is the task of social education through which alone we can attain this salvation of the society in which we live. It must be the symbol of our efforts - a symbol greater than our differences. It must suggest to us the kind of living spirit that lights, warms, animates and endures. Or this unity is a mirage ! Man shall have lived in vain, if out of such human differences, he cannot make a human unity!

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THE FLUX OF THE BEDWIN TRIBES

- 1) Summer migrations
- 2) Winter migrations

