Six Months in a Syrian Monastery


Deir Zafaran
Mardin: Aug 10. 92.

SIX MONTHS

IN A SYRIAN MONASTERY,

BEING THE RECORD OF A VISIT TO THE HEAD QUARTERS
OF THE SYRIAN CHURCH IN MESOPOTAMIA,
WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF
THE YAZIDIS OR DEVIL WORSHIPPERS OF MOSUL
AND EL JILWAH, THEIR SACRED BOOK.

BY

OSWALD H. PARRY, B.A.,
Of Magdalen College, Oxford.

ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR.

WITH A PREFATORY NOTE BY

THE RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

GORGIAS PRESS
2004

First Gorgias Press Edition, 2001.

Second Gorgias Press Edition, 2004.

ISBN 1-59333-152-5

GORGIAS PRESS
46 Orris Ave., Piscataway, NJ 08854 USA
www.gorgiaspress.com

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TO

D. G. HOGARTH, ESQUIRE, M.A.,

WHO FIRST DIRECTED

MY FOOTSTEPS TO THE EAST.

To

His Holiness
Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwaz
Patriarch of Antioch and all the East

This new Reprint is Dedicated

Gorgias Press

PREFATORY NOTE.

MR. PARRY has asked me to write a prefatory note to the record of his visit to the Old Syrian Church. Such an introduction appears to me to be quite unnecessary. The scope and character of the narrative cannot fail to commend it to all who watch with interest and hope the quickening into fresh life of the ancient Christian communities of the East, and are anxious to fulfil their political obligations to the Turkish Empire and to the Christians who are subject to its rule. At the same time I am glad to have the opportunity of saying with what pleasure and profit I have read the book.

Mr. Parry visited the East in 1892 on behalf of the Syrian Patriarchate Education Society, in order to inspect the elementary schools already established by the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch with the help of friends in England, and to report generally on the prospects of effectually promoting education in the churches under the Patriarch's jurisdiction.

The route which he followed through the "Syrian gates" to Aleppo, Urfa (Edessa), Diarbekr, Mardin, Mosul, is full of great memories, and yet comparatively unknown to Englishmen. As the traveller moves Eastward, Western influences gradually disappear, and he looks again on scenes of patriarchal times, which call up thoughts on human life lost

in the hurry of our own restless days. Mr. Parry has succeeded in conveying to his readers, with vivid and natural directness, the impressions which the country and the people made upon him. His sketches of scenery and manners, of character and persons, are full of life and local colour. He describes with perfect candour and impartiality the good and bad qualities of Christian and Mohammedan; and it is no slight testimony to the power of the Gospel that he found the Syrian Christians, isolated and oppressed for centuries, to maintain a higher standard in the common virtues of personal and domestic life than their Moslem neighbours. From time to time he throws side lights on the vices of the Turkish local government as he chronicles the intrigues and corruption—Oriental, perhaps, rather than Turkish—of which he was witness; and the recent outrages on the Armenians receive a terrible illustration from the sufferings inflicted on the Yazidis while he was at Mosul.

At the same time Mr. Parry recognises the growing toleration which is now extended to the native Christians in the country which he visited. But it must be remembered that every fresh concession to Christians is opposed to the spirit of Islam, and cannot but alienate the feelings of the true believer from the Sultan who yields it, and make the Sultan more nervously sensitive to every expression of national spirit. None the less the duty of the European powers, by which the authority of Turkey is upheld, is clear. They are bound to observe scrupulously the terms of the treaties which they have made with Turkey, and to provide by watchful care that the Turks shall also observe them. In this respect it is a matter of deep

regret that the name of England has lost something of its old power.

But great as is the value of Mr. Parry's book as a contribution to our knowledge of an important out-lying province of the Turkish empire, its chief importance lies in the view which it gives of the position and prospects of the Old Syrian Christians, the scanty representatives—perhaps 150,000 or 200,000 in number—of the Syrian element in the Church of Antioch, the earliest of the Gentile churches. Since Dr. Claudius Buchanan visited the Old Syrians in Malabar in 1806, from whom the Patriarch received a valuable present while Mr. Parry was at Mardin, interest in the ancient Oriental Churches has steadily, if slowly, increased in England, and it has received a powerful stimulus lately from the work of the Archbishop's mission to the Assyrians. The interest is natural. These independent Churches appeal with especial force to England and to the Churches of the Anglican Communion. They lie, it is true, under the imputation of contrasted heresies, dating from the controversies of the fifth century; but those most competent to speak are satisfied that in the case of the Jacobites and Nestorians of the present day the accusation rests on the misunderstanding of technical terms, and can be cleared away by mutual explanations. Meanwhile the rival Communions are eager for education. They desire to learn fully the teaching of their own ancient formularies and of Holy Scripture. They are not committed to any modern errors. Their very existence through centuries of persecution and temptation is a proof of the vitality of their faith.

They are characteristically national Churches. They guard with the most jealous care their apostolic heritage, and are still able to express through it the power of their own life. Thus, while they cling to their liturgical language, Syriac, with almost pathetic devotion, they adopt the vernacular freely in sermons and popular services.

These general remarks apply with peculiar power to the Old Syrian Church. This seems to live in the past. Its Patriarchs still assume on their election the name of Ignatius the Martyr. The people hitherto have known Western Christianity only through the Roman and American Missions (Congregational and Presbyterian). But both missions have failed to make any serious impression on the main body of the Church. The aggressive imperialism of Rome, in spite of the dignity of its services, the strength and devotion of its missionaries, the political influence of France, repels a nation proud of their own possessions handed down from their fathers. The American Missionaries necessarily offend the same feeling of religious patriotism from another side. They have no instinctive regard for historic continuity, and look with little reverence on customs venerable by ancient use. But the Anglican Church on the other hand, strong by apostolic order and catholic sympathy, can approach the Syrian Christians without threatening their independence or disparaging the primitive traditions of a Communion older than itself. It can consistently welcome the task of building up, purifying, strengthening a body which claims tender regard for the sake of sufferings which it has borne for the Faith. It is under no temptation to seek either submission or uniformity from those whom it serves. It acknowledges

the power of the Faith to harmonise large differences of intellectual and ritual expression, answering to differences of race and history, within the limits of the historic Creed. It can wait for the issue which it desires, taught by home experience that stable reform must come from within. It can with good hope prepare the way for reconciling divided Churches through considerateness and patience.

The first step towards the accomplishment of this great work of conciliation and enlightenment for the Eastern Churches by England—a partial acknowledgement of our debt to the East—must come through better knowledge on both sides. The Old Syrians confound our position with that of non-episcopalian missionaries; and we again are inclined to treat them as merely "nominal Christians." The understanding which we both require will come through that help in education which the Syrians seek from us. And their need is unquestionably pressing. The Syrian Christians in the villages are for the most part poor—there are not, we are told, "perhaps more than four books on an average in a village through Jebel Tur"—and those in the towns require the encouragement of a good example. So far a good beginning has been made. The late Patriarch used well the means which were placed at his disposal; and the work in the schools which he founded is on the whole satisfactory.

For rendering on a larger scale the help which is required, the present time is eminently favourable. There is good reason to hope that the new Patriarch—for the nonagenarian Patriarch with whom Mr. Parry stayed died in the past year—will be even more anxious than his predecessor for the

extension of elementary religious schools and for the efficient education of his clergy. The noble monastery El-Za'aferan offers itself as an admirable place for a Patriarchal College. And for the larger influences of an educational mission, the rule of Turkey gives better opportunities than could be found if national and ecclesiastical differences were accentuated by the dismemberment of the Mohammedan Empire.

If the season is thus opportune and the work urgent, the English Church appears, as I have endeavoured to show, to be specially fitted to undertake it. Here also, as elsewhere, representatives of the English Church would come to learn in teaching; and the Old Syrian Church can give us several lessons which are worth consideration. Let me mention two only. The regulation of the order of Deacons—"perhaps the most characteristic order of the Eastern Churches"—deserves careful study, as likely to provide a solution of some of the problems suggested by the conditions of home work. Scarcely less interesting and important is the service of ordination for the wives of the parochial clergy, by which they are made a kind of deaconesses. Some such solemn dedication might be a help to many women among ourselves who, placed by marriage in positions of heavy responsibility, are distracted by the trivial calls of modern society.

Even directly, therefore, we might gain much from extending the work which has been most happily begun in the East. And we cannot but look to more remote and wider consequences of the enterprise. If it be fulfilled, it is likely that the controversy with Mohammedanism will enter on a new stage. The spread of Mohammedanism over Eastern Christendom was largely due to the barren controversies and

divisions of Christians: the quickening and reuniting of the remnants of the ancient Churches may well be a revelation of the power of the Faith which will bring conviction to many devout souls, and open the way to the evangelization of the East by Eastern teachers. No doubt a long period of discipline and training must go before such a consummation, and our part is to claim now a share in the preparatory labour.

So the vision opens before us. By history and character and by the history and character of the National Church, the English nation is called to be the missionary nation of the world. It is not more surely marked out by its history to bring the Christian truth to the peoples of India, than it is marked out by the endowments of the National Church to bring new life to the Churches which represent the old Patriarchates of Antioch, and Alexandria, and Jerusalem. May it be enabled to fulfill this double call, and so to gain the blessing of fruitful service. Mr. Parry's narrative of his pioneer mission to Mesopotamia will, I trust, hasten the fulfilment of one part of this great issue.

B. F. DUNELM.

Auckland Castle,
Dec. 8th, 1894.

INTRODUCTION.

As in old days the tide of conquest flowed westward, it is but natural that the ebb of travel should return towards the East. Year by year the region of romance is narrowed, and places which once were names for travellers to conjure with are brought one by one within the reach of spring and summer tourists. Romance now lurks beyond the Karakoram ranges or in Japan, scared away from the more familiar haunts of Syria and Greece. Nor can "the prerogative of travellers in Turkey to tell lies," which Landor tells us was in his time undisputed, be any longer exercised.

For the serious archæologist, however, or the devotee of history much still remains within the ring or in the borderland surrounding it. With such a region, the Syrian country that lies between Palestine and the Tigris, the following pages are concerned. They present a detailed study of a relic of history pursued off the track of general research. They record no adventures or unusual episodes, but they seek to present a picture of quiet life in a country much abused, and among a people that command less than their share of ordinary interest.

Among the various schemes, many fantastic enough, for promoting the union of Christendom, none seem to rest on a firmer basis than those whose aim is to secure greater intimacy and a more intelligent cordiality between the Christians of the East and West. Several societies have been formed with this purpose, recalling the similar efforts made by the Non-jurors of the eighteenth century; and it was at the invitation of the oldest of these (the Syrian Patriarchate Education Society), and as their agent, that I undertook the

journey here described. The aims of the society, the method of carrying them out, and their prospect of success, will be apparent to the reader. It is necessary here only to record my gratitude to the society for the opportunity afforded of obtaining so unique and pleasant an experience.

Among the number of obligations which I have to acknowledge, the chief are owing to the Rev. F. E. Brightman, of the Pusey House, and the Rev. A. C. Headlam, of All Souls' College, Oxford, for much kind advice and assistance in the more strictly ecclesiastical part of my work. To Sir Frederic Goldsmid and the Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society I owe thanks for valuable suggestions in regard to the transliteration of Arabic words, and for permission to consult the library of the Society. To my brother I am indebted for much arduous work in reading and correcting manuscripts and proofs.

To the translation of parts of the sacred book of the Yazidis contained in the appendix a melancholy interest attaches. The original manuscript was in the hands of the late Professor Robertson Smith, waiting to be translated, when he died. Mr. E. G. Browne, Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and lecturer in Persian to the University, kindly undertook the work of translation, which now stands as a slight monument of love to the memory of a great Orientalist. It comprises the most authentic copy yet published of the sacred book of that strange people, with whom all who have read the works of Sir Henry Layard will be in part, at least, familiar.

I have been sparing of references to the many books which I have consulted. The chief of these are the following: the immortal history of Gibbon, to appreciate whose marvellous and accurate learning there is no surer method than to pursue some bye-path in the period of which he treats; the "Bibliotheca Orientalis" of the Assemanni, that storehouse of Eastern ecclesiastical knowledge; Dr. Payne Smith's translation of John of Ephesus, the gentle historian of the

sixth century; the works of Renaudot and Le Quien. Of more recent books, Etheridge's "Syrian Churches," Badger's "Nestorians and Their Rituals," Cutts' "Christians under the Crescent," Maclean and Browne's "Catholicos of the East and His People," Buckingham's "Travels in Mesopotamia," Palgrave's "Central Arabia," Burton's "Pilgrimage to El Madinah and Meccah," Ainsworth's "Euphrates Expedition," Layard's three volumes on Nineveh and Babylon, and the English collection of Dr. Nöldeke's essays, have been of most value.

For the map of the Jebel Tur district I am indebted to Mr. Andrus, the agent of the American Congregational Board of Missions at Midhiat. I have not thought it necessary to insert a map showing my route through a country so well known as Eastern Turkey.

In the difficult matter of the transliteration of Arabic words I have mainly followed the system of the Royal Geographical Society, as that which seems likely to win its way into most general use. It assigns to all consonants the same value that they have in English, to all vowels that which they have in Italian. All double vowels, oo ee, are thus avoided. One accent only, the acute, is used, to mark the emphasis of the syllables. In general I have not used accents in the text, but have marked each word with great care according to its East Syrian pronunciation in the glossary. Several words, commonly used in English, have been left in their usual form, such as "Koran"; others, the English spelling of which is less defensible and the correct form less seemingly pedantic, such as "harim" (harem), "bazar" (bazaar), "beg" (bey), "Mohammed" (Mahomet), have been altered. But in so difficult a matter, especially as regards vowels, it is scarcely possible to avoid inconsistency. Of certain shortcomings, for instance in the treatment of words having the definite article prefixed, I am fully aware; I must shelter myself with the excuse that I am not a scientific linguist. Nor have I made any attempt to reconcile the system I have adopted

with the far more scientific one of Mr. Browne, which nevertheless I believe to be practically less convenient.

Since the above was written the chief figure in the Old-Syrian Church has passed away. He had spent the summer in the monastery Deir-el-Za'aferan, and, being in unusual health, rode back on October the 6th to Mardin. On reaching his house he was seized by a sudden fit, and died at the age of ninety-five.

His has been a stormy life since the time when he left his mules and horses two-thirds of a century ago to follow the way of the Church, and for the last twenty years to rule his people. He has done a good work for his nation. Of a stern and at times fiery nature, holding, too, a singularly autocratic and isolated office, and living day by day far removed, in virtue of his position, from the softening influence of familiar intercourse with men, he yet, by the charm of a very tender heart, won from many the tribute of real and warm affection.

He has suffered much from harsh judgments; but for the building up of his Church and opening the way to larger light and fresher vigour he has done more than any who have gone before him. He rests in the mausoleum of the monastery awaiting, like his great predecessor Bar Hebræus, the day when all these schisms shall be done, "when the Lord shall be King over all the Earth, in the day when the Lord shall be one and His name one."

CONTENTS.

THE OLD SYRIAN CHURCH.

APPENDIX.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

SIX MONTHS IN A SYRIAN MONASTERY.

CHAPTER I.

Through the Syrian Gates.

It is a sad necessity that condemns the student of the mysterious East to enter Syria by a seaport town. Nowhere else may the ill results of inharmonious fusion be so clearly seen, bringing into foremost view the characteristic evils both of East and West. Alexandretta, the port of Aleppo, is no exception to the rule, rich though it is in memories of the past and signs of possible future greatness. The name of the town and every neighbouring hill or village recalls a vanished faith or empire. "Jacob's Well," "The Pillars of Jonah," Issus Iskanderun, each echoes the history of a long-passed age.

Over the ill-paved streets of the dirty town, one day early in April, 1892, there rumbled a rickety cab drawn by four half-starved horses, and containing two Europeans, one a smart German commercial traveller, the other an Englishman without apparent aim or occupation, out on to the broad level plain that divides the range of Amanus from the Mediterranean Sea. One age after another had marched by this same road up to the "Syrian Gates"—or pass that leads through the mountains—the armies of Cyrus, Alexander, and the Ptolemies, the mercenaries of the Lower Roman Empire, and the fate-inspired warriors of Islam. On either side was a row of

wretched huts raised on piles above a fœtid marsh, soon giving place to groves of mulberries and aloes and fields of newly-sprouting corn. It was mid-day as we crossed the fertile fever-stricken plain, and we were glad to reach the hills and feel the air grow fresher as we neared the pass and village of Beilan. The land was rich, but failed from lack of trees to satisfy our European eyes. A palm tree here and there upon the plain, and on the hill sides small groups of splendid pines, gave some relief and shade, but all too few to overcome the general sense of desolation.

On the road itself there was life enough with the strings of Syrian camels—great tawny creatures with tufted necks and shoulders, far finer to look at than the swift dromedaries of the desert. They were a picturesque sight, but seemed to express with their long upper lips unutterable sorrow, foreboding the day when they shall pass away and the Iron Horse run where the Assyrian caravans have for three thousand years trod slowly east and west. Then we passed a detachment of Turkish soldiers marching in disorderly fashion with their wives towards Aleppo; and then came herds of sheep and goats, bells tinkling and dogs barking, as they made their slow way to some wayside fountain. Pedlars and beggars that sat by the road exposing fearful sores to our charitable gaze, even these, too, were new sights to us; fresh pages of the wonderful picture-book of the East.

Beilan was a pleasant little town, stretching right across the gorge at the top of the pass and built on either side, house above house, with mosque and church between. Just beyond was an aqueduct, through breaks in which the water poured with the sound of melody so sweet in a thirsty land. Towards the sea to the west, and eastward over the plain of Antioch, the views were magnificent. The snow was still upon the mountains of Amanus and Taurus across the bay, and to the north upon the hills about Marash. In the eastern plain lay, like some mountain loch in Scotland, but many times larger, the great white lake, "Bahr-el-Ajub," of Antioch; and over and beside it floated clouds of mist, like flocks of sheep, in the heavy air.

The Syrian Gates
looking over Alexandretta

The road from this point to Aleppo was not remarkable except for a fine causeway, built over the marshes by a certain Pasha of blessed memory called Murad, and not long since restored with the road itself. A little village had sprung up by the causeway, water being plentiful, and a small stall was opened where forbidding and forbidden drinks were sold, and oranges from the groves of Tarsus. Turkeys and geese made their several noises by the water-side, tended by small brown children; and some way off, close by one of the mounds that are so abundant in this part of the country, was a group of Kurdish tents pitched there for the sake of the rich spring pasture. A little beyond these stood a large farmhouse with a village nestling round it, to cultivate the crops and gather the wild liquorice that grows plentifully in these parts. Some hot springs give the place the name of "Hammamat," and cause it to be much visited for the cure of certain diseases.

In the neighbourhood may be seen traces of the once extensive ruins of Dana, a town that lay on the high road from Antioch to the East, and the probable scene of the defeat of Queen Zenobia, in whose dominion it was, by Aurelian. Remains of cities of the Lower Empire lie scattered on every hill; and not far to the south still stand the monastery and church built to commemorate the most famous of all the Syrian Ascetics, Simeon Stylites, who, electing to spend his life in eccentric solitude on the summit of a column forty feet in height, wielded an influence over Christians and Arabs of which even the Emperor stood in awe.*

The country was in itself not interesting, although in the early morning there were fine views looking towards the northern mountains with the sun cutting across the heavy mist. The road into Aleppo was execrable, nor is it possible to describe the misery of alternately bounding over loose boulders and dragging through sloughs of gelatinous mud. The caravan road was even worse, leading in parts over rocky

* He died A.D. 459, and was buried at Antioch. A popular account of him may be read in the English collection of Professor Nöldeke's Oriental essays. The church is described in De Vogné's great work on the Syrian churches, and in the Introduction to Neale's "Patriarchate of Antioch."

ground, in which the only track available for horses' feet was from hole to hole filled with thick soft soil.

Seen from the last hill-top on the north-west side, the city of Aleppo forms a striking feature of the landscape, standing in the centre of the plain that stretches many miles to north and east and south. Of the town itself there is no need to write much. The fine bazars, the beautiful mosque of Zechariah, father of John of Damascus, with the strange legend connected with its daily call to prayer, the refined inhabitants of every creed and nationality, have all been described often enough.* I was surprised to find myself in a good hotel, strange confusion though it was of East and West. There was a visitor's book and *table d'hôte*, of which I partook in company with a loquacious Greek from Smyrna, who drank more "arrak" than coffee, and half a dozen Turkish officers with sparsely buttoned hose, who sat silent through a solid English meal for the honour and glory of the thing.

Early the next morning a deputation of the Syrians of the place came with their priest and a train of rustics to wait upon me. At their head was the best of Orientals, Antonius Azar, a member of one of the oldest and most respected families in Aleppo, to whom I had letters requesting him to forward me on my way to Mardin. Nothing could exceed his politeness and hospitality. On my return from Mardin some months later I stayed in his house; but, as his wife explained, they had thought that, though their house might seem a pleasant place after living in the barbaric interior, yet on arrival from England I should be "ashamed" to stay in such an uncivilized abode.

For some time the party sat round my room in awkward silence, rolling cigarettes for each other, and occasionally examining some of my possession. But the situation becoming strained, Selim, Azar's son, who spoke some words of English, suggested that I should go to his house and see the rest of the family. I readily acquiesced, and we walked in imposing

* See especially a pleasant account in Cutts' "Christians under the Crescent."

procession through the streets. Arrived at the house and seated in the "diwan," coffee, cigarettes, and slices of preserved citron were handed round in filagree silver dishes, and a long dull hour passed, such as is usual in a land where the polite show their breeding on a visit by the observance of a dignified silence. Such conversation as went forward related to England and the few inhabitants of that country of whom they had heard; or of the luggage I had brought with me, and the price of the various things I wore. This is the first and most polite question a Syrian can ask a stranger.

Everyone in the room smoked, including Azar's wife, an Armenian lady, who expelled both the smoke and the few words of French she knew in the same mincing manner with the tip of her tongue, as if they were gems of value which she was loth to lose. She was, nevertheless, the most refined native lady I met in Turkey, and a kind, considerate hostess. Her four daughters sat with her in the diwan, and shook hands and talked in a rational manner, very different from the custom of things further east, where women are treated like dogs, and dogs like wild animals. No less noticeable was the contrast of the simple dresses and sparse jewellery with the wealth of silk and trinkets and gold coins worn by the richer ladies of Diarbekr or Mosul; of which contrast, no doubt, the absence of railways and the ten days' journey from town to town, is in great degree the cause.

The room, in which we sat discussing the future of Turkish trade and the price of eatables in London, was a pleasant, airy diwan, decorated with green and white paint, and furnished with handsome modern carpets and cushions. There was a fine collection of old porcelain in the room, and over the doors were flaunting oleographs of the Greek and Russian royal families, with photographs of the Syrian Patriarch and several of the leading bishops. Green and red were the prevailing colours here and in the courtyard, and looked bright in the sun against the fine white plaster, for which Aleppo and Diarbekr are famous.

A large diwan for receptions, another for the ladies' use, a

dining room where everything was in a manner *à la Franga*, formed, with the kitchens and a small summer diwan, the suite of rooms upon the ground floor. The fourth side of the court facing the north was occupied by a large open verandah or "aiwán," in which to sit on summer evenings. It was covered by a lofty vaulted roof, supported on tall marble pillars of Saracenic style, having rich capitals, and the wall above decorated with graceful arabesque designs. The inner walls were of stone, and the floor of fine marble in arabesques. Everything else in the court, the fountain in the centre and the pavement, were of Aleppo marble, which gains by exposure to the air a lovely mellow tone, the colour of old parchment. The court, with its ever-flowing fountain and sweet orange trees, was only less delightful than the broad flat roof, on which I walked at evening, and gave rein to idle fancies about the ancient city hidden by roofs and porticos below.

A walk round the chief buildings of the town brought us at last to the humble little building which the Syrians call their church. It was near the hour of evening prayer, so we sat a short while with the priest, a simple, pious old man, who made me write my name in his service book. It was most pathetic to note the contrast between the fine churches of the Roman, Greek, and Armenian communions of Aleppo and this poor little place, which is all that remains to a community that not long since numbered in the town three thousand souls. Few of the worshippers seemed to understand the words of the Syriac service, but there was no mistaking the real, though ignorant, devotion of the worshippers, who came week by week from the villages round, some many miles away, to attend their fathers' church. There was one old woman, wrinkled and with hair dyed scarlet, in the church, and a score of great village men, who, service ended, walked reverently towards the altar to kiss the silver-bound Book of the Gospels and receive, one by one, the blessing of the priest before they left the church.

It was my first acquaintance with this Old Syrian church, and details were marked clearly as they occurred. Perhaps

I expected too much, and had courted disappointment. And yet there was something, too, in this bare little church and this ignorant worship, of which we have too little at home; more of simple trust and patient faith in Him who is the Head of all the Churches.

CHAPTER II.

From Aleppo to the Euphrates.

In a soothing atmosphere of cigarettes and coffee, heavy with the sense of future bakhshish, we sat, Selim Azar, myself, and two stout sons of Anak, six foot four apiece, determining the rate of a journey to Mardin. It was a long affair, as such generally are; for first the good men denied the possibility of getting their animals in from spring pasture near the town at the early hour of nine on Monday morning; this in view of growing bakhshish. For Selim's sake, however, and the honour of his house they would start at ten, and charge only twice the regular fare. More coffee and cigarettes were needed to reduce the price; and after an hour we concluded a bargain to pay half as much again as I paid on the return journey. Neither in Turkey nor elsewhere is experience to be had free. The muleteers then retired, paying, after the strange manner of their kind, a certain sum to guarantee their good faith, and promised to return at 8 a.m. on Monday; "upon their heads should it be."

By a great piece of fortune having heard that a French gentleman, a government inspector, was starting that very day for Saert, I lost no time in obtaining an introduction, and it was arranged that we should travel together to Diarbekr, so that I was saved the necessity of procuring an interpreter.

To western eyes there can be few stranger or more picturesque sights than to watch the arrival of one's train at the inn gates, attended by a crowd of interested spectators, gay-petticoated, newly shaven, and well be-turbanded for a new

week. One of the sons of Anak appeared an hour late, very differently apparelled to-day, in consideration of the journey, with one beast for my slender luggage, and another for myself. What a squeaking, and whinnying, and biting, and kicking among the number of creatures belonging to this and other caravans! Donkeys, mules, and thoroughbreds were all in the highest state of excitement, with the men shouting, and using every abusive word they knew in all their three languages. Bells clanged, and tin pots banged with coffee pounders and kettles for use upon the road, until a re-echoing bray from the chief donkey announced that the loads had all been adjusted, and the caravan was ready to start. My French companion was waiting all this time near the Serai, or government buildings just outside the town, and with him several gentlemen, Turkish and French, who had come out to escort him for the first mile of the journey.

With fantastic gyrations of our Turkish companions, and an unceasing flow of talk on the dangers of the road, to the tune of the caravan bells some way behind, we filed out of Aleppo along a route, called by courtesy a road, past the Aqueduct, built by the Empress Helena on her way to Jerusalem, and under the telegraph wire, until we reached the last of the gardens, and an olive grove, out of which rode, like an ancient knight of Arthur's court, our orderly, known in Turkish as a "zaptieh." Here everyone dismounted, watered his horse, and bade an affectionate farewell to his neighbour, as to a dearest brother, and one half turned citywards, while the rest started out towards the unknown country beyond the Euphrates.

April 4.—The last cord was cut that bound us to civilization, A wonderful sense of freedom came over us, and an invigorating buoyancy inspired by the Arab country giving us the power to perform an unbroken ride of eleven days with enjoyment.

It was a remarkable company, our caravan. The Inspector and I formed an advance guard with the zaptieh (him that came out of the wood), riding some way ahead, as we were light loads; and some days, especially when wet, reaching our night quarters two or three hours before the rest. This

much annoyed our "Katirjis," or muleteers, who were of timid stock, and did not at all like to separate from our doughty myrmidon, though the Spirit of brigandage only knows what *he* would have done, had any occasion for his services occurred; most assuredly his place beside his wards would have known him no more. A curious creature was this zaptieh, in an ancient uniform, musty blue coat with tags of cotton braid hanging promiscuously about it, and faded trousers but ill-provided with buttons to match: over all a great coat, conglomerate of red and mustard yellow, made, it seemed, more to guide the rain to unprotected spots, than keep it out. A revolver or two, a gun of enormous length and curious construction, were combined with an evil look about his eye to keep up an appearance of ferocity, which, there is reason to think, would not have been maintained in action. Further afield he improved; a passable saddle, and reins of string, led one to admire the really fine half-breed that he rode. This horse had, perhaps, fared best of any in the caravan, as his sleek sides showed; for whenever we passed a good green cornfield, and that was often in this springtime, he turned off, and browsed as long as he might. Being an official person, with pay some months, perhaps years, in arrear, the zaptieh used his prescriptive right to feed at other people's expense. That there was any right or wrong in this, did not appear to him; and had not his father done so before him? Moreover, he was a pious Moslem, as his devotions, morning and evening, with exact lavations proved. His equipment was completed by a spotted red handkerchief, called "kefiyeh," laid over his low "tarbush," and over it wound a twist of black camel's hair, the regular Arab head-dress, and an admirable protection from the sun.

The zaptiehs belong to a large corps of mounted police or orderlies, who do a great deal of courier work for the Government, carry the post, and are supplied to travellers for protection along the high roads. The Government are obliged to give as many as are necessary to anyone who bears the proper passports, and travels along the public road. Doubtless they are not of much use in case of real danger; and

in unfrequented places it is better to travel without an official, who only draws upon one the suspicion that the caravan is a valuable one; but in ordinary cases they guarantee that the Government accepts the responsibility for any loss or robbery, and ensure a polite, if unwilling reception into Kurdish villages. A good zaptieh may be extremely useful in small ways when evening comes, and may take the place of an extra servant, thoroughly earning the bakhshish which is his due.

Aleppo looked very picturesque, as we rode away in the morning light, with the beautiful mosque of S. Zechariah in front, and then the "Serai," or Government buildings, with the tower behind, lying round the high scarped rock of the citadel.

The country between Aleppo and the Euphrates is not ordinarily interesting or beautiful, except for the splendid ranges of snow all along the mountains of Kurdistan. Yet once it was a land of great cities, the land of North Syria, of Chalybonitis, of Augusta Euphratensis. We may still trace its former splendour in the mounds and ruins that lie scattered over the plains, and make the heart sigh for what it once was, and for what devastation has made it. Near and far these mounds, χώματα as Diodorus Siculus calls them, meet the eye, generally in fertile places near a stream, or not far from the foot of a hill, so that villages still nestle under them, for the pasture of the flocks, and the produce of a few ploughed acres. Tel-Azaz, near the river Afrin, Arfad to the north of Aleppo, Bashir near Nezib, the site of the famous battle between the Turks and the Egyptians in 1839, Birejik, and Baal Kiosk, the beautiful retreat of Jocelyn de Courtney, second Count of Edessa, on the Euphrates' banks, are but a few of the hundred mounds which mark the remains of ancient cities, once Syrian, then Roman, and now the shame of Turkey.*

* These sites are treated fully by W. F. Ainsworth. "Euphrates Expedition," ii. 407. Azas-Arsace, a mound 250 yards in circuit. Important when the Saracens conquered Syria; held by Robert of Flanders. In an Appendix on Chalcidene, Ainsworth says: "In the time of the Romans and Palmyreans there was no great Syrian desert . . . . it would have no existence, were it not for the predatory dispositions of the Arabs, which, unrestrained by a feeble government, render sojourn or even travel insecure . . . . all tells of the past and present capabilities of this deserted region." ii. 423.

Climate, and the permanency of site that is so strong a feature of the East, to say nothing of the tendency of the Moslems, nay, even the Christians in these lands, to let a thing fall to ruins, but not often destroy it, have kept these mounds as they have been for hundreds of years. "Thou hast made of the city an heap, of the defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built."*

For an hour or two as we left Aleppo, the low hills were stony enough, except along the banks of the Kawaik,† where herds of countless sheep and cattle feed and drink. Cows these people set little store by, for pasture is hard to find in summer, nor is their milk counted so wholesome as that of goats. Sheep there are by thousands, not least valued for their wonderful tails, the fat of which is so fine that it may be used in place of butter for cooking. Their tails grow so large at times that small wheeled carts are made to support them, with shafts attached to the creatures' sides. Selection for breeding has, of course, emphasized this peculiarity. But far beyond all other creatures of the herd is the goat, the epitome of all that in an animal is worth living for; full of frolic when a baby, and knowing nothing but to jump off small eminences, and to cry mamma; conceited and pugnacious in youth; and in maturity solemn to a degree that is at times exasperating. After a long day's journey we would often sit and watch the children bring the herds in at evening, shrieking with delight as they seized the tail of this, and the hind leg of that bleating imp. Then came solemnly in the goats; and they were set upon by the same company of boys and girls, hunting them over roofs and through kitchens until all were milked by stalwart dames, and then allowed the solace of their offspring, about which there was a good deal of quarrelling among the mothers, until they had settled down, each with her own progeny. After a short respite the kids were again seized ruthlessly,

* Not many years since, however, the builders in Aleppo began to take stone from the wonderful churches in the neighbourhood for their own use. It would be a pity if strong measures were not taken to prevent the continuance of this.

† Ainsworth i. 91, for the course and history of this river. The Chalus of Xenophon.

and cast into bell-shaped holes in the ground to work digestion's happy cure, until all goats and kids were collected, and driven into the inmost chambers of the houses for the night. In these villages the outer room is occupied by the men, an inner one by the women, and a third one by the cattle, who have thus to pass through the side of both rooms to reach their night quarters.

This work over, the children collected to stare at us, and the ladies to peep from behind corners, or prepare the evening meals, or watch their lords at play under the walls of the house.

These good people had been exercising the prescriptive right of Eastern males to do nothing in the spring, and those who had not been watching us were engaged in playing a dull game of knuckle bones, with eggs for stakes. These tall Kurds formed a picturesque group sitting under the mud walls, some in gay cloaks or "abbas," richly embroidered, others in short jackets, and all with the kefiyeh bound with a cord of camel's hair round their heads, and long white petticoats, with their boys standing round them. It was sad to see the diseases, especially of the skin and eyes, from which so many suffered, and towards which we could give little help, save by a general distribution of simple lotions. For the men it seemed a not unpleasant life, mind not considered, with plenty of wives and plenty of food; but for the women, their slaves, who knows? They have little dignity or pleasure in any sense, except with their children, while they have to do all the hard work. Of religion, there is little enough either for men or women, beyond the daily prayer-drill, led by the village "Mullah," on an open space some little way beyond the houses. The sight of Moslems at prayer is impressive when seen for the first time; but to see it day by day is to learn to doubt whether it be, for most of them, more than a mere exercise of drill; certainly it does not teach them not to lie, or cheat, or murder, nor, above all, to honour the wife as the weaker vessel.

Towards evening of the first day, we came through richer land, grassy, and with more ample crops, to the village of

Akhterin. It was a desolate place, being built of sun-burnt brick, and destitute of trees, while the groups of conical roofs, constructed after the manner of the so-called treasuries of Mycenæ, gave it the appearance of a large rhubarb bed. We were conducted through a filthy yard to the guest-room of the head man's house, a fine, new room, with a platform on each side of the entrance, on which to sit and smoke or stand and pray. On the opposite side of the yard, a huge fire blazed in a corner just outside the stable, and on the third side, were the rooms occupied by the family and their various herds. Everywhere, except in our diwan, mud prevailed, making very necessary the large wooden clogs that all donned to cross the yard. Fortunately, the air was, as yet, too cold for mosquitos and other insects, so that we enjoyed repose unbroken, except by the music of donkeys and innumerable cocks.

Our room was large and freshly decorated with rough carving and gaudy paint of red and green upon all the woodwork, and gay weapons of antique design ranged upon the walls, with tinsel ornaments round a mirror, the most distorting it has been my fortune to behold. Near the door, a wooden balustrade divided off a space some two feet below the level of the rest of the room, where Katirjis and women might sit and gaze upon their lords. Down the two sides of the upper portions two long felt rugs were laid, on which we sat and took our ease until the appearance of supper. The sole architectural feature of the room was a large round fireplace, built half in, half outside the wall, serving well enough in calm weather, but in a wind—well, the smoke did drive the swallows out before bed-time came. There were windows, but very small and high up, for safety's sake, so that all the light there was came in at the door, which, as always in this hospitable land, stood open from morning until night. No one is refused entrance, who wishes to inspect, rob, or ask rude questions of the traveller, drinking his coffee and smoking his cigarette. Supper was a simple meal, hard-boiled eggs, bread, sometimes milk, every fourth day a starved old hen, and a little wine, so long as good Madame Azar's Aleppo

store lasted, after which we had to rely upon the scant provisions of the Kurdish villages.

Next morning, starting early on an ample breakfast of hot milk and bread, we soon overtook a party of Armenians waiting to join our caravan. Great sallow-faced men with heavy jaws and aquiline noses starting straight from their foreheads, bushy eyebrows and coarse black hair, they did not prepossess us in favour of their race. They all rode horses, either lame or with frightful sores upon their backs, perched upon a mountain of rugs and mattresses, like inverted snails set upon their horses. Coats, kettles, tin pots, and other utensils hung from every available point of the animals, or were piled upon the saddle so that the whole erection reached not far from ten feet high.

We were passing through country far richer than the previous day, green valleys and hill slopes covered with anemones and periwinkles. Down by the streams countless goats and sheep fed, tended by shepherds of the old poetic type. Over a green slope came an aged herdsman, ugly and brown, seated on a tiny donkey that listened wrapt to the mournful strains of the reed pipe he played. Then in procession came two great yellow dogs, crop-eared and solemn; and next, with the cares of many generations on his neck, the father of the flock, followed close by a crowd of goats and sheep and lambs and kids bleating fit to break their silly hearts and drowning the quaint vagaries of the old man's pipe. Further on was another scene of patriarchal memories, a well with the stone rolled off the mouth, and children pelting the cattle with stones to let the goats and sheep drink their fill. Men were drawing the water in great skins to pour into the troughs, while women saw fair play done among the beasts. "And hither were all the flocks gathered; and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place."

In the evening we were to sup with our Armenian companions. The less said of that meal the better, except that we enjoyed one admirable dish of fine wheat boiled in milk. But

for the rest eggs swimming in brilliant yellow grease, none too sweet, with sardines, and above all sardine oil, with the flavour of the tin upon it, how they enraptured our hosts!

Day followed day monotonously enough, nor did the character of the country change much on the west side of the river. The weather seemed set for an eternal summer, and everything looked its best in the springtime of the year. Only as we started at four or five o'clock in the morning did we feel the cold, and caused much merriment among the Kurdish villagers by our strange wide-awake hats, and the gay rugs with which we kept ourselves warm. But as soon as the sun was up we were plunged into summer warmth and, hoisting umbrellas, began to look out eagerly for wayside wells.

As we mounted the ridges that overlook the Euphrates valley by gradual stages, the heat grew more intense than ever, until my katirji, "excellent minion" that he was, as he "mounted and marched" just before me on his tiny donkey, fell fast asleep. The heat overcame the donkey too, so that suddenly, without any warning, she gave way and precipitated the big man on his nose. His violent language was soon drowned by the laughter of his fellow katirjis, delighted at the discomfiture of a rival: and it was some time before the caravan recovered its equilibrium, and was prepared to descend the slopes that lead down to the river shore.

Thousands of goats and sheep were feeding along these hills; and on the sandy shore were cranes and ibis, and turtles basking by the pools into which they were ready to slide at the sudden approach of a foe. The western shore is about four hundred yards in breadth; but on the east the rocks rise sheer above the water up to the platform on which the town of Birejik is built.* This first view of Mesopotamia, with its ancient frontier town, the Zeugma of the Lower Empire, was exceedingly beautiful. The early evening light illumined the massive ruins of the castle towards the north,

* Ainsworth (i. 214) gives an admirable description of this town, as of all the country between it and Antioch. The sculptures in the castle described by Badger (i. 351) are no longer to be seen.

jutting out upon a crest of chalk into the broad stream, and southwards the long line of houses crowded in between the water and the hills. Lower down among some palm trees stood a graceful little minaret with a group of mosques and lattice-windowed houses looking out upon the river. Everywhere there were trees, and higher up a cluster of tall pines, to which a flock of green ibis, that had been holding council, on the western shore, disturbed by our approach had flown off to watch events from a safer and more dignified seclusion. They, like the storks, hold an immemorial charter of protection from the reverence of the Mohammedan inhabitants of Turkey. Birejik is one of the most picturesque and interesting places in Mesopotamia. It was a little way below this town that the Euphrates Valley Expedition started on its course, that was at one time to have opened a new and important page of our Eastern history. But it seems that that was all a dream, to die away within half a score of years.

It took nearly an hour to collect our scattered caravan upon the shore, ready to embark upon the most antiquely fashioned barge this side of India. Half-a-dozen of these huge arks were moored below the town, two of which soon made their way across the stream to the place where we were standing. The bows were lofty and massive, with a platform upon which stood a man with an immense pole shaped at the end for use as a rudder, and fastened at the nose of the ship. Embarkation was a work of some difficulty, for, although the beam ends were cut down nearly level with the water, yet the stern could only come within two or three yards of the shore, and everything, including the baggage mules, had to wade and then make a gigantic leap or scramble up on to the platform. One man seized the head, and another the tail of each successive beast, the one to pull the other to keep him straight; everyone shouting and getting very wet, until with a desperate effort and all the skin off his knees, the animal plunged into the barge. The donkeys, who could scarcely do more than see over the bar, came off the worst; but my katirji carried his in! Last of all the zaptieh, who in his

official soul thought to give himself airs, dashed into the water like a second Cæsar, determined to scale the barge or die; but his horse, either having eaten too much green corn, or wishing to spite the man, missed hold of the beam and getting entangled in the ropes, tumbled straight back, and left his valiant rider in the stream clinging to the barge. This damped his fine spirit, and he submitted to be helped up by the two murky half-clad Armenians who guided the craft behind. We humbler people were borne upon the backs of other mermen, and deposited in doubtful safety between the hoofs of our horses and the deep sea of the "fourth river which is Euphrates."

It was like a dream, this passing of the Euphrates, with all the thoughts conjured up by the wonderful stream; Abraham's flocks may have crossed here, or Senacherib passed by here with his hosts on the way to Jerusalem, and many a Roman Emperor, and Persian King, Saracen Amir, and Crusading Count; but the first was the passing, on which one preferred to think, the passing of the great Patriarch, to whom all the country looks back as to its father, the man of peace and of submissive will, the "Friend of God."

After a swing across and down the stream, we were towed up by the Arabs who stood on the middle shallows, and then swung right across down the full stream a hundred yards below the landing place, to which we were again towed and rowed, by men on shore and others at the helm, one with the great rudder, and a second with a monstrous punt pole, and both with countless imprecations, while the rowers cried, "Ya Allah, ya Allah,"* keeping time to the oar strokes. It was a perilous voyage, especially as the zaptieh's horse had elected to make himself conspicuous, kicking all the other horses, and ridding himself of his saddle, which fell into the foul bottom of the boat. But

* I think I never heard a Moslem of the lower orders speak, but every other sentence contained the name of the Almighty. The boasted regard for His power has a dark as well as a bright side, and a Christian cannot walk through any Turkish town without being shocked a hundred times a day by the reckless use of this name.

at last it was all over, and, with sundry bakhshish, we escaped up to M. l'Inspecteur's office, where coffee and cigarettes awaited us.

After sitting in silence for more than an hour on very hard official benches, the never-to-be-hurried Turkish clerk entered with many salams and grovelling expressions of regard, and some business was transacted. We retired to our khan to settle for the night, until an invitation came to dine at the bureau. This was pleasing news, nor did the dinner, *à la Turca* of course, disappoint us. We enjoyed, for the first time, real *poisson d'Euphrate* and rice pilaf, arrowroot, and chicken, crowned by a lordly dish of leben, or curdled milk, a dish for heroes on a hot day. All this we ate without knives or forks, sitting on small string-covered stools at a huge tin tray placed upon another such. The postprandial wash followed, very desirably, and, last of all, very delicious coffee and unlimited cigarettes.

After sitting another hour in polite silence we were glad to bid good-night and find our way, under the guidance of our new zaptieh with his lantern, to our khan. No man of any position walks abroad at night without a lantern, varying in height according to his station, from one to three feet. It consists of a lamp placed within a huge case of glass and tin, and is carried almost on the ground by a servant preceding his master. It is a necessary precaution in such rocky streets as those of most Eastern towns, and explains why the Psalmist spoke of "Thy word a lantern unto my *feet*." We were not long in falling asleep, although in the middle of the night I woke to hear M. l'Inspecteur's katirji complaining to the moon how the custom-house officer at the ferry had robbed him of thirty pounds Turkish for conveying gunpowder contraband from Aleppo to Mardin. When accused he was quite calm, and paid the money down like a man. But reflection brought sorrow in its train; not that he could not afford the money as well as most muleteers in Turkey, but he had been outwitted, and, all said and done, thirty pounds is a good round sum in Turkish gold. In consequence, he never recovered his temper for the remainder of our journey.

The rest of our company, the five Armenians, were all drunk, having taken advantage of an early arrival to "make keif" in a liberal way during the evening. They had thus celebrated the first stage of our journey, and inaugurated the morrow's start to traverse the country of the common father, Abraham.

CHAPTER III.

Birejik to Diarbekr.

More than usual bustle attended our departure from Birejik, not only on account of our katirji's ill-humour, but of the very steep road that led up to the table-land above the river. The road, atrocious in itself, was rendered more so by the network of streamlets that sought their way down to the "Father of Rivers." It was occupied by crowds of quarrelsome magpies, and a company of lordly Arabs, travelling westward with long strings of camels and hungering after our wealth. The cold air above, and a crying sense of emptiness within, combined to make us thoroughly miserable. But as the sun arose and we began again to descend to smoother lands, matters improved, and the true beauty of the province of Osroëne, the kingdom of the Abgari of Edessa, began to spread itself before us.

The country was, if anything, richer than before, and the outlines of the snow mountains to the north still more beautiful. But, as afternoon came on, and we were within a few miles of our destination for the night, down came the rain, with the suddenness that characterizes a break-up of fine weather in the East. In ten minutes, those who had no mackintoshes were wet through, and we had scarcely time to dry ourselves in the sun that blazed out as soon as the rain was over, when we found ourselves at the village of Shishan, and soon after sitting round a blazing fire with bowls of rich, bubbling goat's milk before us.

We were loth to leave these admirable quarters next