

THE BAQUBAH REFUGEE CAMP

An Account of Work on behalf of the Persecuted
Assyrian Christians

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1920

THE FAITH PRESS
London: The Faith House, 22 Buckingham St.,
Charing Cross, W.C.2.
Manchester: 5 & 7 Greengate, Salford.

Assyrian International News Agency
Books Online
www.aina.org

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PREFACE

THE following pages have been written with the twofold object of bringing to the notice of the British and American public the travails, of a small Christian nation, which unreservedly threw in its lot with the Entente cause during the late World War, and suffered grievously in consequence; and, secondly, to emphasise what Great Britain, practically unaided, has taken upon her own already greatly overburdened shoulders to ameliorate the sad lot of these fugitives from their former homes.

The writer, as late Commandant of this huge Refugee Camp, almost from its inception, should obviously be in a position to discuss with some knowledge of the facts the matter presented in this little book; and if by so doing he succeeds in raising the interest of others in the fate of the obscure Assyrian nation he will feel that his task has not been in vain.

H. H. A.
April 1920.

CHAPTER I

The Camp; and events that led to its formation

PERIODICAL references have appeared in the Press and elsewhere to the Refugee Camp at Baqubah and it is thought that a somewhat more detailed account of this "tented city" may prove of interest to many who follow the fortunes of small nations with no little concern--as a result of the tremendous upheaval caused by the late World War.

The little town of Baqubah is situated on the left bank of the river Diala, which, rising in the Persian uplands, flows into the Tigris a few miles south of Baghdad. The town is some 33 miles NNE of Baghdad, and is on the direct caravan route between that city and Kirmanshah, Hamadan, and other important Persian centres. The brick and mud houses and huts of Baqubah are almost entirely concealed from the right bank of the river--here from 150 to 200 yards wide during the flood season, and confined between high precipitous mud banks by a luxuriant growth of date palms, orange groves, figs and vines, for which this little oasis is noted throughout Mesopotamia.

The metre gauge railway from Baghdad to Kizil Robot and the Persian frontier, which was commenced shortly after the British occupation of Baghdad, in order, to facilitate the operations undertaken against the Turkish forces in those regions, crossed the Diala by means of a lofty, wooden pile bridge after traversing a great easterly loop of the river a mile or a mile and a half down stream of Baqubah. In striking contrast to the left bank of the river, the right, hereabouts, is entirely devoid of trees or fruit gardens, the neglected soil producing little beyond dwarf camel-thorn owing to the long disuse of the ancient Nahrwan and other canals. These, at one period in history, had evidently fertilised the now and flat plain between Baghdad and the Jebal Hamrin hills, and converted scores of square miles into a veritable granary for the dense population of the great city on the Tigris.

This absence of cultivation and vegetation, however, greatly reduced the difficulties of the problem by which the authorities in Mesopotamia were confronted in providing a suitable site for the hordes of refugees from Persia, seeking maintenance and security under British protection, in the autumn of 1918. The great loop of the Diala river, together with the elevated flat ground to the west of the banks of the old Nahrwan Canal, which turns north and south across the base of the loop--a distance of about 11.5 miles--afforded ample scope on the right bank for the accommodation of forty to fifty thousand people under canvas; whilst the railway passing down the centre of this loop greatly simplified the question of supply.

Running almost parallel to the old Nahrwan Canal, and distant some 1,200 yards to the west of it across the plain, is another small canal known as the Othmaniyeh Canal, down which water from the Diala was permitted to flow fairly regularly. This was convenient for watering a large animal enclosure; and, moreover, enabled two-thirds of the population, camped without the river loop, to obtain admirable bathing facilities. From the eastern extremity of the loop, where the railway crossed the Diala, to the western limit of the camp, where it crossed the running Othmaniyeh Canal, was approximately 1.75 miles in length; and within this area were ultimately erected some 3,000 E.P.¹ tents for the accommodation of the refugees, hospitals, and troops, and the various departments connected with the camp.

The above details are given first with the intention of creating some impression of the extent and size of this huge camp; but before proceeding further with a description of the camp and its inhabitants it will perhaps make the narrative clearer if a brief account is now attempted of the genesis of the Refugee Camp, and the events that led to the necessity of there accommodating 40,000 to 50,000 men, women and children-fugitives from their former homes in the mountains and plains between Lake Van in Turkish territory and Lake Urumieh in Persia, whence they were forced to flee before Moslem oppression and armed hostility by Turk, Kurd, and Persian.

These refugees are all of a very ancient Christianity and had maintained themselves since the rise of Mohammedanism in the hills of Kurdistan and adjoining plains for many centuries, in spite of being ringed round by Moslems of a more or less fanatical type, with whom they were in almost constant conflict, and by whom they were vastly outnumbered. Those for whom shelter and security were ultimately provided in the Baqubah Refugee Camp may roughly be grouped under three separate heads

(a) The Armenians, chiefly from the region of Lake Van, who numbered approximately one-third of the camp population;

(b) The Assyrians of the mountains of Kurdistan in Turkish territory, who formerly inhabited the wild regions watered by the Greater Zab and its afluent; and who also numbered approximately one-third, of the population;

(c) The Assyrians and Armenians of the Urumieh and Salmas Plains, and formerly Persian subjects, who comprised the remaining third.

Broadly speaking, the proportion of men, women and children in each of the above groups was almost identical; so the camp may roughly be described as being composed of some 15,000 men, 15,000 women, and 15,000 children under 14 years of age, at the time I handed over command to my successor in June, 1919.

Though all Christians, the above three groups possess distinct characteristics, and may in some respects be almost regarded as separate nationalities. The Assyrians and Armenians speak entirely different languages, and their religious observances are by no means identical; and though both types of Assyrians, the mountaineers and plainsmen, owe allegiance to Mar Shimun, the spiritual and temporal head of the Assyrian nation, as their Patriarch, yet they, too, differ from each other. The Assyrians of the mountains are a hardy and warlike people, divided up into various, chiefly pastoral, tribes, who have never really acknowledged or acquiesced in Turkish rule, being assisted to this attitude by the difficult and formidable nature of their mountain fastnesses. The Assyrians of the plains in Persian territory, on the other hand, do not possess the martial marauding instincts of their mountain brethren, and may be regarded generally as an unwarlike, peaceful folk, chiefly devoted to agriculture, and far better educated than the mountaineers, owing to the establishment of American Missions in their midst for many years past. A large proportion of this group have forsaken the faith of their fathers--the ancient Nestorian Church--and been drawn into the American Presbyterian fold. This question of religion unhappily gives rise to considerable dissension, as it tends somewhat to split the Assyrian ranks asunder, and to undermine the authority of the Patriarch as both spiritual and temporal head of the nation. In their backward state of civilization these peoples are far too prone to connect religious differences with nationality, with the result that those who have been proselytised by the activities of French Roman Catholic priests, in or about the Mosul vilayet, and are known as Chaldeans, are regarded now as French rather than Assyrians proper; whilst, in the same way, those who have left their ancient Church and turned Presbyterian are looked upon virtually as an American offshoot of their race. The Patriarch dwells chiefly with the mountaineers, who are almost all entirely Nestorians, and amongst them his rule is undisputed. The members of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission to the Assyrians, very rightly in my humble opinion, confine their attention to educating and improving these peoples, without in any way attempting to convert or interfere with the religion of these Nestorians; and, they are, in consequence, not viewed with the same amount of veiled suspicion and distrust by the supporters of the ancient rites of the former National Church.

For some years past our Press has been flooded at intervals with heart-rending accounts of the atrocious massacres perpetrated on Armenians by Turks and Kurds, so it is needless for me to draw any further attention to them; but the part played by the small and obscure Assyrian Nation in the recent World War is certainly less well known, and therefore deserves more detailed mention to explain how it was that the remnants of this people sought an asylum with us at Baqubah.

Dealing first with the mountaineers, occupying Turkish territory at the outbreak of the war, it may be stated that for many years past they had cherished the hope that either the English or Russians would set them free from the oppressions under which they were suffering; and it was only natural, therefore, that when war broke out their sympathies would be with the Entente as against the Turk. The Turks, however, made frequent attempts by many specious promises to enlist the services of these hardy Christian tribesmen against the advancing Russians; but these were all unequivocally declined by the late Patriarch early in 1915, as a result of Russian overtures and promises of help, these Assyrians openly threw in their lot with the Entente, made attacks on the Turkish forces at various points, and ultimately formed a junction with the Russian troops west of Julamerk. No sooner had this been accomplished, however, than, the Russian commander announced that he had received orders to return to Van the following day. The mountaineers protested, pointing out that the Russian withdrawal spelt destruction to themselves, and begged for three days in which to gather their people together for evacuation of their country; or, failing this, that at least arms and ammunition should be served out to them in sufficient quantities to defend themselves. These requests were refused, the Russian force withdrew, and the Turks and Kurds attacked the Assyrians in overwhelming strength. Yet for six long months these hardy mountaineers, ill-armed, and hampered by numbers of women and children, and large flocks of goats and sheep, stubbornly defended their mountain homes against the repeated efforts of the Turkish regular troops, and irregular Kurdish hordes. The autumn snows were now beginning to fall, and their last strongholds in the lofty plateaux were surrounded by their relentless foes, who had cut off their direct line of retreat leading to their brethren in the uplands of Persia. Encumbered as they were with all their impedimenta, and faced by mountain ranges and gorges as difficult to traverse as any habitable region on earth, they nevertheless succeeded in breaking their way through, by means of a circuitous route, and ultimately emerged from the mountains, convoying their women, children, and flocks to the plains of Persia, where they reached comparative safety, for the time, amongst their brethren and the Russian troops then in occupation of Urumieh. Their late homes had been utterly destroyed by Turks and Kurds, who laid waste the country, wrecking their villages and churches, and breaking down the skilful irrigation channels which watered their terraced fields.

Although the mountaineers had regarded the act of the Russians in withdrawing to Van as one of bad faith between Allies, yet they again agreed, after their arrival in Persia, to assist the Russians, who appealed to them for their services in that country. Two battalions of these mountaineers were organised and placed under Russian officers, and formed an

integral part of the Russian Army. Later, another battalion was raised and placed under the special command of the Assyrian Patriarch. These battalions were in active service under Russian direction, and employed against the Turks and Kurds, until the dissolution of the Russian Army; and then, during the first half of 1918, formed part of the Irregular Force that defended the plains of Urumieh and Salmas, and held the Turks in check on that frontier. In fourteen distinct actions, between March and, July 1918, they defeated every force that was brought against them--in conjunction with the Armenians of Van, who had also sought refuge in the Urumieh plains when deserted by the Russians.

It is advisable now to touch briefly on the unhappy position of the Christians in the Urumieh plains. The experience of these Armenians and Assyrians both before and during the war gave them no reason to hope for fair treatment at the hands of Turk, Kurd or Persian. In August 1914, before Turkey had declared war on Russia, the Christian villages of Targawar and Margawar, outlying plains of Persia, were looted and destroyed by Turks, and by Kurds who were Persian subjects. At the beginning of 1915 the whole of the Assyrian and Armenian population of Urumieh, with a very few exceptions, were looted, their homes destroyed, their churches burned, men murdered, women violated, and girls carried away captive--chiefly by their Persian neighbours. The Russians who had retired from Urumieh at the end of December 1914 reoccupied Urumieh in May 1915, but in August ordered a second evacuation, when most of the American Missionaries left, accompanied by Assyrians. This evacuation was never completely carried out and the Assyrians shortly after returned.

During the autumn of 1915 the Assyrian mountaineers, as already related, arrived from Turkish territory, and settled down amongst their co-religionists in the Persian districts of Khoi, Salmas and Urumieh. In the spring of 1916 the Russians advanced south and west into Kurdistan, accompanied by the freshly-raised Assyrian and Armenian battalions, driving the Turks and Kurds before them. For some eighteen months afterwards the Moslems and Christians lived together in comparative peace on the plains of Urumieh and Salmas; but when the break-up of the Russian Army occurred disturbances recommenced.

Early in December 1917 the Russians decided to withdraw all their forces from N.W. Persia, and the serious question of what the Assyrian nation were to do arose. In consultation with Russian officers and the Caucasus Government the Assyrians decided to remain; and, in cooperation with the Armenians to the North, endeavour to hold the Persian front against the Turks. They accepted arms and ammunition from the Russians for this purpose; whilst some Russian officers, as well as one French one, remained on as their instructors. This arming of the Assyrians was resented by the Persian Government; but the Assyrians replied they had no quarrel with Persia, and desired only to be permitted to remain in peace on Persian soil until they could return to their own homes. They were ordered to disarm, but protested that being in close contact with their enemies the Turks and Kurds, it was impossible and that, moreover, the mountaineers always had borne arms. This did not satisfy the Persians, who, after the withdrawal of the Russians, attempted forcibly to disarm the Assyrians, which led to disturbances in Khoi, Salmas and Urumieh.

Fighting became general in the latter town on February 22nd, when the Christians inflicted a heavy defeat on the Moslems, after which peaceful relations were re-established. But Persians from outside now interfered and prevented a satisfactory peace and reconciliation being effected; and Mar Shimun, the Assyrian Patriarch, and head of the nation, was treacherously murdered with a number of his followers, after a Peace Conference, by Simku, a Kurdish chieftain of Salmas, whom Mar Shimun visited to settle the terms between Moslems and Christians. This occurred about the middle of March 1913, and when the news reached Urumieh the infuriated Assyrians at once massacred a number of Kurds in that city, until the slaughter was put down by the Assyrian authorities.

An Assyrian force, however, was hastily organised under one Agha Petros, and immediately despatched to punish Simku in his fortress at Chara. After thirty-six hours fighting Simku was defeated, and many of his people killed; but he himself, unfortunately, escaped with some 500 followers to Khoi, and has been a serious obstacle to the repatriation of the Urumieh Assyrians since. On its return journey the force relieved a number of Christians imprisoned at Dilman, and subsequently punished other villages, the inhabitants of which had murdered Christians during its absence from Urumieh.

About the middle of April a Turkish force was reported to be advancing from the direction of Sujbulak and Ushnu. Agha Petros, placing himself at the head of the Assyrians, advanced to meet this force and heavily defeated the Turks, from whom several guns and some 300 prisoners were captured near Ushnu. Subsequently the Assyrians were successful in two other engagements against Turkish forces. But the opposition of the Persian Democrats only increased against the Assyrians, and some 4,000 of them dwelling in Khoi were ruthlessly massacred, only a few women and children being left.

From this time on until the end of July the Christians were, hard put to it defending themselves against the combined forces of Turks, Kurds, and Persians. Surrounded by overwhelming numbers, and their stock of ammunition running dangerously low, the Christians were finally forced to abandon their homes in the Urumieh plains, and to start of on their long, southerly march through hostile country to seek shelter behind the British, whom they had long been expecting to come to their succour. The evacuation of Urumieh was not completed before the Persian population were up in arms, killing women and children, old men and sick, in the streets of the town; and then followed along the road to cut the

throats of stragglers without respect to age or sex. Some 10,000 Christians were cut off and never able to join the exodus, their fate being unknown, though it is conjectured most were massacred.

This massacre continued for the greater part of the long trek of 320 miles to Hamadan; but when a small British force was met at Sain Kaleh, the horrors of the journey were somewhat mitigated, during the last 200 miles, by the gallant efforts, day after day, of these few mounted British troops to keep the pursuing Moslems at bay, and to cover the retirement of the refugee hordes. Throughout the greater period of the war the road between Urumieh and Hamadan had been devastated by Turk and Russian in turn, so supplies were scarce, and the privations endured by the refugees resulted in thousands dying by the wayside, from hunger, disease, and exhaustion. Driven thereto by a spirit of reprisals, and hunger, certain sections of the fugitives undoubtedly committed great excesses during their flight, on roadside Moslem villages, since they were well aware that those of their numbers who had dropped behind, had been pitilessly massacred or violated by their pursuers and though they plundered freely, it is on record that, in spite of all these Christians had experienced at the hands of the Mohammedans, no single instance is traceable where any Moslem woman was violated by, or otherwise suffered indignity at the hands of, a Christian. Starving people, whatever their colour or nationality, passing through villages occupied by their ancient and sworn enemies, will inevitably help themselves to what little may be available in the way of food, to sustain life; and to expect otherwise exhibits a lack of knowledge of human nature. Ultimately the remnants of Christian refugees, some 50,000 in number, reached Hamadan in mid-August in a most pitiable condition.

At this time the British were in occupation of the main line of road communication between Baghdad and the Caspian Sea, passing through Baqubah, Kirmanshah, Hamadan, Kazvin and Enzeli--over 600 miles in length. Small detachments had been pushed forward in various directions towards Tabris, the capital of Azarbaijan, then largely in possession of the Turks, though a Persian Province. Attempts had been made to get into touch with the hard-pressed Christians about Urumieh, and a British aeroplane had landed there early in July after a daring journey, with promises of ammunition, money, and officers to train the Assyrian Army. The Assyrians agreed to endeavour to break through their surrounding enemies, and to join the British at Sain Kaleh about July 24th.

A squadron of the 14th Hussars and a Machine Gun Section, together with other British officers and N.C.O's, accordingly advanced from Bijar with a convoy of ammunition and money to meet the Assyrians at Sain Kaleh. This place was reached on the 23rd July; but as no news was received of the Assyrians on the 26th, difficulties of supply necessitated the withdrawal of the column to Takkan Tepeh. There on the 31st a messenger arrived reporting the arrival of the refugees in the neighbourhood of Sain Kaleh, whereupon the convoy returned and got into touch with the fugitives at that place on the 2nd August. Thence they covered the retirement, and shepherded the demoralised crowds of men, women, children, carts, animals, flocks and herds ultimately to Hamadan, through country almost entirely devoid of supplies.

Having regard to the great difficulties that were already being experienced in maintaining the British forces in Persia, spread out to the Caspian, it is obvious that the advent of tens of thousands of destitute men, women and children at Hamadan seriously aggravated the problem of maintenance along the Persian lines of communication. It was decided, therefore, that several thousand of the more robust males should be enrolled as an Irregular Force for employment in Persia; and that others should be utilised as Labour Battalions to improve existing road communications on the Persian plateau. The remainder of the refugees were to be drafted down the road in batches, during the next few months, to some concentration camp readily accessible from supply centres in Mesopotamia. Baqubah was selected as a Convenient site, towards the end of August, for the, reasons already given, and steps were immediately taken in hand to prepare the area for the reception of refugees already on the road down from Hamadan, and the advanced portions of whom were shortly expected. Tents and mat shelters were hastily erected, and the general arrangements of the camp, and proposals for further expansion, carefully considered.

It would be tedious were I to attempt to describe the shifts and trials of the early days of the camp in meeting the sudden demands of a steady flow of forlorn humanity, who had lost their all, and had but little to hope for, or look forward to, after their dreadful experiences since leaving Urumieh. It may perhaps, however, be of interest to hear some further details of the general organization of the camp, and what was done for the refugees by the time we had got into our strides, and were able to flatter ourselves the show was a "going concern." It is perhaps needless for me to emphasise the extraordinary difficulties caused by the language question, for comparatively few of the refugees could speak English, and there was only one British officer in Mesopotamia who knew Syriac, and none who could speak Armenian. Fortunately the services of the former officer were early placed at the disposal of the Camp Commandant, as he had been with the small force that went to meet the refugees at Sain Kaleh; whilst several members of the American Persian, Relief Commission, who spoke Syriac and had worked for years amongst the Assyrians, quickly came to our assistance at the camp and proved of great value to us.

CHAPTER II

Administration and Organization of the Camp

CAMP Headquarters consisted of the Commandant, a G.O.C.; an A.A.; and Q.M.G.; D.A.Q.M.G. and a Staff Captain; an Assistant-Director of Medical Services; a D.A.D.M.S., for Sanitation; an Arabic speaking Political Officer, as liaison officer between the Commandant and the Political Officer Baqubah circle; and the Special Service Officer previously mentioned who spoke Syriac fluently and had lived before the war with the Assyrian mountaineers. There were in addition, in the Camp area, a Deputy-Assistant Director, Supplies and Transport; a D.A.P.M., in charge of the Military Police and Detention Camp; an officer in charge of Works; an officer in charge of Water Supply; a Controller of Refugee Labour; an officer in charge of the camp Q.M. Stores and Ordnance; a Field Treasure Chest Officer; a Postal Department; and others required for the efficient administration of the camp, such as a Veterinary Officer and staff, etc.

The whole camp area occupied was subdivided into three lesser areas, known respectively as "A," "B" and "C" areas, the former comprising the entire loop of the river, and bounded by the Diala on three sides and the Nahrwan high bank on the fourth. The flat plateau between the Nahrwan and the Othmaniyeh Canals, which afforded accommodation for two-thirds of the population, was divided into "B" and "C" areas. Each area had its own senior British officer in command, and contained from ten to twelve sections. Each section consisted approximately of fifty E.P. tents, in which were accommodated some 1,250 refugees, for whose welfare, cleanliness, and discipline a British officer assisted by five British N.C.O.'s and privates, was held responsible. The camp, therefore, consisted in reality of a series of regularly laid out tented villages, 600 ft. by 400 ft. sheltering 1,250 souls--each section having its own piped water supply, cooking sheds, latrines, incinerators, washing-places, etc., under the immediate charge of the B.O. and British other ranks who lived on the premises, so to speak.

During the early rush of refugees from Hamadan it was only possible to allot arrivals, as they came, to such vacant tents as existed in various sections which had been opened out for their reception. Consequently, for some ten weeks after the camp was started, Armenians, Mountain Assyrians and Plain Assyrians were, unavoidably, somewhat intermingled throughout the camp. Members of the same families, arriving at different dates, had, necessarily, to be temporarily located in different sections, with the result that refugees were constantly disappearing in droves from one section and cropping up in others, thus completely baffling the ration arrangements made for respective sections. As more accommodation gradually became available by the opening out of new sections, and the stream of refugees from Persia began to show signs of diminishing, it was decided to take a complete tribal census of the camp, and to arrange for a "General Post" on a given day, in order to remedy matters. The list took some three weeks to compile, and much labour had further to be expended on arranging exactly to which section and tent every man, woman, and child should be allotted. But thanks to the very careful working out of the scheme by my staff, and a preliminary rehearsal, assisted by men and officers of the 1/4th Battalion the Devonshire Regiment to shepherd the people to their new abodes, the "General Post" on the morning of the 19th November, 1918, went off without a hitch, and all were settled into their freshly-allotted homes before midday! Some 30,000 people were simultaneously on the move throughout the camp, and as all were laden with their bedding, household goods, cooking-pots, etc., etc., the scene presented for several hours was one not easily forgotten. The British Tommy, as always, quite surpassed himself, and not an infant or child was found to have gone astray, or got separated from its parents, in this formidable undertaking.

As a result of the "General Post," the Armenians were all located in "A" area; whilst "B," and "C" were occupied by Assyrians, who were arranged throughout the sections in accordance with their tribal divisions and affiliations. The supply, and other questions of administration and discipline, were greatly simplified in consequence.

Besides the human element provision had also to be made for thousands of animals brought down by the refugees, in addition to wooden carts of ancient and wonderful design. Altogether some 6,000 animals of different kinds, ponies, mules, cattle, donkeys and camels, besides 7,000 or 8,000 goats and sheep, accompanied the refugees. Grazing being practically non-existent in the vicinity of Baqubah, it was decided to locate as large a number of animals as possible at Beled Ruz, some 25 miles distant to the east, under refugee guards. Some 4,000 in all were sent to grazing grounds there, and a small colony of 1,000 refugees established to look after them; but after a few months some 1200 animals had died, and been sold to, or stolen by, Arabs; and so much friction resulted between Arabs and Christians out there that eventually this colony was withdrawn again to Baqubah. The remainder of the animals were retained for veterinary treatment; and transport work in the Camp area, and, others utilised for agricultural purposes in the vicinity.

In addition to the above the Assyrian Contingent, which began to arrive from Persia about the middle of November, also brought down a further 800 ponies with them. There were a good many cases of glanders amongst the animals of the

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Contingent and in the Refugee Camp. Mange was also common and segregation paddocks had to be provided; but many animals had to be destroyed in order to stamp out these diseases. Nevertheless we were able to utilise about 120 refugee carts daily, which performed most useful work in the camp area in the transportation of supplies, etc. A section of "R" Co. S. and T., with its mules and army transport carts also rendered valuable assistance in the distribution of supplies throughout the camp.

From what has been written it is clear that many of the refugees were likely to reach Baqubah in a very debilitated condition; for it was improbable that during the further journey by road of some 250 miles from Hamadan they should have recovered their former health and strengths. The work devolving on the medical services in the camp, therefore, was particularly onerous and responsible. Special medical arrangements were imperative at the camp, as it was rightly anticipated that a large number would arrive in a completely exhausted state, and that all, in addition, would be vermin-infested. A most thorough bathing and disinfection of all arrivals, together with their bedding and clothing, was a prime necessity to prevent the spread of louse-borne diseases before permission to be at large within the camp area could be accorded the refugees. A barbed wire detention section, capable of accommodating 2,000 refugees at a time, and a large disinfecting area with bathing-sheds, near by, were consequently amongst the first provisions made for their reception; and through these every man, woman and child was passed as soon after arrival as possible, before transfer to an open section. A small hospital was formed at one corner of the detention section in which all sick arriving were temporarily treated until cleared to one of the larger medical units in the camp.

At the opening of the camp, early in September, the only medical unit available for dealing with the sick was a section of No. 30 C.C.S. consisting of 100 beds. This was followed by three other sections which opened on the 8th September, and the hospital immediately filled. On the 14th September No. 42 Indian General Hospital arrived from Amarah and opened in "A" area on the 23rd, and arrangements were made to expand both No. 30 C.C.S. and 42 I.G.H. to 750 beds, in order to cope with the large numbers of sick. Out-patient dispensaries were also started to deal with the sick in sections, since many of the refugees, at this time, would not go to hospital. Early in October No. 30 C.C.S. was ordered to another front, and was replaced by No. 2 British General Hospital, then beginning to arrive also from Amarah. At the same time V.A.D's from among the refugee women and girls were enrolled and took to the work well. Before long they rose to 122 in number, and proved of great assistance to the overworked Nursing Sisters in the hospitals.

No. 2 B.G.H. was gradually established in "C" area, where it could deal better with the sick in the more recently opened sections west of the Nahrwan Canal. Both hospitals were working at high pressure, as the number of admissions was very heavy; whilst deaths at this period averaged some fifty to sixty daily, out of a population, then, of little over 20,000 refugees. Many of these had reached Baqubah in the last stages of exhaustion; and dysentery, brought in mainly by new-comers, was responsible for more than half the deaths. The camp was full of small-pox and relapsing fever as well, through infection brought in, and in spite of segregations in an Isolation Hospital. But these diseases gradually decreased, and never became really serious, thanks to the energy of my medical staff. Cholera, typhus, measles, and diphtheria also occurred at various times, but were almost immediately stamped out.

Towards the end of November No. 12. I.G.H., from Amarah also, was added to the hospital strength of the camp, and located in "B" area, where it received men only. During the last month of the year 1918 there was a marked diminution in sickness and deaths, the latter averaging about thirty daily though the population had doubled since the beginning of October. Yet over 3,000 refugees had died during the months of September, October, November and December, chiefly as a result of the dreadful sufferings undergone by them previous to their arrival at Baqubah. Six months later, when I severed my connection with this great camp, I had the unqualified satisfaction of being surrounded by as healthy a population as one could well desire; for the deaths then did not exceed twenty to twenty-five weekly out of a community of over 45,000 souls.

Efficient sanitary methods were, naturally, mainly responsible for the good health introduced amongst the refugees after the privations undergone by them; and, it must be understood, that, until educated up to it, ideas of sanitation amongst Orientals are crudely primitive, not to put too fine a point to it. We had our difficulties, at first, and they were not a few: but before long men, women and children quickly adapted themselves to our requirements; and one of the first remarks made by numerous visitors to this huge camp of a medley of humanity was a reference to its cleanliness and sweetness.

A Sanitary Section was formed in September 1918 with eighty refugees, their training and supervision being carried out by the Ceylon Sanitary Section, which was attached to the camp. It was early decided that incineration of all refuse was the only method of disposal. A central destructor was impossible, as transport was not available; so each section was made complete with its own sanitary arrangements, and refugee men and boys employed, under supervision of their B.O.R's (British other ranks), to deal with all excreta and refuse in the section. Owing to the lack of skilled labour, however, it took several months to construct the necessary number of large closed incinerators throughout the camp; for the open incinerators in many cases failed during some exceptionally early and heavy rains at the beginning of November.

During this spell of bad weather from the 7th to the 14th November the camp roads soon became impassable for motor ambulances, owing to their boggy state; and a large number of sick in sections could not be removed to the

hospitals. A light 2ft. 6 in. gauge line was therefore taken in hand later, and laid along the main thoroughfares. This proved invaluable, not only for dealing with the sick in bad weather, but also for the daily distribution of supplies throughout the camp, the small one-ton trucks being loaded up at the supply depot by the refugees, and propelled by them to their destinations by hand.

In addition to the establishment of Maternity Wards, and other special conveniences for women in the hospitals, which are somewhat outside the normal routine of work in General Hospitals on field service, mention should here be made of a special Orphanage section. This was established at the north end of the camp, in "C" area, adjoining No. 2. B.G.H. and in close proximity to my Headquarters camp; and these youngsters were one of my chief joys at Baqubah. To qualify for admission children had to be under the age of fourteen, and to have lost both parents. Armenians and Assyrians occupied opposite sides of the large wired-in enclosure; whilst girls and boys lived in separate tents under the eyes of elderly women, who were distributed one to each tent, and were responsible for their flock of twenty boys or girls, as the case might be. When I left we had over 1,000 children in the orphanage, and several hundred more were shortly expected from Mosul. The large cook-house and bathing-sheds were common to both Armenian and Assyrian children; but they worked at lessons and played apart--each nationality having its own school tents, and giant-strides, horizontal and parallel bars, swings, see-saws, etc. which were made up at Baghdad at my request.

Since about one-third of the refugees consisted of children, who had slender means of amusing themselves, small playgrounds were fitted up with gymnastic paraphernalia in various parts of the camp for their use; but experience showed that many hefty children of a larger growth enjoyed the giant strides and swings and see-saws intended for the younger ones; and it was by no means unusual to see men of the Contingent, and other burly ruffians about the camp, having the time of their lives, soon after these structures were erected. The result was that they did not last long under such strenuous conditions; and the desire to become a member of the orphanage precincts evidently grew stronger in some very youthful bosoms, for strict investigations showed that some applicants, at least, had both parents alive in the camp, and going remarkably strong!

There were in all some 3,000 British and Indian personnel employed in the administration and guard duties of the camp before demobilization, at a later stage, caused the numbers to be considerably reduced. Their health, on the whole, during the early days of the camp can be described as fair only due to their close and continuous contact with the refugee population whilst in performance of their duties. Up to the end of 1918 over 800 British and Indians were admitted to hospital--about 250 had to be evacuated to Baghdad and elsewhere; and about a dozen died at Baqubah from small-pox, dysentery, and other diseases.

Owing to the great area covered by the camp, and the comparative helplessness, at first, of the people who had to be fed, the supply question was far from a simple one. A large supply depot was established at Marshall's Bridge Railway Station, which formed a fairly central position in "A" area, within the loop of the river: The light 2 ft. 6 in. line starting from this depot, alongside the metre gauge railway, greatly facilitated the distribution of supplies by means of hand-propelled one-ton trucks, largely reduced the cart traffic along the camp roads, and considerably decreased the refugee labour required for the service of food and fuel. Rations were issued in bulk daily to Area Commanders, and by them to their Section Commanders, who, in turn, supervised the measuring out of rations to tent representatives within their sections. These latter then divided up the quantity received between the occupants of their tents--approximately twenty five men, women and children in each.

Generally speaking, the rations of flour, rice, tea, sugar, meat, vegetables, cooking-oil, wood-fuel, etc., approximated closely to that provided for employed Turkish prisoners of war; and the physical condition of the refugees rapidly improved, vastly soon after their arrival at Baqubah. A large bazaar was opened in the centre of the camp area in October and was generally thronged by refugees, a number of whom were afforded opportunities of setting up as shopkeepers. Certain selected men amongst them were personally conducted to Baghdad to enable them to decide what articles procurable there should find a ready sale amongst their countrymen in the camp; and soon bread, fruit, vegetables, cigarettes and articles of many different kinds were in great demand as luxuries by refugees who drew pay for their labour from government, and also by women and children doing work in the American Mission compound.

The requirements of the refugees in the matter of ordnance stores, such as tentage, blankets, clothing, cooking-utensils, etc., necessitated the establishment of a large Camp Quarter-Master Store. Close on 3,000 E.P. tents had to be received from other parts of Mesopotamia, and pitched for use of the refugees, hospitals, camp personnel and other purposes; whilst, many thousands of blankets, and hundreds of thousands of yards of cloth were also issued out among these people, as well as great quantities of part-worn clothing returned by the troops to Ordnance-Depots throughout the country; for it must be remembered that the large majority of the refugees arrived at Baqubah with little more than what they stood in, and such bits of bedding as they could conveniently carry themselves. During the earlier stages of the camp the Works Department was chiefly employed on the construction of rough huts and mat, shelters in the various sections planned out for the reception of the refugees, together with the necessary latrines, cooking sheds, and open incinerators--for E.P.: tents were then only available in limited numbers. It was subsequently decided that the hutting for refugees

should be discontinued, and that they should be accommodated, gradually, entirely in E.P. tents when these could be freed by the troops elsewhere, to whom they had been served out for the hot weather. This proved a fortunate decision, for the slight mat structures, though affording sufficient protection from the sun during the months of September and October, completely failed to prevent their occupants being drenched when unusually early and heavy rains broke over the camp in November. The construction of roads, bridges, and drainage channels throughout the camp also formed an important part of the Works Directorate; and was almost entirely carried out by refugee labour. The numerous and varied demands on the Works officers and personnel were continuous and heavy, but the manner in which the urgent requirements of the rapidly growing camp were successfully met by their energy was most praiseworthy. I might illustrate some of their difficulties by recalling how a young railway officer, sent out from Baghdad to construct several miles of the light line through the camp, tackled his job. He could only speak English, and was assisted by an Indian subordinate who knew no English; and both were unable to converse in the language of their refugee labourers. Yet they pushed gaily along with the earthwork, bridging of drains, and plate-laying, instructing the refugees by signs, and their own efforts, as they proceeded. Few of the refugees had seen a railway, or train, before they came to us; but soon they were plate-laying as though to the manner born!

The provision of a chlorinated-piped-water supply throughout the camp area was early decided upon and was undoubtedly the means of improving and maintaining the health of the refugees. At first only one 20 H. P. Gwynne-Aster pumping engine, with a lift of 200 feet, was available for drawing the water from the Diala, and forcing it through the pipe system in "A" area to the various pairs of tanks located in each section. The river at that time was some forty to fifty feet below the level of the banks on which these camps were situated. As the camp extended, on the still higher ground on the Nahrwan Canal plateau, a second pumping station was established to serve "B" and "C" areas particularly; but both systems were connected up in order mutually to assist each other, in the event of a breakdown in one or other of the pumps. The estimated supply from each pumping station was roughly 6,000 gallons per hour, and that proved sufficient for the requirements of the cold weather; but shortly before I left in the hot weather steps had been taken for erecting more powerful pumping engines to increase the supply during the summer months. In all, up to then, close on fifteen miles of piping (4 in., 2 in. and 1.5 in.) had been laid throughout the camp area; and 130 tanks, varying in capacity from 800 to 400 gallons each, erected for water storage in the different sections and subsidiary camps--the daily total consumption of piped-water for drinking and cooking purposes exceeding 150,000 gallons.

For bathing, mat shelters were constructed at intervals along the high banks of the Diala; and almost continuously for one and half miles along the Othmaniyeh Canal. Arrangements were also made for heating the water in large tanks, supported on brick walls between which logs of wood were burnt during the winter months. Being by nature very cleanly people, these bathing facilities were highly appreciated by them; and as they are not troubled by prudish ideas of undue modesty the thousands washing and bathing, throughout Saturday in particular, in order to be spotlessly clean--both as regards clothes and the person--for Sunday, was a sight not easily forgotten. It appears to be the general custom for wives to give their husbands a thorough tubbing for Sunday; so, at first, it was somewhat disconcerting to see scores of naked gentlemen crouching down in the open on their bunkers, being vigorously soaped and having water poured over their backs by their Attendant spouses. The women and girls performed a like task to each other and paid little attention to the passer-by, but were always eminently unconcerned and refined.

Reference has already been made to refugees being enrolled for the Assyrian Contingent and to form labour battalions up at Hamadan. The enrollment for labour was continued after these people reached Baqubah, as labour was not only urgently required for purposes of the camp, but it was hoped that men could also be usefully employed on canals, roads and railway earthworks under construction outside the camp area. Since, however, some 7,000 of the more robust males had already been drawn upon in Persia, a very large proportion of the residue that reached Baqubah were not fit for protracted work. This caused a serious delay in the provision of necessary sanitary work; and a careful registration and classification became essential. Part of the medical staff was employed, in conjunction with the labour officer, for several weeks on this investigation; and eventually a further battalion was raised, and transferred for work on the Khalis Canal; then being repaired and reopened some thirty miles distant up the Diala. The remainder of the able-bodied men in camp were utilised for unloading of supplies arriving by train from Baghdad, transfer to the supply depot, and their further distribution throughout the camp: also in the construction of roads, drains and bridges, the light railway and later, on a high embankment for the new metre gauge railway alignment skirting the Western confines of the camp, and leading to a new permanent railway bridge then being built across the Diala about a mile up-stream of the camp.

The severe weather on the Persian plateau early in November had caused a good deal of sickness amongst the labour battalions there, and they were shortly after drafted down to Baqubah, and did most useful work on the heavy embankment referred to. Small colonies of refugees were also temporarily located in neighbouring districts, and utilised for agricultural work. All labour was paid for under the direction of the Labour Officer attached to the camp, or by the Government Department to whom the refugees were loaned outside.

The Baqubah Refugee Camp

In order to provide the necessary troops for the performance of guard duties, fatigues, and the maintenance of order and discipline throughout the camp area, a British regiment (the 1/4th Devons) was transferred from Amarah to Baqubah in September 1918. A squadron of the 13th Hussars, and one of the 14th Lancers, were also moved to the Refugee Camp; whilst a Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal, with establishment of British N.C.O's and men, provided the military police and commanded the barbed-wire Detention Camp where malefactors were confined. The mounted troops were periodically changed, and finally withdrawn; but they proved most useful in the early days in connection with the refugee animals, their protection at night against Arab thieves, their registration, branding, etc., and also in furnishing mounted patrols in the vicinity, as it was difficult to prevent refugee men, women, and boys from wandering all over the country; and from wading or swimming across the river, when it was low, and entering Baqubah village, which had been placed out of bounds.

I have referred previously in these pages to members of the American Persian Relief Commission coming to our assistance in the early days of the camp; and I am doing them but bare justice in expressing my warm appreciation of their splendid efforts on behalf of the refugees, for several thousand of whom they found employment in useful directions. The advanced members of the Mission reached Baqubah on September 24th, 1918, and at once began engaging refugee women for sewing garments. At the end of the first week thirty women were at work, which number before long was increased to over 300. In addition to the sewing work, a large wool and quilt-making industry was undertaken, which in time employed over 4,500 people, chiefly women and children. These industries produced, during the first three months, over 12,000 pieces of clothing, some 3,000 quilts, besides mattresses, pillows, and over 15,000 lbs. of yarn. The clothing and quilts were distributed free in the hospitals, orphanage, and to the more needy in camp; whilst the yarn was disposed of to Army contractors for the manufacture of blankets, and for weaving into cloth at Baghdad, whence they were brought back to camp for sale or distribution.

The knitting of stockings for refugees was also carried out by the people themselves, from the yarn supplied by the Mission. The American payroll soon mounted up to R.S. 12,000 per week, all of which went into the hands of the refugees in camp; and their work-sheds on week days was one of the sights of the place, as they were thronged with busy women and girls who, by means of congenial employment, were thus given an opportunity of rapidly forgetting the horrors of their dreadful exodus from Urumieh.

Several of the Mission ladies and gentlemen had spent the best years of their lives amongst these refugees, and two or three had accompanied them during their sad journey through Persia. They were consequently in close sympathy with the people, and had full knowledge of all they had suffered. At the same time I found that their views were generally broad and robust and that they fully recognised the bad as well as the good points of the refugees; so it was a real pleasure to work in close conjunction with them in the administration of the camp.

Again, it is difficult for me to express adequate admiration of the magnificent work performed by the devoted band of Nursing Sisters attached to the three General Hospitals at Baqubah. In all there were some thirty-five English ladies belonging to Queen Alexandra's Military Nursing Service, of whom about two-thirds were on the staff of No. 2 British General Hospital, and the remainder divided between the two Indian Hospitals. All alike entered whole heartedly into the heavy, and often extremely unpleasant and trying, duties that fell to their lot in tending the thousands of sick and dying refugee men, women and children in the camp. Living under canvas, faced frequently by most adverse climatic conditions, and surrounded by an atmosphere of sickness and death, they were a noble example to all by their cheerfulness and willingness to do all that was humanly possible to restore again to health and strength those entrusted to their care.

Nor amid such depressing circumstances did they forget to think of others besides themselves for every officer in the camp had reason to be grateful for their cheery Sunday afternoons "At Home" particularly in No. 2 B.G.H. when all were made welcome to tea in their mess-tent, and given an opportunity of continuing in touch with ladies' society, which I personally regarded as of infinite advantage to many young officers scattered throughout the camp area. Several of them subsequently won brides from among these charming ladies, and are heartily to be congratulated on their good fortune.

CHAPTER III

The "Assyrian Contingent" and its Work

IN the previous chapter only brief reference was made to the Assyrian Contingent; and it may prove of interest now to supply further details regarding the formation and employment of this Irregular Corps.

Shortly before the arrival of the refugees at Ramadan in August 1918, it had been decided to organise a fighting force from the Assyrians and Armenians, who had been engaged in active operations against the Turks for the two previous years about Urumieh, under Agha Petros. And for this purpose a specially selected body of twenty British officers and fifty N.C.O's was directed to proceed to Urumieh. Before they could leave Hamadan, however, news was received that these Christians had evacuated Urumieh, and that their advanced parties had already reached Bijar--about halfway between Sain Kaleh and Hamadan--pursued by Moslems, who with great difficulty were being held in check by the small British force sent out to cover the withdrawal of the refugees.

On the arrival of these additional officers and N.C.O's at Bijar every endeavour was made to rally the fighting men amongst the refugees; but this was found impossible owing to their being spread over a large tract of country, and, under little or no control, speedily making for Hamadan with their women and children.

Eventually Refugee Camps were established at Bahar and Yanghi Khan, a few miles outside Hamadan, and recruits for the intended Contingent called for these were obtained without much difficulty, the young men showing great keenness to be trained as soldiers under British officers and N.C.O's. Recruiting was chiefly carried out through the medium of the leading men, of whom the new Assyrian Patriarch, and Baron Levon, a Van Armenian, were the principal. Conditions of service were that the troops should be led and trained by the British, and be paid and supplied by the British Government with rations, clothing and ammunition, the men bringing their own rifles and the mounted men their own horses. It was decided to raise four battalions on the lines of an Indian Infantry battalion, except that one company in each battalion was to be a mounted one.

When selected the recruits were moved to Abshineh, some six miles from Hamadan, and there organised into battalions. No tents or billets being available for them at that time, the men were accommodated in rough brushwood shelters, and having little in the way of blankets or bedding suffered considerably during an outbreak of influenza, which attacked the British officers and N.C.O's as well. Contracts were made locally for the supply of equipment and clothing, and it was hoped to have some 4,000 men fitted out by November 1st.

Towards the end of September the G.O.C. North Persian Force decided to dispose of the Contingent as, follows:

2nd Battalion (Van Armenians) to Senna;
3rd Battalion (Armenians) to Bijar;
1st and 4th Battalions (Assyrians), and a training depot for all four battalions, to remain temporarily at Abshineh, but to move later to Zinjan and Nahvand respectively.

Early in October information was received that the bulk of the Turks were withdrawing from the Caucasus, and there appeared a possibility of the Contingent being sent to re-occupy their own territory. Plans and routes were considered for this purpose; and on the 13th October orders were received to push on rapidly with the equipping of the force with a view to an early move in the direction of Urumieh--the mounted men to advance via Senna, and the remainder via Bijar. Subsequently, however, it was decided that the Contingent should march down into Mesopotamia, and come under my orders in the vicinity of Baqubah.

The 1st and 4th Battalions were still not adequately supplied With uniform and blankets, as those ordered, from Tehran failed to arrive on the date expected, though a certain number of quilts were procured for them, in lieu of blankets, at Hamadan. Consequently, considerable hardships were experienced on the march down, due to unusually early heavy rains and intense cold, which added greatly to the discomforts of the journey. The Mountain Assyrians endured the march well and lost practically no men; whereas the Plain Assyrians became somewhat demoralised after losing some of their numbers through exposure, and there were a good many desertions en route, though most rejoined at a later date. These two battalions reached Baqubah on November 19th and 23rd respectively, and were located on a large camping ground on the left bank of the Diala near the bend of the loop where the railway crossed the river and where the 2nd and 3rd Battalions (Armenians) who had arrived on the 16th and 17th November were already camped.

On the arrival of the Contingent in Baqubah, a slight reorganization of the battalions was carried out, and the refugees in camp on the right bank drawn on for this purpose. All battalions underwent a thorough medical inspection, and the men found unfit transferred to the Refugee Camp, and replaced by others from there. With a view to separating the

Urumieh men of the Contingent from the others, two battalions of Assyrian mountaineers were formed, and one of Armenians, and one of Urumieh Assyrians. The clothing purchased locally in Persia was very poor stuff, and had been rendered practically unserviceable by the time the Contingent reached Baqubah; whilst foot-gear was a difficult problem, for such local boots as were originally issued in Persia proved quite useless. By degrees, however, equipment was obtained from Baghdad, and the drill and training of the men actively proceeded with; and there seemed a very fair prospect of raising a really serviceable force from among the Van Armenians and the Assyrian Mountaineers, though the Plain Assyrians did not shape quite so well as the others.

Early in January 1919, as a result of the armistice, and other indications, G.H.Q. Mesopotamia hoped that it might be possible in the near future to carry out the repatriation of the refugees to their former homes. For this purpose the Contingent would have chiefly to be relied upon to perform protective duties on the march, and to maintain order when their destinations were reached. Consequently, in the interests of the British Officers and N.C.O's, it was considered expedient to have the force put on a proper footing, and to call on all members of it to sign an enrolment form--whereby the men agreed to obey all lawful military commands from those placed in authority over them, and to proceed wherever desired in connection with the repatriation of their own people.

For some obscure reason this plain, straightforward document was viewed with the gravest suspicion by the Armenians and Urumieh Assyrians, who appeared to imagine that by signing this form they would be liable to service in India, and even to be placed under the command of Indians; and other stupid objections of a like nature. The independent, freebooting mountaineers exhibited no such distrust of our good faith, cheered lustily when called upon to sign, and professed their willingness to go anywhere and do anything if accompanied by their British instructors.

Evidently there was some undercurrent of intrigue which was seriously affecting the peace of mind of Armenians and Urumieh people; for, in spite of, the most explicit explanations to them by their British officers of the purport of the enrolment form, and frequent interviews by me of the leading Armenian and Urumieh officers, for several days, the rank and file stoutly declined to sign any form whatsoever. Eventually the Armenian officers agreed to sign themselves first, in order to give a lead to their men; but the Urumieh officers could not be prevailed upon even to go so far. The immediate result was uproar and stormy meetings in the Armenian battalion when the men heard their officers were prepared to sign; and the officer in command of the Contingent telephoned up to me on the morning of the 7th January that the Armenians had threatened to shoot any of their officers who signed the document; and that the British officer commanding the battalion reported the attitude of the Armenians as distinctly ugly. I decided thereupon to disarm and disband the Armenian battalion; and issued orders that the battalion should be paraded fully equipped and marched up to my Headquarters, alongside which the 1/4th Battalion Devons were camped.

Two companies of the Devons were told to hold themselves in readiness about their camp; but not to show up, as though trouble was anticipated, unless I blew a whistle to signify that my order to "ground arms" was disobeyed by the Armenians. In due course the battalion arrived, and was formed up with its rear to the river bank--here 40 or 50 feet high and a sheer drop to the water below. After addressing the men for some time through an English-speaking Armenian official of the orphanage, I informed them it was my painful duty, as a result of their distrust of the British Government, no longer to regard them as soldiers, but as refugees pure and simple. They would, accordingly, hand over their arms, accoutrements, and equipment now; and on return to their camp make over their uniform to their respective company commanders. The order to "ground arms" was obeyed without any sign of hesitation: a company of the Devons emerged from their camp to take over rifles, bandoliers, etc; and every Armenian of the battalion was searched over to see that he had no revolver or ammunition concealed about his person. They were then marched back through the Armenian sections of the camp, to their own on the other side of the river, and a few days later transferred and distributed among the Armenian population in "A" area.

As little or no trouble was anticipated from the Urumieh battalion, it was, meanwhile, marched direct to the Camp Q.M. and Ordnance Store, and there handed over all arms and equipment to the officer in charge. And they, too, a few days later, became merged amongst the Assyrian refugees in "B" and "C" areas. I immediately reported the action I had been compelled to take by telegram to G.H.Q. Baghdad; and followed this up by a detailed account in writing, which received the full approval of the Commander-in-Chief.

The weak point, at that time, in these battalions had undoubtedly been their native officers, who were mostly chosen from men who were said to have been leaders in their own country. But, as shown, this had not proved altogether satisfactory--chiefly, perhaps, on account of language difficulties, and to the fact that these officers in most cases had not received special training as such. Classes for this purpose were subsequently arranged, and worked wonders in raising the self confidence, initiative, and powers of command of both native officers and N.C.O's. Still, speaking generally, the discipline of the men during the period they had been at Baqubah was very good, and very little crime had occurred in any of the battalions, all offences committed being of a minor nature.

This is quite remarkable when it is understood that, then, practically no British officer or N.C.O. with the Contingent had a working knowledge of the languages of these people; and that the latter, for the most part, had never had any

dealings with the British before, and lead to pick up English words of command, and receive their instruction largely through the medium of interpreters, and by means of signs. Yet their progress was astonishing; and at a later date the Assyrian Mountaineer officers proved themselves quite capable of drilling their companies and the battalion in English; and carrying out the various tactical exercises, unaided, so ably taught them by their British instructors.

Subsequent events proved to the late Armenian and Urumieh battalions that they had erred greatly in adopting the obstinate attitude they had done towards the enrolment form: and when they perceived that the mountaineers, who had been moved over to the right bank near the Patriarch's camp, had no cause to regret, but every reason to congratulate themselves on being treated as soldiers, and making great strides on practical lines, numerous were the appeals to me to re-start those two disbanded battalions. But this was out of the question. The British officers and N.C.O's who had been attached to them had left for other spheres of activity, and in most cases would not have been willing again to undertake the task of training men in whom they had lost confidence by being "let down." Moreover, it was decided at a later date that all Armenians should be repatriated to their former homes, about Van, by sea to Suez and the Black Sea ports, and not overland via Mosul: so in their case it was believed a protective Armenian force would be, unnecessary.

Shortly before I left Baqubah, however, in June 1919, I obtained permission to attempt another experiment with the Urumieh people, and at the time of my departure a battalion had been raised from this branch of the Assyrians, who were doing well, and showed promise of developing into something better than the previous disbanded one. The demobilisation of British troops in Mesopotamia was then hitting us very hard in the camp, as the British regiment, and Indian troops sent to replace them, had both been withdrawn from us, and all guard duties had to be taken over by the Assyrian mountaineers alone. Owing to the recall, too, of many Colonial officers with the Contingent, the two mountaineer battalions had been amalgamated into a species of double-battalion under one Commander, in order to reduce the British staff officers, and N.C.O's--rapidly being demobilised. Consequently, it was hoped that the re-raising of the Urumieh battalion would go far toward solving the local guard question, until required for repatriation purposes, as Arab thieves necessitated constant alertness throughout the camp area by night.

CHAPTER IV

A Glimpse of Life in the Camp

HITHERTO I have only dealt on broad lines, with the component parts of this great camp; but the people themselves, and our experiences whilst among them, were of the very greatest interest. It has been my good fortune in the past to have had a tolerably varied career in many lands; and my last experience in the East was certainly about as novel a one as could well be desired. I frankly admit that when I received orders in September 1918, after close on three years campaigning in Mesopotamia, to assume command of the "Jelus Refugee Camp," then being established at Baqubah. I had not the wildest notion who the "Jelus" were, whence they came, or what their previous history or adventures had been. It is small wonder, then, that people in England should have been blissfully ignorant of the existence of such a race. I might, remark, however, en passant that the term "Jelus" applied to the camp was a complete misnomer; for, of the ultimately 50,000 refugees who found shelter and security there, not more than 600 or 700 were Jelus of the various mountaineer tribes located in the camp area. "Jelus" appears to have been the generic name given by the Persians and Russians to the Assyrian mountaineers, mainly because the Jelus were the nearest Christian mountain tribe to the Persians living in the plains of Azarbaijan; and with whom previously they had been in closer contact than the more remote mountaineers.

The Armenians did not differ greatly in appearance amongst themselves, those from the neighbourhood of Van being dressed very similarly to those located for several generations in Persian territory about Khoi and Salmas. The men frequently wore loose trouser surmounted by semi-European coats, with astrakhan caps on their heads. Generally speaking they are men of fine physique, with distinctly western cast of countenance; and it is by no means unusual to see sunburnt faces with fair hair and light-coloured eyes amongst them. The women and children are often quite rosy-faced, and in some cases possess markedly blue eyes and extremely pretty faces when young. Most women and girls wear long skirts and jackets of various colours, and a kerchief fastened over their heads; but, as a rule, the display of colours and picturesqueness of costume of the inhabitants of the Armenian sections were completely overshadowed by the striking, attire affected by the Assyrian mountaineers.

The Armenians being more national than tribal they had no one outstanding personality to represent them in the camp. It was early arranged, therefore, that an Armenian committee should be formed, selected by themselves from amongst the most influential refugees of that nationality, who should, bring all larger questions--affecting the Armenians in the camp as a whole--before me. Lesser matters were arranged between the committee and the area commander; and this worked quite satisfactorily. I had frequent interviews, too, with members of an important Armenian committee located in Baghdad, who took especial interest in our Baqubah orphanage, which they often visited. This committee evidently had command of considerable funds, for they completely dressed in uniform and provided quilts and bedding on a generous scale for every Armenian orphan boy and girl. Teachers were also sent out from Baghdad to assist in the education of these orphans, amongst whom they lived. These youngsters, therefore, were extremely well done by their own people in better circumstances; and their smart, get-up and general air of well-being were enviously regarded by the poor Assyrian orphans, who had no wealthy or influential compatriots outside to perform a like service for them. In time, however, we were able to raise something more than cast-off clothing for these urchins, and gradually had coats, trousers, and long frock-skirts, made up for Assyrian boys and girls from blankets and other serviceable material. They were supplied with shoes, too, and then felt they could hold up their heads with pride in the presence of their smart, Armenian Rivals!

Dignitaries of the Armenian Church are located in important centres in Mesopotamia; whilst amongst the Armenian refugees there were a great number of priests scattered amongst the sections. Questions ecclesiastical entered considerably, therefore, into the life of the Commandant of the camp, for the Assyrians likewise were plentifully endowed with clergy of different denominations, Nestorian, Rome and Presbyterians. Church tents and sheds had to be provided for the use of the refugees of the various religious persuasions on Sundays and other days; and interviews granted to many clerics on matters affecting their people. In the early days of the camp the Armenian Archbishop of Baghdad was a frequent and enthusiastic visitor to us, and full of ideas for the benefit of the Armenians; whilst early, in January 1919 the Armenian Grand Patriarch of Mosul was conducted over the camps by me. He arrived at the time trouble was brewing with the Armenian battalion, and I suggested to him that it would be a good thing for him to address the battalion on parade, and give his compatriots some good advice regarding signing the enrolment form. Thus he did, but, his homily apparently fell on deaf ears, for the battalion had to be disarmed two days later.

The procedure in dealing with the Assyrians was different, since the recognized head of the nation, the Patriarch, Mar Polos Shimun, was himself a refugee in our midst, and had direct access to me on all occasions. The Patriarch is a

young man of twenty-six, though looking more by reason of a full black beard and whiskers. Of slight physique, pale of face, and well below the medium height, he is far from strong; and as the hot weather drew upon us at Baqubah it was found imperative to remove him from the dust and heat of the camp to a more salubrious clime. Temporary accommodation was found for him in a Jacobite monastery at Mar Mitten some twenty miles north-east of Mosul in the foot-hills, for which place he left with a small escort of the contingent, and accompanied by Dr. Wigram, an old personal friend of his, on the 28th April. Consumption, I fear, is threatening this young man, and it appears doubtful if he will live long; whilst his normal successor in the Patriarchate is but a boy of twelve or thirteen, and son of his brother David.²

It will be convenient here to digress for a moment to explain something about this hereditary office of Patriarch; and to give further details of the Patriarchal family, which plays so important a part in the life of the Assyrian nation today. In the first place it should be stated that the Patriarchate descends normally from uncle to nephew, and not from father to son--for the very good reason that no Patriarch is permitted to marry. The late Patriarch, to whose treacherous murder by the Kurdish chief, Simku, I have already referred, was the eldest nephew of the previous Patriarch, and a man of great character, who from his earliest youth had been trained for the high office for which he was one day destined. The future Patriarch must be a celibate, and have lived the life of a species of Nazarene, eschewing meat and other forbidden dishes. In large families two or more of the sons are thus trained, in case the elder should not live to succeed to the office; whilst the eldest sister, too, is vowed to celibacy, her duty in life being to attend to her brother, the Patriarch.

The late Patriarch was one of a family of seven, five brothers and two sisters, his eldest sister being a very remarkable personality, Surma Khanum by name, who is at present in England, to plead the cause of her people, by whom she was unanimously chosen as their Ambassadors. But I shall have more to say about her later. The present Patriarch is the youngest brother, save for his twin, and succeeded to the Patriarchate when his eldest brother was murdered in March 1918. The only other brother now is David, who was not trained in youth for the office, is married, has several children, and whose eldest son is heir-apparent to the Patriarchate³; whilst he himself is the senior Assyrian officer with the Mountaineer Battalion.

At the time the Assyrians threw in their lot with, and were then abandoned by, the Russians in Turkish territory, the fifth brother was being educated at Constantinople. So enraged were the Turks with the late Patriarch for his action in leading his people to fight for the Russians that they seized his brother Hormizd at Constantinople, and had him conveyed to Mosul. Here he was handed over to the Turkish commander as a hostage for the future good behaviour of the Assyrians; whereupon the commander sent a message to the Patriarch calling upon him and his people to desist from further opposition and surrender themselves to the Turkish authorities--failing which his brother, who was now a prisoner in his hands, would be executed. The Patriarch replied to the effect that his brother Hormizd was one, whereas his people, were many, and they had committed themselves to his charge. He had with full responsibility agreed with his people that their duty lay in fighting for the Entente against the Turks, and be the consequences what they might, they would not now desert their allies; further, that if he were in his brother's place, he would willingly forfeit his life for the good of his nation. And so Hormizd was executed by the Turks--a brutally cruel and atrocious crime.

My connection with the present Patriarch, and his sister Surma, at Baqubah was close and cordial during the whole eight months I was in command of the camp. Surma Khanum speaks English well, and is a highly cultivated and exceptionally intelligent lady, which is all the more remarkable seeing that she had never left the mountains of Kurdistan, and lived all her life amongst wild lawless surroundings, until the recent tragedies descended upon her nation. In early youth she had been educated and taken in hand by a Dr. Brown of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission to the Assyrians. He had taught her English and the amenities of life among civilized communities, with the result that the child rapidly developed, despite her uncultured companions and rough environment, into a polished young lady; whilst her mental calibre, and general outlook on life and world politics, gained for her the highest position in the councils of her people. At the time delegates from the numerous small nations were flocking to the Paris Peace Conference I made repeated efforts, through the authorities in Mesopotamia, to obtain permission for Surma Khanum to attend to plead the cause of the Assyrians. The requests were turned down time and again, but I never ceased to press the point up to the date on which I severed my connection with the camp and returned to England. A few months ago I heard, to my pleasure, that sanction had finally been granted, and that Surma Khanum was then in England; and since her arrival she has met many of the most influential people in the State, including Her Majesty the Queen, and impressed all by her personality, character, and charm. My wife and amongst many others have enjoyed the opportunity of having her to stay with us in our home for a week, during which she quite won the hearts of our three small children.

In close attendance on Mar Shimun, and living in his camp, were two high church dignitaries--the Matran, or Metropolitan, and the Bishop of Jelu. Later this triumvirate was joined by Mar Timotheus; the Nestorian Metropolitan of Malabar and India, who obtained permission from the authorities in India and Mesopotamia to visit the Refugee Camp; and remained at Baqubah for several months. Unlike Mar Shimun the Patriarch, and the two other Bishops, he spoke

English fluently, and was a very frequent visitor to my tent--the welfare of his refugee brethren, and their future existence under British protection, being the frequent theme of our discussions. An able and gifted personality, he was certainly greatly missed by Assyrians when compelled to return to India shortly before I left Baqubah.

There were many other priests and deacons of the Nestorian Church distributed throughout the Assyrian area, who played lesser parts in the life of the camp: but the Maliks, or tribal chiefs of the mountaineers, were an exceedingly important body of men, and were represented fully on Mar Shimun's Council. Anything more imposing or more picturesque than these chieftains in full native costume, attending one of Mar Shimun's Council meetings, it would be difficult to imagine, as all the colours of the rainbow were there in daring contrasts, whilst silver-handled daggers and other ornaments were stuck jauntily into their belts, or adorned their persons. Some of the chiefs were old, others in the prime of life, and others quite young men still; but all were a hardy looking body of men, and not the type of individual one would care to run into on a dark night if one had a difference of opinion with them.

There were some fifteen to twenty tribal chiefs representing the various clans amongst the mountaineers, of whom the Upper Tiari, Lower Tiari, Tkhuma, Baz, Diz, Barwar, Bhotan, Mar Bishu, Jelu, Shamasdin, Targawar, Margawar, are some that recur to my mind. The costumes worn by these different tribes are extremely picturesque, and of astonishingly variegated colours; and on a bright sunny morning when all the tents in their sections had their "kanats" (or side canvas walls) removed, and their interiors fully exposed to the sunshine and air, some of the camps had the appearance of a busy, bustling, moving patchwork-quilt effect--if one can so describe it--by reason of the wealth of colour flitting to and fro. Only those who had spent years amongst these people, like Captain Reed, my special service officer, could readily tell by their dress exactly to which mountaineer tribe or clan the wearers belonged--there being certain differences and minor idiosyncrasies which to the practised eye were quite apparent, though not to the casual observer, except in a few important tribes.

The Tiari men, for example, perhaps the most warlike of all these mountaineers, one could not mistake for any other tribesman when in their national dress. Fine upstanding fellows they are, with rope-soled, home-made shoes on their feet, their legs, encased in long loose baggy trousers of a grayish hue originally, but so patched all over with bits of blue, red, green and other colours that their pants are veritable patchwork. A broad cloth, "kammarband," or waistband, is folded several times round the trunk of the body, and a short cut-away jacket of amazing colours, worn over a thin cotton variegated shirt. The head-dress consists of conical felt cap as depicted in frescoes of Assyrians of thousands of years ago, and which has survived to this day. The Tiari "beau" rigged out all in his best is a striking specimen of grand manhood, and well-equipped to find his way to the hearts of Tiari. "belles"

Nor are the women one whit the less picturesquely attired. They, too, affect the most daring combinations of colours in their loose baggy trousers caught in above the ankles. Over this they wear a species of overall or apron, a broad "kammarband" about the waist, and a gaudy skirt or jacket with long sleeves tucked into it; and the whole surmounted on gala occasions by a small velvet zouave coat of any colour the wearer may have a special penchant for. On their heads they wear small turban-shaped caps wound tastefully round with some coloured scarf or veiling. At wedding dances and festivities I have seen scores of these women enveloped from head to feet in gowns of velvet, in blue, green, yellow, purple, brown, and other colours, with huge silver belts round their waists, and their breasts literally smothered with handsome necklaces of silver and gold coins, or other silver ornaments; and circlets of silver, sequins falling, all round their heads from their head-dresses to which they were attached. It was always a marvel to me how these women throughout their dreadful adventures succeeded in retaining possession of such expensive garbs and valuable ornaments; but Surma Khanum explained to me that some of the, mountaineer women, during their flight from their homes, wore no less than five dresses, one on top of the other! I should hazard the guess that the velvet dresses and trinkets were well concealed and worn nearest the skin.

Many of the men and younger women, and boys and girls of these mountain tribes are extremely good-looking, with fine rosy cheeks and healthy complexions. The women might usually be described as petite in comparison with their sturdy men-folk; but they are beautifully made, and extraordinarily hardy--being inured to every form of hardship in their struggles against nature almost from birth. I am credibly informed, by those who have dwelt and laboured among these people in their homes, that venereal disease is absolutely unknown among them, and that adultery and similar lapses from the paths of virtue are of exceedingly rare occurrence. This was certainly our experience in the camp; for although four or five families usually shared one E.P. tent, men, women, and children all living together in it, I remember no instance of charges of impropriety being brought by the occupant of a tent against any other member of it. I wonder if this would have been the case had five European families been sharing one tent under similar circumstances. *J'en doute.*

The Assyrians of the plains of Urumieh do not require any very detailed description regarding their dress. As already stated, they are in a somewhat more advanced stage of civilization than the mountaineers, by reason of their close association with American missions in their midst for a good many years past. The men were in some respects dressed European fashion, in the usual trouser and coat, with Russian astrakhan caps or other unremarkable head-gear. A few had travelled

outside their own country, and had even visited Europe and America; and quite an appreciable number spoke English, and were useful in that respect as interpreters in the various sections to the British officers and N.C.O's. The women, too, wore plain skirts and blouses or jackets, with kerchiefs fastened over their heads; and many of them were also handsome and pretty, like their mountain sisters, and generally neat and tidy in appearance; but not remarkably striking in other ways.

From a purely spectacular point of view the Urumieh sections did not attract the same attention as did the others to the crowd of visitors from Baghdad, and elsewhere in Mesopotamia, to the camp. We had not long developed into a "going concern" before applications for permission to visit this great human menagerie, whose fame had rapidly spread abroad, poured in upon us from officers and other Government officials. To obtain any adequate idea of the camp, its inhabitants, and the work connected therewith, really would have occupied an energetic sight-seer several days. Since few could spare more than a day for the visit, I mapped out a regular round, which I usually took when personally conducting "big-wigs," and which occupied only two or three hours before lunch, and a couple of hours or so after. This enabled a general impression to be gained of the different types of humanity congregated in the camp, and of the more interesting features of it. The official "eyewitness" spent several days in my Headquarters camp for the purpose of describing the place and an official cinema expert took a large number of films portraying the life of the refugees. These were intended to be utilized for propaganda in the United Kingdom and America, but I have not yet come across any person who has seen these movies in England—so it is possible that, as the weather was not very favourable at the time of his visit, the films may have developed unsatisfactorily.

The thousands of children and babies with which the camp literally swarmed were not amongst the least interesting features of it. Their past troubles sat lightly upon them, and with the happy resilience of youth they quickly forgot the horrors they had undergone, now that they were well fed and at liberty to enjoy themselves to their hearts content within the precincts of the camp. In many respects the boys—especially the mountaineer ones—were very much like English boys of a like age in their love for games and mischievousness generally. One of their chief delights was battles with slings, in which these young urchins could hurl pellets of mud with great dexterity at each other, up to distances of sixty or seventy yards. The youngsters of one section would sally forth and attack those of a neighbouring section, and soon a terrific combat would be raging across perhaps one of the main thoroughfares of the camp—somewhat to the danger of passers-by. At least on one occasion, when taking my evening stroll with one of my staff through the camp, we came between two fires, and were both struck by missiles intended for the opposing sides. So excited were the combatants that they forgot the risks run by their approaching "General" until too late, when both sides fled incontinently to the shelter of their tents on realizing we had been hit!

The greatest battles of all, however, took place periodically between the mountaineer boys of "B" area and the Armenians of that portion of area nearest to them. The combatants would number, at times, several hundred on each side and the mountaineers would descend with loud shouts from the high banks of the Nahrwan down into the broad depression of the old canal, where the Armenians would be formed up to meet the attack. Then would ensue a slinging contest of great fury, each side advancing and retiring in turn, and endeavouring to outflank the other, until one or the other was ultimately driven from the field for the day. We had eventually to put a stop to these engagements, for as the hot weather approached, and the mud became extremely hard, several boys received rather serious injuries about the face and eyes.

The martial spirit of the mountaineer boys was further exemplified by their love for drilling each other—entirely picked up from watching their elder brothers in the Contingent being drilled. And it was a common sight to see a squad of ten or twelve ragged urchins being put through their "manual exercises" by one of their number, armed with sticks instead of rifles, and receiving the English words of command from an imp perhaps of seven or eight! Then they would be maneuvered about, forming fours and so forth, in quite approved fashion; whilst on one occasion I happened across a squad, all of whom had ribands of strange design pinned on the left breast, in imitation of the British officers and N.C.O's so decorated! Needless to say, I never passed through the mountaineer sections of the camp without every boy in his tent immediately stepping outside, bringing his bare feet together with a "click," and saluting in absolutely correct style. That they regarded as the very least due to me.

Football naturally appealed to them most forcibly and as we had numbers of these sent out to us from Baghdad, nearly every section was provided with one. Any evening, therefore, when the day's work was over, one would see the B.O.R's of sections kicking these balls about, surrounded by mobs of men and boys contending for the next "hoof" at the ball. And, be it whispered, I have witnessed dignified bishops, and stately elderly maliks, in the Patriarch's camp, indulging in similar relaxations of body and mind—within the seclusion of their special plot of ground!

Part-worn tennis-balls were enormously appreciated by both boys and girls throughout the camp, and on receipt from the Baghdad Sports Club and other sources, were distributed amongst them from time to time. These were utilised for a species of "rounders" by men and boys; and for bouncing by the girls, who, after each stroke, spun quickly round on their tracks, and faced the ball again on its rebound preparatory to the next strike.

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The imitative faculty being so pronounced in the boys, they were not long evolving games of hockey of sorts; for which purpose they raised any old club or stick, and manufactured rope or woollen balls themselves. And with these they would sally forth in the heat of the day, and make use of any vacant hockey-ground on the camp outskirts. There were three such grounds near my Headquarters and just outside the orphanage; and here we would see these rogues playing vigorously at a time when we were glad to be under the shelter of a double-fly tent, as protection against the sun.

And here it may be mentioned that although these refugees, of all classes, viewed with dismay the prospect of spending the hot weather under canvas in the plains of Mesopotamia, and made frequent appeals to be transferred to higher altitudes elsewhere before the summer months descended upon us--which was quite impracticable--they, nevertheless, stood the extreme heat remarkably well, and enjoyed the best of health throughout.

In a letter recently received by me, one of my late staff officers at Baqubah states that there were only ten heat stroke cases reported the whole summer, of which six proved fatal. The average number of people in hospital was only 450, and the birthrate had increased to about 200 per month. It rarely exceeded 50 or 60 earlier in the year; and a large proportion of these babies died within ten days of birth, owing to the debilitated condition of their mothers.

CHAPTER V

Further Aspects of Camp Life

I HAVE previously drawn attention to the fact that the general behaviour of the refugees in the camp was exceedingly good; but it is inevitable that in a community of some 45,000 souls there should be a proportion of black sheep. With a view, therefore, to dealing locally with serious crimes I was early invested with the powers of a Military Governor, and placed in a position to try cases of all kinds, and award punishment up to any extent, with the exception of death, which required confirmation by the G.O.C.-in-C., Mesopotamia. And yet, during the eight months I commanded the camp, not more than half a dozen serious cases had to be tried by me personally, the remainder being lesser crimes and minor offences with which my second-in-command dealt as occasion arose.

So far as was possible Mar Shimun was permitted to try and dispose of purely Assyrian breaches of good conduct within his community, subject to my approval of the punishment awarded; and so long as the offence committed did not affect the discipline of the camp as a whole. For example, Mar Shimun brought to my notice that three of the Urumieh women in the camp were guilty of bigamy, in that during the flight from Urumieh these women had taken to themselves husbands from among the Assyrians with whom they were still living in the camp; whereas they were lawfully wedded to Assyrians who were absent in America and Canada at the time of the exodus from Urumieh. Bigamy and adultery are viewed with the greatest detestation by the Nestorians, and the punishment meted out in their own country for such offences is of a particularly humiliating nature. The woman has her locks shorn close to the head, is placed on an ass with her face to its tail, and thus publicly paraded through the village or district, for all to observe and take warning, before being finally plunged into a prison for such time as the Patriarch may decide. The guilt of the three women in the present case being beyond doubt and it being also proved that the men concerned were not aware that these women's lawful husbands were still alive, the women alone were sentenced by Mar Shimun to imprisonment in the camp. As our detention camp was intended only for male malefactors, the difficulty was solved by the construction of a small barbed wire enclosure close to the Patriarch's camp, in which the ladies were accommodated in a small tent, and guarded by men told off for the purpose by him. Here these women had to do their own cooking, and deal with all such matters as the cleanliness and sanitation of their small open-air prison, themselves.

The proportion of deaths among newly-born infants at one time became so high, particularly with the Assyrians, that I pointed out to Mar Shimun there seemed, in the opinion of my medical officers, to be good reason for believing that mothers were in the habit of purposely overlying their babies shortly after birth. Whether this was due to the people hoping for their speedy repatriation, and in anticipation of the difficulties mothers would experience on the road if encumbered by children in arms, it was not for me to decide; but I begged him to appeal to mothers to do everything in their power and to take full advantage of the facilities afforded by our maternity wards, to rear up their infants. The nation was already so reduced in numbers by their sufferings during the war that it was simply race suicide if this high death rate amongst babies was allowed to continue. In response to my request the Patriarch issued a proclamation to all mothers, and expectant ones, exhorting them for the sake of the future welfare of the nation to give every care to newly-born children; and this was posted up in the bazaar and other prominent places throughout the camp.

At one time it seemed possible that a fair proportion of the babies born in the camp, shortly after the arrival of the refugees, might have been the result of violation of the women at the hands of either Turks or Kurds during the earlier part of the year; and that for this reason the women purposely made away with their offspring as soon after birth as possible; but on going into this matter with the American missionaries, who had been with the Assyrians prior to, and during their exodus from Urumieh, they expressed the opinion that probably very few of the women now in the camp had been victims of rape by Moslems; and in any case it would be extremely difficult to get mothers to admit they had suffered such indignity. Moreover, a strange fact was also brought to my notice by these missionaries—to the effect that it was rare that Christian girls and young women, who had been carried away captives by Moslems, and forcibly treated as concubines before being released some months later, had children as a result of their humiliation.

On the whole the Patriarch's appeal certainly proved beneficial, and the mortality amongst infants soon showed signs of diminution; but one apparently serious case of child-murder was brought before me for trial, in which the young woman stoutly denied having had a child at all, in spite of the testimony of several witnesses who had seen her being helped in her confinement by two other women; and watched her burying the babe in the ground, immediately after its birth. The little body was exhumed by the witnesses, and the opinion of the doctor to whom it was sent for examination that the child had died from natural causes and not strangulation, saved the young woman from a term of imprisonment, to which I certainly would otherwise have sentenced her.

Just before Lent, and after Easter again, numerous weddings took place in the camp amongst the young men and maidens of both Assyrians and Armenians; and dances and festivities in their honour were celebrated daily for several weeks in the spring of 1919, adding much to the gaiety of life and happiness and content generally of the people. Facilities for enjoying protracted honeymoons in seclusion could not, alas! be accorded the happy young couples. We had no spare tents to place at the disposal of the newly-wed, so they were dependent on the goodwill of the occupants of other tents doubling up to free them one for a day or two to themselves. As it was springtime, and the weather was balmy and pleasant sleeping, in the open was no hardship now but one young couple decided to spend their bridal night under the stars just beyond the new railway embankment being constructed to the permanent bridge over the Diala. In the small hours of the morning, however, the occupants of the bride's camp were startled by a partially dressed female rushing in to it in a terrified manner, and shouting out that she and her newlywed spouse had been brutally set upon by Arab thieves, whilst peacefully asleep, and robbed of all they possessed--and that her husband had been so badly knocked about she feared he had been killed. A search party immediately set forth to recover his body, which was found stripped of all clothing, and the man himself quite unconscious after the beating he had received from the Arabs. He completely recovered in due course, but the experience of this young couple brought about a slump in spending honeymoons outside the precincts of the camp proper.

This springtime marriage season gave rise to one of the few tragedies accompanied by fatal results in the camp. A young man in the Mountaineer Battalion of the Contingent was deeply in love with a beautiful Assyrian girl, and she equally in love with him, but the mother, who was a widow, proved obdurate and would not sanction the marriage. The young couple therefore decided to take the law into their own hands, and she agreed to be abducted by him by night and to be carried off into a neighbouring section, and there married in the tent of a mutual friend before morning. In order to carry out his mission the young man persuaded seven other friends of his in the Contingent to join him in the adventure, with the object of dealing with any opposition he might encounter from the other residents of the girl's tent or section. The girl was duly warned of the hour her lover would appear outside her tent to carry her off, and was ready fully dressed, though pretending to be asleep near her mother. At the appointed time the young man with his accomplices approached her tent, called softly to her, and out she crept to join him; but unfortunately the movement aroused her mother, who immediately set up a hue and cry that her daughter had been abducted. This awakened the whole section, and men and women dashed after the fugitives, who were held up temporarily in an adjoining section, when the man threatened to shoot any one who attempted to lay hands on him, and explained that the girl was accompanying him with her own freewill, and they were going to be married. In a struggle that ensued three revolver shots were fired, a man dropped dead, and the lovers escaped to the shelter of their friends' tent, where the man left the girl and returned to the Contingent lines. Early next morning the fracas was reported to me, and though I heartily sympathised with the young man being balked of, a charmingly pretty young wife by a mere whim, on part of her mother, the use of a revolver was too serious a matter to go unpunished.

The man and his accomplices admitted everything except the use of a revolver, which all stoutly denied having taken with them at all on their mission--whilst the girl also protested that her lover had no weapon in his hand, and had only bluffed his opponents with a threat of shooting if they obstructed him. But the fact remained that an Assyrian had been shot dead with a revolver bullet; and though the weapon was never found, other witnesses swore they saw one in the accused's hand, and that he fired it three times to keep off his opponents. This love story, therefore, ended in two years hard labour, for the young soldier, and a broken heart for the sweet maiden--though I still hope they may marry when his two years is up and he rejoins his people, and that they will live happily ever after.

In a camp covering so wide an area as that at Baqubah, it was practically impossible to prevent Arab thieves getting into one part or another of the camp at night, and stealing animals and private property of the refugees and others, in spite of a liberal distribution of sentries along the inland perimeter of the camp. Happily the Arabs about Baqubah are not quite such adepts, or so persistent in their attentions, as those about Amarah, and other places along the Tigris, or the Baqubah Camp would soon have been cleared of all it contained in the way of movables. Nevertheless they were a constant source of annoyance, and gave rise to frequent firing at night by sentries, but unfortunately it was seldom that an Arab thief fell to these fusillades in the dank. The Patriarch's tent on one occasion was entered by a thief, and the silver cross of his office, which had been worn by successive Patriarchs for fifteen centuries, at least, was abstracted, together with certain other insignia, whilst he slept. The cross is, of course, quite irreplaceable; but in spite of all, efforts by the political officers no trace of it has ever been found.

Several officers, sisters, and British N.C.O's in the camp were also victims of Arab thieves, and had the contents of their tents silently removed by night. I very nearly suffered a like fate, but fortunately awoke on hearing an iron chain secured to the back of one of my mule trunks rattle. Thinking a dog or jackal was prowling about inside my tent, I gave a couple of loud "Shoos!" to frighten the beast away, but was surprised to hear scurrying of footsteps, so immediately tumbled to the conclusion that I had disturbed thieves. I leapt out of bed and turned on my lamp which was burning dimly on a table in the centre of my tent. The light at once disclosed a portion of the kanat at the side of the tent to be open, and that the mule trunk was gone; so I dashed out of the tent and raised the alarm by shouting for the sentry who should have

been close outside my tent. As I was in my pyjamas and slippers, and it was pitch dark, and had been raining, I was unable to proceed further than the exterior of my tent in the mud; but before the alarm was responded to I had retrieved various bits of clothing outside the opening, that had been abandoned by the thieves in their flight. There was no sign of the mule trunk, however, and this had been successfully carried off bodily with all its contents. Presently, some officers and men of the 1/4th Devons arrived on the scene from their camp just below my Headquarters; and armed with hurricane lamps they proceeded to search in the direction I indicated to them as that taken by the thieves--judging by the sounds of their hurried retreat when I was first awakened. After some time shouts from the search party announced that they had found the trunk, the lock of which had been wrenched off, and the entire contents rifled in the few minutes that had elapsed since its removal. In addition to a considerable amount of clothing and summer uniform, the trunk had contained a much valued nickel-plated .476 long-barrelled Webley revolver--a gift to me of thirty years before by a dear friend, now dead, when I first sailed for India in 1889, and which had accompanied me on numerous travels and expeditions in Asia and Africa throughout the long intervening years. Needless to say I never saw or heard of it again, in spite of all efforts on the part of the political officers to recover it.

Besides the contents of the mule trunk, much other clothing had been abstracted from that in daily use, which had been folded up on the shelves of a book case standing close to the opening made in the tent by the thieves. In due course a claim for compensation for the articles of uniform and clothing of which I had been robbed was submitted by me to G.H.Q. at Baghdad. In addition to the revolver the list of losses included articles of uniform and boots, which were replaced at government expense; but when it came to the number of shirts, pyjamas, socks, vests, drawers, pocket-handkerchiefs, etc., which had been stolen, and which I asked should be replaced from Ordnance Store, it was not without humour to learn that a general officer on active service was entitled to possess only two shirts, no pyjamas, two pairs of socks, two vests, two drawers, and three pocket-handkerchiefs, etc. And that is all got from government to replace the considerably larger number of these articles stolen from me. I was fortunately not condemned, however, to wear one shirt by day and the other in lieu of pyjamas by night, as a neighbouring hospital generously equipped me with three suits intended for the use of refugees! I was able also to replace other losses by purchase from the Ordnance; but it is not a very paying proposition to be victimised by Arab thieves.

Rifles and revolvers, and ammunition for both, are the chief attraction of these daring and skilful thieves; and numerous attempts were made on the Contingent lines, but only proved successful on two occasions in obtaining rifles. Thereafter the Assyrian sentries were so extremely vigilant that it was hardly possible for a jackal to escape drawing fire at night. Indeed, on one occasion a party of Kurds, on their way to Baqubah from Baghdad, were foolish enough to approach the camp along the high road which passed through the western corner of the camp about the Othmaniyeh Canal. It was still dark, and the party disregarded the sentry's challenge; and he, fearing that if he controlled his fire any longer he would be rushed by a gang of Arab thieves, emptied his magazine "into the brown." The guard turned out as female and children voices of pain announced that something unusual had occurred. It was then found that the sentry had unwittingly bagged three women, two children and two men, who ultimately proved to be peaceful travellers bound for Persia. Those wounded were at once lodged in one of the hospitals, where they all made good recoveries, and continued their journey later, little the worse for their startling reception on the outskirts of the Refugee Camp.

It maybe judged that as a result of constant thieving by Arabs the refugees were none too friendly disposed towards the inhabitants of the Baqubah district. Further friction was caused by the Tiari, and other mountaineer tribes, wandering far afield daily with their large flocks of sheep and goats in search of grazing, which was extremely sparse after the winter rains had ceased, and the hot weather began to set in. At this time, too, the young crops sown by the Arabs in the neighbourhood were rapidly maturing; and there is little doubt that some of the men and boys out with different flocks did not exercise proper control over the movements of their sheep and goats whilst grazing in the vicinity of crops. The consequence was that these not infrequently strayed into nice succulent patches of cultivation and ate heartily whilst they had the chance. Few things infuriate an Arab more than the destruction of even a small corner of his crops, and several serious fracas resulted some distance from camp between Arab and Assyrian, owing to the former setting upon the careless attendants of offending flocks.

Small colonies of mountaineers up to this time had been permitted to erect shelters for themselves, wives and families, and hurdle work enclosures for their flocks along the banks of the Othmaniyeh Canal, at considerable distances from the camp proper, in order that they should be comparatively near grazing grounds. But relations now became very strained between the Assyrian herdsmen and Arabs, who, as reprisals, endeavoured at night to steal sheep and goats from these isolated encampments of Tiari. To prevent bloodshed, owners of flocks were ordered to break up their little settlements and to move them to the west bank of the Othmaniyeh Canal along the outskirts of the camp, where they were less liable to be molested at night by Arab thieves.

The Tiari are passionately devoted to their flocks, and were held responsible for the safety of their own animals by night; and right well these burly ruffians, armed with stout staves, guarded their property. Several would-be Arab sheep-

stealers were captured, and pretty roughly handled in the process before being made over to the camp authorities, and thence despatched to the Political officer at Baqubah town--for incarceration in the local gaol.

The scene along the west bank of the Othmaniyeh Canal, shortly before sundown, when the flocks were returning from their day's grazing, and before they were impounded for the night, was an extremely animated one. In the spring and early summer, several thousand kids and lambs were born, and these were left at home when their mothers were driven out at early dawn to graze well out of sight of camp. Towards nightfall, on the arrival of the returning flocks, such a bleating and clamour by parents and children arose as to be almost deafening. In preparation for the return scores of mountaineer women and girls were already on the spot provided with various utensils and skins, into which each milch goat and sheep was milked before the residue was made available for her impatiently clamouring hungry youngster. The women and girls were extraordinarily dexterous and quick in drawing the milk from a struggling sheep or goat; and the men, too, evidently knew each mother and its own particular lamb or kid, despite the numbers, with unfailing certainty; and would see that none but the legitimate youngster drew nourishment from the freed parent. Both men and women would frequently bestow resounding kisses on the muzzles of the milch animals and their offspring throughout the proceeding, and a holy calm would temporarily descend upon the scene when each mother and child were united again for the evening meal prior to being driven into their enclosures for the night.

Earlier in the season, when we were still subject at intervals to heavy rains, I was not a little surprised to see large blanket shelters springing up here and there inside the camp area, on the edge of the Nahrwan Canal bank; and on enquiry found that these had been erected by the Tiari over hurdle enclosures made by them from brushwood, for the protection of newly-born kids and lambs against the inclement weather. "But where did you get all these blankets from?" I asked. "They are those Your Excellency served out to us, soon after we arrived, to keep us warm at night. But as these lambs have been born several months before they are due in our mountains homes, and will perish in this rain and cold without shelter, we have sewn these blankets together to protect them, and are doing without them ourselves. The welfare of our flocks is more important to us than our being a little cold at night." So I left it at that.

Sheep's milk is more highly prized than cow's or goat's milk by these mountaineers; and from it they make a very sustaining form of thick, almost solid, curds and whey, which found a very ready sale throughout the camp, and was utilised also for purposes of barter with the Arabs in exchange for eggs, vegetables and other commodities. So, in addition to personal affection for their flocks, the Tiari were fully alive to their market potentialities also. The Assyrians, and Armenians also, were frequently met by me during the course of my daily early morning rides out into the country, miles from camp. Before dawn, parties of two and three would set out for neighbouring villages laden with curds and other goods for which they would buy eggs and similar articles from the Arabs, returning to camp at dusk.

The spirit of travel and barter, therefore, is pretty well engrained in the Assyrian; but these small excursions pale into insignificance compared with the adventurous journeys of the Jelus proper--as distinct from the other mountaineer tribes. For generations past, apparently, these sportsmen have been in the habit of despatching parties of their people to Europe and America with the avowed object of collecting funds for charitable purposes, such as their own schools, churches, orphanages, etc. I gather they usually start off on their travels in groups of fifties or so; and later divide up into smaller parties taking different directions, on arrival at the country they propose to exploit--by virtue of letters of recommendation provided them by their bishops before their departure. These papers, seemingly, are accepted by the authorities concerned, who grant the Jelus written permits authorizing them to start collecting funds in their districts. Since such parties are frequently absent for two or three years at a time, and are almost entirely dependent for maintaining themselves in the interval on the collections made abroad, I should judge the charities, for which kindly folk subscribe, do not benefit to a very considerable extent by these excursions to distant lands. Indeed, the Jelus proper appear to have no other occupation for earning their living, except by such missions; and are in consequence not held in very high estimation by other mountaineer tribes, who rather despise their mendicant proclivities. And yet, speaking generally, the cast of countenance of the Jelus, particularly of their women, is more classical and handsome than that of any other of the mountain tribes; but they are notorious beggars, which none of the other Assyrians can be accused of being.

CHAPTER VI

Educational and other matters

Although there were considerable difficulties in the way of providing education for the men and women in the camp, from lack of teachers amongst their own people, it was found possible to do a certain amount on behalf of the children--particularly in--the orphanage. Here, as already mentioned, schools were established for Armenians and Assyrians; but the almost universal desire of these young scholars was to be taught English in preference to their own mother tongue. Both Armenians and Assyrians gave periodic entertainments in the orphanage by children of both sexes, which I usually attended with several members of my staff, and which consisted generally of songs, country dances, recitations, and small theatrical performances. What particularly struck one on these occasions was the complete lack of shyness, or self-consciousness, of these young performers when once on the stage and facing their audience. They were so natural in their speech and gestures that it was difficult to imagine they had any nerves, or suffered from stage fright at all, as they appeared so fully engrossed with the task before them as to exclude all other sensations for the time being.

Most of these performances were given in their own language; but an occasional recitation in English appealed perhaps more forcibly to those of us who had little or no knowledge of Armenian or Syriac. One hot afternoon at the end of March a new departure was made by the pupils of an outside school in No. 27 section, which was especially set apart for the better class, or gentry, of the Assyrians and their families. Here a separate educational establishment for children was started in the early days of the camp, and attended by over 200 young scholars of both sexes. Many others clamoured to be admitted, but there was neither sufficient staff nor tentage accommodation to deal with more, and we had, therefore, reluctantly to limit the numbers attending. The progress made by these children in English was quite remarkable, and a very large gathering of Assyrian parent was present to witness their performances in a tongue foreign to themselves. Readings were given from various English primers by both girls and boys standing in lines, and taking four or five sentences each in turn. The elder children after reading out more advanced stories closed their books, and were asked by me, and others present in the audience, to spell words which had occurred in the piece just completed. This they rarely failed to do correctly, showing that they retained an intelligent interest in what they had read, and had not merely committed it to memory parrot-like fashion.

Tiny dots of five and six even paraded their knowledge of English before me by reading simple sentences consisting of words of three or four letters, such as "The cat is bad," "A dog has legs," etc., in their tiny lisping voices; and it was not difficult to see that the wild mountaineer mothers and fathers listening were immensely proud of the prowess of their offspring on so public an occasion. And they had very good reason to be, as it is doubtful if English children of so tender an age could grapple with the Syriac characters, and read out Syriac words so clearly and correctly as these tiny mites did English ones. The afternoon's entertainment concluded by one of the elder boys reciting a poem(?), entitled "Thanksgiving," written by the Assyrian head master of the school, and consisting of seven verses. His ideas on cadence and rhyme can best be exemplified by quoting the piece in extenso:-

I am here to express my thanks and great wish
To all guests, especially to the British.
To those who arranged cur tent city so fine
Supporting every tribe with no difference of clime.

We have lost our most beloved Patriarch,
But thank God we have another who to us is like Noah's Ark,
And we are protected by the World's greatest Monarch,
Who to us in this wilderness is like the shadow of the rock.

General Austin we know he is very nice,
Who supports us with meat, sugar and rice.
This to us indeed it is a great surprise,
If it was not for heat to stay here always is very nice.

All gentlemen from Headquarters,
Soldiers, Corporals, Sergeants and Officers,

All Sisters and Doctors with their bottles "No. One," "Two," "Three"--
They have from Typhoid and Relapsing Fever made us free.

Hurrah! for the commanding power
Of "Come on! Come on!" over and over,
Especially for this plan of latrine
Which has done us good and kept us so clean.

The rain that falls in Iraq's plain,
And the great care of the English gentlemen--
These surely could not be in vain,
For it is God's plan for the Assyrians to remain.

People of Israel were fed by God
Everywhere in the wilderness they trod;
But they never had the comfort we have got.
We stop! We think! then cry "Great Scot!"

This poem was, of course, the *piece de resistance*, and I am afraid that, in spite of the admirable and emphatic delivery of the reciter in a tongue foreign to him, I, and others of the audience who understood English, howled with merriment at this ambitious effort. I felt I must ask the head master for a copy of his effusion, which he had type-written for my edification, and which is given above exactly as furnished.

At the same time I must very gratefully acknowledge that the Assyrians showed they did appreciate what the British Government had done for them, through the instrumentality of myself and my loyal colleagues and helpers in the camp. This took the form of presenting me on Easter Sunday with an exceedingly handsome silver urn, enclosed in a Russia leather casket, the top of which was adorned with very fine designs in enamel. The intended presentation of these gifts was kept an absolute secret from me and my staff; and I can only say that I have seldom been more surprised in my life than when I learnt the object of the deputation of Assyrian Maliks, and others, to me that Sunday afternoon.

I had received a note in the morning from Mar Timotheos asking me to give him and the Patriarch Committee an interview that afternoon; and had somewhat grudgingly assented, as I anticipated that the subject of it would be the well-worn one of yet another appeal from the Assyrians to have them repatriated, or moved to higher latitudes, now that the hot weather was descending upon us when "they would surely die if retained in the plains of Mesopotamia." However, in accordance with my usual practice, when receiving large deputations, I had tables and chairs placed out on the shady side of the mess-hut when the sun began to sink below the roof, and issued instructions to the servants to prepare the inevitable brew of coffee for my expected visitors.

In due course the approach of the deputation was announced, so I issued out of my tent to meet them, and then conducted some fifteen to twenty notables to the place prepared for their reception. I was somewhat mystified on taking our seats to observe one of the deacons of the party handing over a large parcel wrapped in cloth to Mar Timotheos. This he opened on the table at which we were seated and disclosed the oblong casket to which I have referred; but the meaning of this still did not occur to me. He then opened the casket and drew out from it a highly burnished silver urn some eight inches in height, and beautifully embossed on the exterior with scenes representing ancient Assyrian frescoes, and pastoral life. He placed it in my hand, and I naturally admired it greatly, not only on account of its workmanship but the weight of silver used in its manufacture.

Addressing me in English, Mar Timotheos then proceeded to explain that, as a small token of gratitude from the Assyrian Nation, many in the camp had subscribed to present me with these two gifts, which they begged me to accept as a memento of my association with them. All the kind things said by him of me in particular, and the British Government in general, modesty forbids me recount but I felt serious qualms as to the propriety of accepting such handsome presents from these poor people committed to my charge. When, however, he opened the lid of the urn and began to read out the inscription engraved in Syriac, corkscrew fashion down the smooth interior from top to bottom, and I heard my name occur in this, I deemed it would be churlish and give unnecessary pain if I refused to accept such a spontaneous tribute of regard from the Assyrian Nation.

I expressed my sincere thanks for their most unexpected and undeserved Easter offering, and assured the assembled Maliks that I was quite overcome that the people should have shown their appreciation of what had been done for them in this manner; and that on behalf of the British Government and my colleagues in the camp I would gladly accept their kind gifts, which I would always esteem highly, and which I hoped my family would also do after me.

During the conversation over our coffee and biscuits after the speechifying, I learnt that the Assyrians had had this urn made by Persian silversmiths in Baghdad, in accordance with designs provided by the Assyrians for the purpose. The previous history of the casket I was not able definitely to ascertain, though its primrose-coloured silk and plush lining seem to indicate that it may once have been used as a jewel-case by some fair Persian lady of high degree. Later I received an English translation of the Syriac inscription inside the urn, which runs as follows:-

JAH!

May God bless the Easter Festival of the most honoured

Genl. H. H. AUSTIN, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

As an everlasting and sincere memorial of the above-named gentleman. As long as the Assyrian Nation exists; and as a token of good-will towards him for all the benefits, kindnesses and care bestowed upon her people in all necessary things by the same most honoured Commander, the General of the Government of Great Britain, during his administration since the Assyrian Nation took refuge under the said Government.

From the Assyrian Nation.

Assyrian Camp, Baqubah,

O.S. April 7th in the year of our Lord 1919.

Arab thieves were not given much opportunity of depriving me of these interesting mementoes of Baqubah Camp; for a few days after they were carefully packed and despatched to my wife in England, whom they reached safely before I arrived in the old country myself some two and a half months later.

Since my return to England I have not infrequently seen moving references in the press to, and appeals on behalf of, the Chaldeans, who it is asserted--presumably by Roman Catholics or others not accurately informed--suffered terribly in the late war for having thrown in their lot with the Entente and fought against the Turks. It may not be out of place, therefore, to point out that there were exceedingly few Roman Catholic Assyrians or "Chaldeans" as they are generally termed when they embrace Rome, amongst the refugees at Baqubah. The very large majority of the Roman Catholic Assyrians in the Mosul vilayet did not join the mountaineers and fight against the Turks and in consequence were permitted by the Turks continue to dwell practically unmolested in their homes about Mosul. So much was this the case that, after the occupation of Mosul by British troops in November 1918, an American missionary who proceeded from Baqubah to investigate the condition of the Christians in the villages north of Mosul, on his return informed me that they were living and moving about the country as though no war had been on at all; and that the women were openly wearing all their jewellery upon their persons. This certainly would not have been the case had they been accustomed to molestation at hand of Turk or Kurd. Moreover during the operations against the Turks, a very daring mountaineer Assyrian, with a few companions, made his way through nearly to Mosul from Urumieh--hiding by day and penetrating Turkish and Kurdish lines under cover of darkness. He related all his thrilling adventures to me personally at Baqubah, where he turned up months after the bulk of the refugees, by whom he had been given up as dead, since he had not accompanied the others in their flight from Urumieh. In his story he complained bitterly of the hostile attitude shown to him by the Chaldeans, though they were of his own race by flesh and blood. They were then dwelling in comparative safety, having submitted to the Turks; but they vehemently declined to help him and his companions by sheltering them in their monasteries or villages; and drove them forth, on the plea that if the Turks came to learn that they had had any dealings with the mountaineers, their homes and churches would be burnt, and they themselves killed. Consequently, back these brave men were compelled to retrace their footsteps; and after months of the most exciting adventures, and utterly worn out by fatigue and hardships of every description, they finally, gained safety by reaching a British post about Zinjan.

So much for the part played by the Chaldeans About Mosul in the war; and I could mention other stories depicting the unfriendly attitude of Assyrians proselytised by Roman Catholics towards their Nestorian brethren of the mountains. I am all for giving full credit where credit is due; but when, emissaries of the Chaldeans, and their supporters in this country, endeavour to derive chief credit for the valiant opposition offered to Turks and Kurds by the Assyrians during the late war, it is only just that the real facts of the case should be made perfectly clear.

CHAPTER VII

Final Observations

IN the previous pages an attempt has been made to show what the Assyrians and Armenians assembled at Baqubah have buffered by throwing in their lot with the Entente during the World War; and to portray the efforts on the part of Great Britain to afford security and relative comfort to these refugees in Mesopotamia. The maintenance of the great camp on the Diala has been a very costly undertaking, running to several millions of pounds sterling up to date. It is obvious that it is neither in the interests of Great Britain nor those refugees themselves to continue indefinitely the present arrangement. Armenians and Assyrians alike are obsessed with a passionate desire to occupy, once more, their former homes, but the political situation is so involved, and conditions in Kurdistan and North-west Persia so insecure that, pending a definite understanding with Turkey and Persia, the question of the repatriation of these tens of thousands of men, women and children cannot readily be solved.

The Assyrians are fully alive to the fact that they can no longer stand alone and unsupported in their former mountain fastnesses, and uplands of Lake Urumieh, entirely ringed in, as they would be, by more or less fanatical Moslems, only too ready, probably, to take advantage of the greatly weakened Christians, and their inability to protect themselves so stoutly as of yore. Moreover, their villages, churches, and houses have been completely destroyed, and their fields and irrigation channels wrecked. All these have to be repaired before they can hope either to obtain Shelter over their heads, or woo the food required for their sustenance from their ravaged plots of land. In the case of the mountaineers, especially, it will probably be necessary to convey timber for the roofs of their houses from the vicinity of Mosul, since their own country is largely devoid now of suitable trees for building purposes. They will have to be supplied with oxen and ploughs to put their fields in order, and be furnished with tons of grain seed to raise the crops on which their lives depend. And for all those intervening months, whilst they are settling down again in their former homes, they will require to be fed from some convenient centre north of Mosul, until their new harvest ripens and they are able once more to support themselves. It will be realised, therefore, that the problem having regard to the difficulties of the country, and communications generally in those, regions is one of considerable complexity.

The wish of these people is to be placed under British protection, and to derive security and the means of living under our aegis. They have never forgotten that, even so long ago as 1840, when they suffered hideously from massacres, it was the British, through the instrumentality of Sir Stratford Canning, our Ambassador at Constantinople, who intervened on their behalf; and procured the exile of their chief oppressors in Hakkari. Though no longer strong enough to stand alone, they yet believe that, under British guidance, and control, they are still capable of consolidation and considerable development. And I will go still further by pronouncing it as my deliberate opinion that, in these warlike Christian mountaineers, we have at hand invaluable material for counteracting and checkmating Moslem pretensions in the sadly disturbed regions of Kurdistan.

Unfortunately, up to the time I left Mesopotamia, our policy appeared to be to placate the Kurd at the expense of the Christian--those who had fought against us rather than those who had fought for us, and had lost their all in so doing. To me this attitude appeared so unjust and incomprehensible that on several occasions I put forward protests; and tried to awaken the authorities to the fact that they were backing the wrong horse, and would probably realise this before long.

What the Assyrians don't know about the Kurds, after dwelling among them for centuries, is not worth knowing; but the civil authorities seemed, after very brief intercourses with the Kurds, following on our occupation of territories inhabited by them, to be obsessed with the notion that the Kurd was a fine manly fellow, and to be entirely trusted once he had promised good behaviour for the future. Subsequent events proved how utterly unfounded this assumption was, and that the treacherous Kurd had not suddenly changed his character, and spots, merely on account of the advent of British troops in his midst. Soon after the occupation of Mosul when the Turk was down, and our star in the ascendant, Raschid Beg of Barwar, who had twice destroyed Lower Tiari before the war, deemed it expedient to make his peace with us, and to protest undying loyalty to us in the future. When I informed the Patriarch of this, he merely smiled and replied, "So long as the British are in strength, Raschid Beg will be very charming and promise many things; but do not trust him. We know Raschid Beg of old, and what his promises are worth." I passed on the information, which of course did not coincide with the opinion of the Political officer who had just taken such a fancy to Raschid Beg, our new ally, and former destroyer of Assyrian homes! But the Patriarch's words proved true ere many moons had passed.

A still more disturbing example of fickleness to one's friends was the effort made to buy over Simku, the notorious Kurd blackguard and murderer of the late Patriarch--a man for whom the gallows were too easy a death. The

Assyrians at Baqubah soon learnt that an emissary of his, one Shaikh Saiyid Taha, accompanied by two men from the family of Simku, had reached Baghdad to interview the civil authorities. This circumstance at once drew a remonstrance from the Assyrians in the form of a petition to me, reaffirming all the past misdeeds of Simku towards them, and stating that they were surprised to learn friendly negotiations were being contemplated with him by the authorities in Baghdad. The petition closed with this somewhat touching appeal:- "Our complaint concerning Simku was strong before you. Referring to this our serious accusation against him we would ask, now that these two men are present in Baghdad, what is your purpose concerning them?" Then followed the signatures of over twenty prominent Maliks and others.

I was, then, in as complete ignorance as the Assyrians themselves as to what was in the wind, so forwarded the petition to G.H.Q. and asked what reply was to be given to the Maliks. The object evidently was to arrive at some *modus vivendi* with Simku, in order to facilitate the return of the Plain Assyrians to their former homes about Urumieh, near which district was Simku's stronghold. It was stretching imagination a bit far, though, to picture the Assyrians living on friendly terms again with the treacherous murderer of their beloved Patriarch. This occurred shortly before I left for England; and that arrangements did not subsequently prove of a very lasting nature appear certain, by a recent statement that the Persian authorities had embarked on active operations against Simku. It evidently was not possible for us to do so; and one may easily guess of what value his fervid promises to "father the Assyrians" in future would have been! In any case a recent letter from Baqubah informs me that, as regards repatriation, the position of the Urumieh people seems "more hopeless than the rest."

Such, then, is the situation with respect to the future of the Assyrians, by which we are faced in Mesopotamia. They all desire British protection; but in their own former homes, amid the mountains of Kurdistan in late Turkish territory, and on the plains of Urumieh in Persian territory. The arms of the British may be long; still, can they possibly embrace so huge a tract of, at present, lawless and largely roadless country. The expense would be great to administer and establish security in those remote regions; whilst the military forces required for the purpose would be considerable--if the Kurd is really to be kept in order and regrettable incidents avoided.

Much, of course, will depend on the decision regarding our future boundaries, and spheres of responsibility in Mesopotamia; but for the moment it appears hardly likely that these will be so defined as to include the former homes of these Assyrians. Deprived of our moral and material support they dare not hope to occupy once more their ancient lands. The plains of Mesopotamia, to these accustomed to high altitudes and cool breezes in summer, are not suitable for colonization by these peoples; and it is likely that if they were so disposed of they would before many years cease to exist as a separate entity. It is very questionable, moreover, whether the permanent location of these people in the plains of Iraq would not lead to friction and difficulties with the present Arab dwellers in those regions--though in former days, centuries ago, the forefathers of these Assyrians were in possession of large tracts of country about Ctesiphon. Indeed, they have assured me that at the dawn of Christianity the whole of Iraq was their home; and that it was only after the rise of Mohammedanism they were faced by gradual extermination, and the small remnants of the nation were compelled to seek refuge, and maintain themselves up to the present day in the mountain fastnesses of Kurdistan.

At one time the difficulties in the way of repatriation seemed so insuperable that I was asked to consult with the Assyrians as to the desirability of settling them in Canada on some special reserve where they could develop the land and start life anew under British auspices--always provided, of course, that the Dominion Government were prepared to accept and place facilities at the disposal of these Oriental emigrants. I called the Assyrian Committee together, towards the end of May 1919, brought the suggestion before them and asked them to let me know the result of their deliberations within the next few days. This they did, and the consensus of opinion was that until something more definite was known as a result of the decisions of the Peace Conference, they would prefer to reserve their decision. They again reiterated, however, that they desired above all else to re-occupy their former homes--secure against Moslem oppression, and under British protection. But should their country fall outside the sphere of British control, and come under the mandatory of some other European nation, they would still prefer to occupy their former homes if the Mandatory Power would guarantee their complete security against Turk and Kurd. If the Mandatory Power could not guarantee them this security, the return to them of their former homes and redress for their past sufferings as the result of having embraced the Entente cause, there remained little for them to hope for as a separate nation. Migration then was the only possible alternative, in order to live in safety and prosper. In that case Canada would probably suit them as well as any other British Colony, though they were not attracted by the prospect of starting life afresh elsewhere, under novel, and probably difficult, conditions. It will be observed, therefore, how the love for their former homes still lingers strongly in the hearts of these refugees.

Such a solution of the problem, however, would be a sad confession of weakness on our part; for it is entirely incomprehensible to these Assyrians that, in spite of their having fought on the ultimately winning side, their ancient defeated enemies should be left virtually in occupation of their beloved homes and lands, which the Assyrians were

The Baqubah Refugee Camp

forced to abandon by the overwhelming Moslem numbers arrayed against them. That these Assyrians deserve well of the Entente nations probably none who have read these pages will be inclined to deny. Yet, through causes to a large extent beyond our control, and after more than eighteen months in the Refugee camp, we find this most interesting residue of an ancient race, who have clung steadfastly to Christianity since the days of the Apostles, are still dependent on our charity at Baqubah--and homeless.

APPENDIX

Assyrian Thanks to British

REPRINT FROM "THE NEAR EAST,"
Jan. 16th, 1920.

WE publish below a document full of human interest, and one that shows in a charming manner a feeling of gratitude of a somewhat rare order. It is in effect a manifesto by the Nestorians from the mountain region of Hakkari, in the refugee camp established by the British at Bakubah (or Baqubah).

The English of the document is the Nestorians' own, and it could not be changed without injuring the touching simplicity of their thanks.

THANKSGIVING

Our brother men, sisters, wives and the children of the nation.

It is just one year now that we have received the beneficences and favours in Baqubah, through the kindness of the most excellent British Government. Therefore, since we cannot make repayment by money, let us raise our voice and proclaim our gratitude for this goodness as much as, letter by letter, we can possibly remember.

Firstly--Do you remember the time of our arrival, sick and exhausted? We were accommodated in large white magnificent tents, arranged by generous officers, and how many were put into each tent. This is the wonder we saw. How these sections, in each from fifty to sixty, tents, were arranged, the camp being fashioned like European towns, their suburbs the sections; and how long it took us to learn their names and situation.

Do you remember how we were instructed not to drink water from the canal, but only from that which was brought in pipes; how we were murmuring, saying, "We cannot drink this, for it has the taste of medicine"; and how these pipes had been put under the earth of the desert, ready when we arrived. You saw how this work reached completion in every section. Again, when we arrived here the latrines were ready and the workers thereof received good payment, under the care of a kind British soldier, who was always burning the refuse, lest bad odours should affect us. How all men were ordered to go to one place only. You saw all this work done perfectly in every section. Bathing places were arranged by the canal, and all men once a week were ordered to take soap from the stores and go to wash themselves, while hot water was prepared under the care of two British soldiers--all this in order to keep us clean.

You remember that others were put to sweep the section, to remove all rubbish, empty tins, and all poisonous and dirty matter, and to cast it into a pit dug in each section specially for this. This digging of pits was a continual work, and the constant cry was heard, "Come on; Jaldi Chair" ("Come on quickly to the pit") to the workmen of the section. The headman of each tent was made responsible for the cleanliness of his tent, both inside and out, for which duty he received pay.

The officer in charge of a section nearly everyday visited each tent in the section to see if it was clean and in order. Often, he inspected the sanitary condition of the latrines, the trenches (drainage), the open spaces round the section, cookhouses, etc.

Every morning a soldier visited each tent asking, "Is there any sick?" and should any one sick be found, he was sent to the hospital in a stretcher, after which a Red Cross motorcar visited each section to collect the sick.

Orders were issued that washing water, when finished with, should be poured in a special pit. Should any trace of disease ("contagious") be found in a section, the person was sent to disinfecting bath, and if it occurred in a tent then all the occupants and their belongings were disinfected. If a man happened to die in tent, the headman was imprisoned and the tent's rations were reduced for a long time.

The honourable majors in each area used to visit the section, inspecting the sanitary conditions. General Austin and Colonel Cunliffe-Owen often used to walk through our camp, seeing to the order and cleanliness.

The visit of the doctors to the sections was a continual, one in order to discover any germs of disease.

When the weather was wet great care was taken to open and close the tents. "Makhi li qunjeeta" (put it to the corner) was a common expression on every tongue at seven o'clock in the morning, and those whose tent sides were not rolled back to the corner their ration ticket was taken away. Always the officer knew from where the wind blew, and that side towards the wind was closed. The same was done in closing the tents.

Sweeping out the flies in the morning, when they were benumbed by the cold, was an order. The flies were gathered in a rug and thrown into the incinerator.

The first step before entering a section was that of "segregation," as you know.

In all these ways, and more, that the British did their object was to protect us from disease, and by these means we were kept clean, and as a result we, are living now.

Secondly.--Two large hospitals for curing our sick people were arranged--one for males, the other for females. In cleanliness and good order, they were set up. Rail couches were provided for every sick man or woman, furnished with clean white sheets and bedding. The clothes of the sick were always changed, those people of the same disease being located in the same line or lines of tents. Thus the patients were transferred from ward to ward, from place to places until they were cured, when they returned to their section. Food also was provided to suit the kind of disease, and according to the strength or weakness of the person. Many times a day medicines of different tastes, sour or sweet, were given to the patients. They were looked after under the gentle care of Mrs. George and the major of the General Hospital. We thank the Indian doctors and employees for their love and sympathy towards our patients. They have astonished the Assyrian mind. Besides these two general hospitals, they arranged tents for dispensaries--one for each two or three sections, to distribute medicines in the morning and afternoon for slight illnesses. Motorcars in the morning and afternoon used to come and collect the sick, should these be any, and take them to the general hospitals. These dispensaries every day were visited by the chief doctor.

Instructions were issued that should a woman be in childbirth she should report at once to the dispensary, in order to be taken to the hospital, where the baby would be taken care of. On returning to the section she took a note to the effect that the baby should lie provided with milk and a feeding bottle, etc.

Thirdly.--Water.--This was another great thing by which we remained healthy. Water was brought from the river, twenty minutes away, through large pipes, and to the sections, through smaller ones. The water was cleansed by being disinfected with medicines at its source (the engine), where it was drawn from the Diyalah river. Two large tanks were placed in each section, and they were filled with water from the pipes which ran up to the top of the tanks. A brick house was built round them in order to keep the water cold during the hot weather of the desert of Baghdad. To each section chatties were also given to keep water clean and cold. Policemen were appointed to see that the supply of water should be in order. The more we drank of this water, so much more were we healthy.

Fourthly. □ *Rations.*--While we were on our way we did not think it would be possible to supply us with sufficient bread but when we arrived here they gave us in sufficient quantity flour, salt, rice, beans, pease, *ghee*, oil, tins of bullybeef (often fresh meat) and vegetables. Almost all these were issued daily. A British soldier and a policeman took round to the tents milk for the babies, coffee and tea for the people.

Fifthly.--Wood and Cookhouses.--The wood which was burned in Baqubah came from India, and was issued to us daily. Cookhouses and ovens in sufficient quantity were built in each section.

Sixthly.--Soon after our arrival at Baqubah the British provided us with material for clothes for every person, together with cotton, needles and buttons. Every one was given a blanket. At the end of May a shawl was given to us, which we called "mandeela," to wrap round our heads. Everybody received from four to eleven yards, and we were instructed to wear it on the head as a protection against the sun.

Seventhly.--Two cookhouses, long buildings running from east to west, were built in each section. Between the two a space was left in which was made a water soakage pit. There was enough open ground also for sufficient ovens to be built for the baking of bread for all the section.

Eighthly.--Cooking and frying pots were given to each section. They, were called "kattelook." □

Ninthly.--Trenches were dug before every line of tents (for drainage), and small canals flowing into a central one and again into a large one at the end of the section.

Tenthly.--Orphanage.--This was a great act of charity. A section was arranged for the orphans of the nation, and all who were without protection, males and females, were gathered together and put in charge, a British superintendent and an Assyrian supervisor, with women as mothers over the children. Teachers were appointed for their education, and they were provided with clothes and rations, etc.

Eleventhly.--Schools were opened and almost all the children were accommodated. A part of these schools were paid for by the American Mission.

Twelfthly.--Recruiting and training of the two battalions of the Assyrians. This was the best and kindest act which the British did for us. They told us that, this Contingent would be trained, and prepared for use, both at the present time and for the future of the nation, until the latter should be settled in its own places. The first battalion has now been sent on with the British Army to punish the treacherous Kurds, our old enemy. The second battalion is still remaining to guard us here.

When we turn our memory back we remember that from Hamadan to Baqubah stages were appointed for the daily parties or batches. We received rations for ourselves, and for our animals too, and we were safeguarded under military escort from Sain-Kala to here.

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Partly from our own knowledge, and partly from the tales of our fathers, we all know that we lived in Kurdistan under the protection of the British Government since seventy-five years ago, on account of their influence in the Turkish Empire. It was they who caused Bedr Khan Beg to be punished by being exiled to Crete, because they destroyed a part of our Ashirate. Since that time to the beginning of the general war the instructions of the late Queen Victoria never ceased to be carried out.

The Government from which we have received so much good, and still are, how shall we repay it, O! Assyrian Nation?
Reply: We have nothing to repay it with but thanksgiving and complete obedience.

Let us pray God to increase it, and make it more victorious. Amen.

Qasha Yokhannan Eshu
Secretary, Assyrian National Committee
December 2nd, 1919

FOOTNOTES

¹ A common form of double-fly and two-poled tent utilised in India, with inside measurement, of 21'x16', and sides 5' 6" high at eaves. They were originally designed for use of European privates, and are 12' to 15' high in center.

² This was written in March 1920; and unhappily my prognostication was soon to be fulfilled, for Mar Polos Shimun died on the 9th of May at Baqubah, to which place he had returned for the winter. See previous footnote.

³ This lad has now succeeded Mar Polos Shimun, and been consecrated as Mar Ishai Shimun.