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WHITFIELD

HISTORY

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FRENCH RULE IN SYRIA

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FORIEGN RELATIONS.

DR.S.C.MITCHELL

THEODORE M. WHITFIELD

FRENCH RULE IN SYRIA

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## FRENCH RULE IN SYRIA

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"Eight hundred killed, wounded, and missing, not to mention the loss of three air plains, several tanks, many guns, and many camels, such were the consequences to the French in Syria .... when a horde of infatuated Druses attacked an artillery convoy."\*

Within the last six months the eyes of the world have been focussed on this little country east of the Mediteranian. Syrian sympathizers travel the United States over seeking our aid in their struggle for independence. General Sarrail, the High Commissioner has been ordered home to explain conditions in his mandate. What is it all about and why? Syria wants her freedom and a seat in the League of Nations.

To the southeast of Syria lies Mesopotamia and Persia. Southwestwardly, England lifts her head beyond the Suez Canal. France caring for her missionaries and teachers in Lebanon casts an eye aside seeking a field for exploitation. Even the Russian Bear, beyond the Caucasians, licks his chops as he gazes on such a "land of milk and honey"

\* The Druses on the War Path.

With so many covertous eyes fixed upon her, little wonder was it that Syria soon became a prize which the Powers sought to divide.

With the coming of the second decade of the twentieth century, coming events cast distinctly their shadows. The presence of German army officers, advisors, and courtiers boded no good for the peace of eastern Europe and Asia Minor. Turkey was too plainly becoming a vassal of Germany, The concession given a German company to build the Bagdad railway aroused some feeling in France; -- a French company had in vain sought this concession. The Powers opposed to Germany began to draw to-gether.

As far back as 1860, France had interviened in Syrian affaires to guarantee the Maronites of Lebqnon freedom to worship unmolested. Gradually French influence spread. In a speach delivered in the Chambre des Deputes, in 1923, M. Poincare acknowledged an early Angle-French agreement saying: "'From the year 1912 we had an understanding with the British about Syria'"\*

England following up her ever-active watch of approaches to the Suez Canal foresaw the passage of Syria into German hands in advent of war unless the Arabs were stirred to action. A loyal, roving native people and a sandy waste would have fought mightily against England had Germany secured possession of this district. To alienate the Arabs, England made an agreement, 1915, with one Hussein, ruler of the tribes in Mesopotamia and Syria, whereby he was to lead these natives to revolt and make common cause with England. She in return promised to favor a constitution for an Arab state to be formed from the hinterland. Reservations were made for French rights along the coastal plain and English spheres of influence in Palestine and Mesopotamia.

Hussein agreed in good faith and at once commenced operations by raising his standard at Mecca and calling for volunteers. With these forces aiding his English and Egyptian troops, General Allenby was able to push on to Aleppo and capture one hundred thousand troops from the Turks.

However in 1916 England broke faith by forming the Sykes-Picot Agreement to which she, France, and Russia were parties. By this document all hope for an Arab state was signed away. France was given Cilicia, with the ports Alexandretta and Mersina, and Lebanon with Beirut. England took Palestine and Mesopotamia. All lands back of the districts were to go to the countries owning the coastal plains. Mosul was to be the dividing point between the French Syrian and the English Mesopotamian spheres of influence. No heed was paid the pledge of England to aid Hussein in establishing an

\*Syrian Opposition to French Rule

Arab state.

This pact was kept secret until Russia collapsed and her archives were opened to the world. Turkey at once exposed to Hussein the duplicity of his ally, in an attempt to win him. England declared that one party, Russia, having collapsed, the pact was null and of no account. Hussein readily accepted this statement only to find later he had been deceived again.

When Turkey capitulated the Arabs flushed with victory anticipated the immediate erection of the state for which they and their fathers had fought for centuries. At Paris, May 5, 1919, they were doomed to the supervision of a foreign power. France wanted Syria and presented to The Peace Conference claims to it. She asserted a triple claim. First, there were ties of sentiment dating back to the Crusades. Second, France had shown such great interest in the Lebanese Maronites, that she was well qualified as the natural mother-state to guide the young state. Third, French commercial interest in Syria were paramount, Here lay the reason for her desire for the Syrian Mandate.

Came then Woodrow Wilson proclaiming his principle of "trusteeship". No longer were "backward" peoples to be wrung from defeated powers and held that the victors might exploit them. There was a duty that the foremost peoples owed the benighted. The strong should aid the weaker states until such time as the latter shall be strong enough to stand alone. Article 22 of The Covenant of the League of Nations formalizes this idea into a Mandatory System. This article is as follows.

"To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

"The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be intrusted to advanced nations who, by reason of their resources, their experience, or geographical position, can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.

"The character of the mandate must differ according to the stage of the development of the people, the geographical situation of the territory, its economic conditions and other similar circumstances.

"Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.

.....

"In every case of mandate, the Mandatory shall render to the Council an annual report in reference to the territory committed to its charge.

.....

"A permanent Commission shall be constituted to receive and examine the annual reports of the Mandatories, and to advise the Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates."

The Treaty of The Peace of Versailles to which the Covenant of The League was attached, was signed June 28, 1919. Syria was made a Class A mandate. The following spring, April 25th, at the San Remo Conference Syria was assigned to the tender mercies of France. Terms for administering the Mandate were defined by the Council of The League July 24, 1922 but final arrangements were not made until September 1923. Ostentatiously France assumed the Mandate as a trust which she was to aid "on behalf of the League".

The Syrian Mandate, is the natural gateway to the Mediterranean for travelers from Persia, bound either for Europe of northern Africa. Alexandretta, the best port, is the western outlet for Mesopotamia. To the Mohammedan world Mecca is, as Jerusalem to the Christian. Damascus is the object of Mohammedan caravans. A developed culture has long resided here. The light of Learning is radiated from the Jesuit and American colleges at Beirut. There is little commerce but the grain fields of the plains make Syria the granary of the adjacent countries.

The four million people have the same language and origin but are bitterly divided on religious lines. In Lebanon we find the Maronites somewhat loyal to France because of the protection they have enjoyed at her hands. In the south there is Jebel Druses, a district of some one hundred and twenty villages and fifty thousand inhabitants. This population is divided thusly, 44,344 Druses, 6,645 Christians, 725 Mohammedans and a few people of several other sects. A hint as to the disposition of the people may be got by considering the fact that they possess 20000 modern rifles. Scattered through the rest of the country are Sunnites, Izmailites, Shuths, and Chaldeans.

Following Allenby's victories the Syrian National Government was established in October 1918. The country was in a prosperous condition and things bid fair to continue smoothly. At

Damascus, October 1918, one of Hussein's sons became King Faysal I. At once he protested to Woodrow Wilson against the action of Clemenceau and Lloyd George of September 13, 1919. In that conference he saw his country subjugated.

The constitutional monarchy called an all Syrian congress to meet at Damascus. The Lebanese Elective Council seeing themselves overwhelmed by a people strongly opposed to their existence in Syria, declared itself free March 22nd. An appeal was made to France. In her Lebanon saw her salvation if we may judge by a publication of that time:

" We are all lovers of independence, only we desire such independence after we are properly taught how to govern ourselves and how to manage our national affairs.

" We Christians in Syria never dream of ruling in a Country where we are much fewer than Moslems but we desire that such rule be in the hands of a party that treats Moslem and Christian alike, ..... When these requisites are found in a ruler, Syrian Christians are just as eager for independence as Moslems." \*

French rule in Syria has never been wanted or popular. The King-Crane Commission sent there by Woodrow Wilson in 1919, disclosed the well-nigh universal disapproval of French rule. Even in Lebanon the natives wished only French advisers and French protection against Moslems. The first choice of a mandatory power was the United States, Great Britain being the next.

In 1920 France overthrew the Syrian Government. The High Commissioner, a fine soldier but poor diplomat, General Gouraud, July 14th made five demands on the Syrian Government. Among these were: 1. Submission to the French Mandate System;

2. Use of Syrian paper money backed by French francs deposited in the Bank of Beirut. A bank largely under French influence.

3. The demobilization of the Syrian army of 150,000.

A few days were given for a suitable reply to be returned. Immediately before the authorities were to telegraph their submission to the demands, the telegraph wires were cut, causing a delay of two hours overtime. Despite the fact that compliance was unintentionally delayed and then only two hours, Gouraud July 18, marched in with his Senegalese troops and took charge of affairs deposing the native government. From that moment the only hope of a national government seemed to lie in open revolt.

Despite the fact that the Mandatory is supposed to act for the good of the pupil-state French rule has been characterized by corruption, disparagement of Syrians, revoltes political and religious

\* Syria's Self Determination.

quarrels.

Instead of trying to teach the natives harmony and government, Gouraud divided the mandate into four districts, Jebel Druses, Alouite, Great Lebanon, and Syria, Aleppo and Damascus lying in the last named state. Five representatives from each province meet to form the general parliament. The religious sore is opened by the religious basis of parliamentary constituency. Already intensely antagonistic because of their religious beliefs, the tribes by such action are thrown at each others throats.

In answer to insistant outcries against this rule so similar to that employed in Africa, Gouraud granted Lebanon a parliament permitted to discuss only a few matters and even on these action was not final. In 1921 Jebel Druses became self governing but subject to a military governor appointed by the High Commissioner.

The Syrians seeking aid in their struggle for a national government lay serious charges of misrule against France.

First, faith was broken with Hussein and his followers by England but France was largely responsible for her later action. Syria claims independence by right of purchase in their blood spilled in fighting against the Turk.

Second, French rule as it exist was not needed or wanted but was forced on Syria. In 1920 the country was in a more prosperous condition than at any time since the eighth century. Artrash Pasha, the sultan of Jebel Druses, speaking for these people says:

"We want our own free Parliament, our national army, our Government, and our King or President as head of the State, The French must be satisfied like the English in Irak, to function only as advisers" \*

Third, Corruption is rampant even in offices held by the Europeans. This same works an unnecessary hardship on the Syrian states. In 1923, France spent 18,000,000 francs to buy native leaders. Native assemblies are likewise taxed for such purposes. When the French premier the following year purposed reducing this figure to 5,000,000 Gouraud openly asserted that he could not keep the peace with such a small corruption fund. The natives are further exploited by back-handed methods of business. A case is cited. A bridge near Aleppo, built by the Turks about 1888, cost 8,000 Turkish pounds. After a flood it was in need of repairs. A French engineer secured the contract to repair it at the cost of 45,000, Turkish pounds. Native engineers estimated the job to be worth only a few thousand.

Fourth, the articles of value because of their worth in the world of art, wherever they may be found in Syria have been gathered up and shipped to France, against the wishes of the Syrians.

\*The Druses on The War Path.

Fifth, the Syrians are discriminated against in dealings social and religious as well as economical. French judges refusing to learn the language burden the courts with the expense of interpreters. Civil justice does not exist between Frenchman and Syrian. The court-martial trying the above named engineer freed him and declared that a Frenchman could not be convicted on the testimony of a Syrian.

Sixth, religious disturbances have been made more acute because of the division of the people for political purposes on religious lines. In this policy the Syrian leaders think they see an effort of the French to perpetuate themselves in the Mandate. So long as trouble is present the people will be judged still immature for self-determination. The direct charge of arming the Maronites is laid at the feet of Gouraud.

Sevent, military rule has taken the place of civil. French troops execute the will of French officers and judges instead of a native gendarmerie directed by natives.

Eight, economic ruin seems threatening. The neat little gold reserve on hand when the French arrived has been collected and exported to France. In its place as the backing for the currency of the country The franc has been authorized and used by the bank of Beirut. The currency now in use is paper based on the franc and becomes worth less every day as the franc depreciates. This is pointed out in contrast to the currency of Egypt and Irak which has been the same due to the gold backing. This same bank has inflated the currency until its notes in circulation are worth little more than the paper on which they are printed. Altho it has a capital of only 10,000,000frs it has issued 200,000,000frs. Altho one of the reason for the creation of the mandates system was to help the weak states by investing capital therein France has failed to do so. Having no ready capital to invest it would look as if France accepted Syria that she might hold it until such time as her nationals would be ready to invest. The old story of the dog in the manger again.

Nine, the right of appeal and criticism has been taken away. A case is cited. Desiring to air their grievances abroad, the Lebanese Elective assembly decided to send several of its members to Rome, Paris, and London. The signers of a bill authorizing such action were summarily court-martialed, given fifteen years imprisonment, ten years deportatinn, and heavy fines. The treatment accorded the prisoners was horrible. Altho a few were of high rank they were basely treated in one instance being confined in a cellat for three days and nights without opportunity fo leave for any purpose what-so-ever. Doctor Shahbender for the offense of criticizing to an American there was arrested.

In 1922 condition were so intolerable as to drive Sultan Altrash Pasha to organize The Black Hand or the Syrian Committee. Its chiel weapon was assination for officers particularly hated.

After a few successful attempts on Frenchmen, Gouraud broke it up and sent Altrash to prison where he was to stay until General Weygand, should release him in 1924.

General Gouraud was given to conciliation and did quite a deal of good inspite of great odds. Weygand was even more successful in ironing out difficulties. He was followed by General Sarrail who at first seemed the man to do the trick.

One of his first acts was to promise the Druses a governor of their choice. Captain Carbillet, placed over them by Gouraud, was quite efficient in handling African tribes but because of this very same virtue hated by the Druses. A delegation sent to Sarrail reminded him of his promise. Courteously Sarrail received them and told them to await Carbillet's return from France that he might present his side of the affair. Without authority a friend of Carbillet, arrested the Druse leaders and confined them. Another delegation went to Sarrail, probably to inform him of the arrest. Advised by his secretary, a friend of Carbillet, the Commissioner harshly told them to go their way. In answer the Druses capture seventy-five French soldiers whom they held as hostages.

Altrash Pasha defending his compatriots says; "General Sarrail was never ready to receive our representatives or to accept our complaints against Governor Carbillet..... Our leaders had been arrested and every spying tale was heeded."\*

When France and England took charge of Syria and Palestine a stream of tourist began to pour into these countries. French interests built a number of hotels. The Druses had long practiced hospitality to strangers as part of their religion and were preferred to the hotel keepers. Finding their hotels empty the owners got a law passed making it obligatory for travelers to stop in them rather than native homes. Natives offering their homes were made liable to arrest and several were so treated.

These arrests and Sarrail's refusal to hear complaints served to precipitate a general uprising, first of the Druses but later all Syria was envolved.

The world was shocked the last of October of the past year on hearing of the atrocious manner in which the French were conducting the war. The immediate shock was occasioned by the bombardment of Damascus, October 18, 1925.

As the war progress the Dreses looked about for allies. About four o'clock of that Sunday afternoon Hassan El Karreth, the leader of a bandit band broke into town and called on the people to rise. 'Rise up, your brothers, the Druses, are here.' A mob rushed upon the Armenian quarter and killed a member of the French police force. By five shells began to drop into the city. Soon came air planes, tanks, and additional troops. For forty-three

\*The Druses Revolt Against France in Syria.

hours the shelling continued. Seven or eight blocks were entirely destroyed and perhaps two thousand persons lost their life in the debris. French losses were ten men killed and fifty wounded.

The world was surprised. France at once demanded a report of Sarrail? Somewhat slow in giving it he had the opportunity to return and give it in person. His defense was that he thought Damascus was infested with bandits; that the architecture of the building made it easy for snipers to pick off the police, and that such action was necessary to the protection of the Christian section of the city.

Glancing back to the sections dealing with the Mandate System one recalls that the Mandatory is required to give an annual report. At this moment, October 19-31, The Permanent Mandate Commission was sitting at Rome. France was at a bad pass. Such action on the part of her agent had to be explained. She however succeeded and retained the mandate but a severe shake-up occurred.

Sarrail was at once recalled. A native summing up the work of Sarrail and Gouraud, for the Frankfurter Zeitung says of the commissioners, "General Gouraud was on the whole a good pacificator... .. respected the religious susceptibilities and prejudices of the population ..... General Sarrail is an anti-clerical and a Radical. He is of the opinion that one should put an end to the old prejudices in Syria. He began his reformatory activities by proclaiming a lay program for the schools .... from which all religious education was henceforth to be excluded." (1)

Sarrail was bitterly assailed at home as well in foreign capitals. "Says the Matin of General Sarrail's intention to embark at Beirut november 8, 'it is the first act of obedience which he has performed for many months' for an extraordinary feature of the Syrian proceeding is that General Sarrail has coldly ignored the Government's request for information. He has treated the French authorities with the same contempt with which he has regarded the Syrians." (2)

However good may have been the intentions of France she has now an ugly blot on her escutcheon. Her prestige as well as honor is threatened if she fails to settle the question quickly and with some degree of skill and consideration for the demands of humanity. Revolt has spread like wildfire. To her present force of forty thousand nationals and fifteen thousand natives she contemplates sending fifty thousand more. Syria has already cost her 200,000,000 francs and 6,626 soldiers killed, wounded, and missing. Only a few towns remain safe for citizens. Damascus is studded with machine guns in every turret. Barbed wire encircle the limits of safety. Martial law obliges all but soldiers to be in their homes by nightfall.

What has she to show for so much effort. This is a burning question in the hearts of many Frenchmen to-day. She has a few bills

(1) The Druses on The War- Path

(2) The Christian Science Monitor.

for damages suffered by English interests in Syria. For her amusement there are a couple of American destroyers at Beirut, resently come from Gibraltar Pity the poor Vacium Oil and The Singer Sewing Machine Companies as they cry out for American destroyers to protect "the lives of American citizens!"

France put her best foot forward determined to bring Peace out of Chaos and redeem her prestige and honor. November 6th. was Senator Henry de Jouvenel appointed High Commissioner. He is judged to be, because of his patience and ability to deal with backward peoples the most capable man France could procure.

At once Jouvenel returned General Weygand to Syria. This move was looked on favorably because of the latter's attitude which won for him the confidence of the people while he had charge of them preceeding the coming of Sarrail, who made him his chief of staff and later dismissed him. November 14<sup>th</sup> just on the arrival of Sarrail in Paris Jouvenel sought him in an interview. Three days later he visited England to discuss with Austen Chamberlain Near East problems. At this date, May, 1926, he has just visited the British Commissioner of Palestine who has much the same problems. Apparently he realizes the gravity of the situation and is endeavoring to get a clear view of the whole problem. Unhampered by conceit he is honestly working for the good of the Mandate as well as the Mandatory.

November 23, 1926 he sailed from France for his new duties.

On his shoulders rest France's answer to the charge of colonizing and misrule: on his sword hangs the honor and prestige of the Gallic Cock; in his hand weighs the burden of proving the Mandate System a loathsome cloak behind which the powers exploit the weaker peoples of the earth, of a glorious means of promoting international justice and good will.

MAY 7, 1926

THEODORE M. WHITFIELD.