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POPULATION PROBLEMS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

By W. B. FISHER, D.Sc.

A meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society was held in the rooms of the Royal Society at Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W. 1, on Wednesday afternoon, May 11, 1949, and Dr. W. B. Fisher delivered a lecture on population problems in the Middle East. Lieutenant-General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, V.C., etc. (Chairman of Council) presided.

Introducing the speaker to the meeting the CHAIRMAN said: Ladies and Gentlemen—Dr. W. B. Fisher belongs to the Department of Geography of the University of Aberdeen. He studied at the University of Paris, where he took his Doctorate just before the war with a thesis on the population of France. He then became a geographical editor on the staff of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Then the war came, and he joined the R.A.F. and served in the Middle East, including Tobruk. He was then sent as a liaison officer with the French in Syria. During the last ten years Dr. Fisher has been making a special study of the geography and population of the Middle East, and has a book on the subject about to be published. He has been studying these questions particularly since the end of the war, when he joined the staff of Manchester University, and during the last two years at Aberdeen. It is the population problem of the Middle East that he proposes to discuss to-day.

FROM time to time it seems that man feels a need to "mortify the flesh." To this end the aborigines of Australia are accustomed to cut off fingers, we are told that the priests of Baal "gashed themselves with knives," whilst in this country we either read Economic White Papers or go in for the study of population trends and statistics. The reason for the latter pursuit is that most parts of the world seem to have a population problem, with either too large or too small numbers.

As regards the Middle East, its countries have both of these extremes. In some areas, such as Lebanon and Egypt, the population density is very high, whereas in Iran and perhaps Iraq numbers are regarded as being insufficient for the full development of the country.

This afternoon I propose to make a very brief survey of the main facts connected with populations in the Middle East and to suggest to you one or two answers to the problems so raised.

The first point we have to consider when dealing with the population of a country is that of the census. In this country we can take the census figures for granted—but in the case of some Arab countries no useful census has ever been made. There have been obstacles in the way of preparing such records. Arabs as a people often do not have what Dr. Bonnè describes as "the exact and numerical approach to reality." One can sympathize with that attitude, for, as we here have good reason to know, it is often not convenient to have things written down on forms for permanent record against us. Then, too, it is only thirty years since the end of Ottoman rule in the Near East, and recollection of their methods still lingers. The two usual results of a census in pre-1918 days were an increase in taxation and conscription into the army. The automatic effect was that villagers either used to hide all their young men in some place outside the

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hamlet while the census officials were there, or else used to minimize numbers as a whole. Since 1918 we have also come across the opposite fact, that in countries run on the basis of religious confession or sect it has now been brought home to the enlightened that an apparent increase in numbers will mean enhanced prestige for their denomination or creed by reason of increased voting-power. Fourthly, under the Muslim way of life, it is not polite to enquire as to how many wives a man has or where they reside. In Syria in the 1930s a census was taken. The work of collecting statistics was undertaken by university students, since most of the population was illiterate and could not fill in forms. They were sent round the country to make compilations, and, being enthusiastic to get the right figures, they asked in the Bedouin tents they visited just how many inhabitants there were. One student never returned from the enquiry.

Lastly, in Palestine particularly, the population figures are a matter of politics. Highly ingenious methods of indirect investigation have taken place, and the proper procedure for the indirect computation of the number of nomads has been argued with the assistance of the calculus and other forms of higher mathematics.

The published figures for these countries are hence a kind of residue left after all those matters have been overcome or allowed for, and I suggest that some results are accurate neither in detail nor in bulk. But for what they are worth we must use them, as there is nothing else; and it is reasonable to say that the population of the Middle East lies somewhere between 50 and 55 millions; 19,500,000 is the suggested figure for Egypt and 1,600,000 for Palestine. For Iran, where no census has been made, guesses as to the population vary between 8 and 17 millions. A similar situation holds in Saudi Arabia. For Arabia it is usual to assume as a basis that the average family numbers five; but when you know that H.M. King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud has had forty-two sons and the number of his daughters is uncertain, you will see just how useful such a basic figure is. The Yemen is a closed country, and estimates of its population vary from 2 to 5 millions.

Another point is that the geographical distribution of population is very uneven indeed. The people are crowded very closely into a few good areas. The Nile valley around Cairo has 6,500 people per square mile, but a few miles away in the desert the population is only 7 to the square mile. If we consider countries as a whole the Lebanon has the most people per square mile. Palestine comes second, then comes Syria, and fourthly Cyprus. All these are to be considered as fairly densely populated. I have not mentioned Egypt because most of that country is desert and empty of population, with 99 per cent. of the people in 4 per cent. of the area.

The reason for the variations in density of population is that natural resources are so unequal. Some places are very fertile—e.g., the Nile valley and the plain of the Euphrates and Tigris, both of which can support a large number of people. Other regions owe their dense population to having good communications. For example, Syrian nationalists sometimes say that the Lebanon has a large population because it benefits at the expense of Damascus and Aleppo. They argue that if the two countries were all one the trade from Damascus would go out through Syrian ports,

and that as it is the Lebanon has a sort of artificial privilege and advantage from being separated from the main Syrian state.

The main factor governing population distribution would seem to be rainfall. The problem of the Middle East is water supply, and so a population map is very similar to a rainfall map: heaviest rainfall, most people. The higher mountains of Turkey and Persia do not entirely come under this rule, but that is because parts are covered with snow. Otherwise it applies pretty generally, except that in a few other parts the distribution of population has been disturbed by political events.

In Cyrenaica the Italians admitted on their own figures that they had decimated the number of cattle between 1925 and 1935. The result was that there were fewer resources and the Arab people died off. In Iran, Riza Shah went in for a policy of ending tribal organization so as to force nomadic tribesmen to give up wandering, settle down, and adopt a different form of life. But when the tribesmen stopped moving around they ceased to leave behind encampments which had become insanitary, and epidemics of disease broke out. Moreover, there was not enough sustenance in any one spot to maintain people permanently, so there was nothing to eat. As a result, it is reckoned that some Persian tribes lost as many as 80 per cent. of their numbers in the ten years before last year. Then there have been massacres, such as that of the Armenians in Turkey in 1915, in Iraq in 1933, and again the events in Palestine during 1948. Massacres must therefore still be considered an element in producing changes of population. This is the background of what I have to say. Resources are sufficient for large numbers in some areas, but in most of the Middle East conditions are quite against a dense population.

Social changes have affected the population problem in the Middle East. Among primitive people it is found that the birth-rates and death-rates are both high—sometimes from 40 to 60 per 1,000. A large number of children are born, but they soon die. Forty is a very good age for a Bedouin Arab, and the average expectation of life is round about thirty years. Most of the population is, as a result, under twenty-five years old, giving a rather different aspect from what we have in this country.

On the other hand, turning to the most advanced communities with the highest standards of living, we find that birth-rates are low, and so are death-rates. The result is that in both communities, primitive and advanced, there is a rough balance: a number are born and the same number, more or less, die. But in those communities which lie in between—*i.e.*, are evolving towards higher standards (communities such as those in Egypt or Syria at present)—we find that the death-rate tends to drop quite suddenly as material conditions improve, but the birth-rate stays just as it was, so that an "intermediate" community has a high replacement rate with a large excess of births each year. In a primitive community many children are born and many die, so that the community stays at more or less the same number. In the most advanced communities few children are born, and the total deaths may even exceed the births. Therefore with "advanced" groups it can be, as it was in France until two or three years ago, as it is now in Sweden, and as it will be here before long: the population is stationary or stagnant.

In summary it comes to this: most people agree that if you spend public funds on lowering the death-rate you will get very quick results. Money spent on hospitals, irrigation, education, and material amenities has a marked effect in lowering the death-rate. That has been very much the case in Egypt. One can, however, spend a great deal without achieving a significant change in the birth-rate, because other factors, social and psychological, are involved. Over much of the Middle East there has been valuable work done in establishing hospitals and in undertaking irrigation, with the result of saving people who would probably not have survived otherwise. There is still an extraordinarily high birth-rate, and hence more and more people as time goes by. For example, in Egypt the population in 1800 is supposed to have been about $2\frac{1}{2}$ millions. There was no proper census then, but that is a rough idea. In 1900 it was estimated at 10 millions and it is 20 millions at the present time. The population has doubled in fifty years, and it looks as if it will double itself again in the next fifty years.

That sort of thing raises many problems. Put in one way, the population doubling itself from 20 millions is going to mean—if Egypt maintains the standard of this country—one new school in less than a day—in fact, ten schools a week—in order to cope with the increasing population. That is just to keep level, not to improve. We obviously encounter all sorts of difficulties in keeping up with the change. For Egypt the problem is that while the people double in numbers they do not double in food resources. They cannot always get twice the amount of food out of the same amount of ground.

I should like to consider exactly what the position is. Originally, under the Pharaohs, the people of Egypt relied on the Nile rising once a year and thereby laying down a layer of silt. Then they grew crops in the fertilized lands. Generally they got one crop a year, but occasionally they might get two by picking the right sort of plant. Within the last hundred years the Egyptians have built irrigation barrages and increased the area for producing crops, thereby doubling production. They get from two and a half to three crops a year, and occasionally four, and this has allowed the population to grow from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 20 millions. They have also gone in for cotton growing and manufacturing, and this has provided another source of livelihood. But now the Nile is used more or less to the limit, and from the volume of water now entering Egypt there does not seem much possibility of increasing irrigation further. Practically every drop of water that goes into the country is used up. There may still be room for small extensions of irrigation, but nothing spectacular like the great dams of Assouan and Assiout can be done; it is a matter of minor improvements on a local scale.

If the fellah gets only one crop a year the Nile mud takes care of fertilizing, but if he takes three or four the Nile silt alone is not sufficient. For the first time in history, then, Egypt is importing fertilizers, half a million tons a year, to make up for the Nile silt, which is no longer adequate. Egypt is consequently pulled into the circle of international trade and must export to pay for this import of essential material. What was enough for the Pharaohs with the Nile renewing fertility is now inadequate, and the traditional way of existence, which has gone on for

thousands of years in Egypt, is in process of breaking down. It is not a cheerful view, but I am putting the facts as agreed by most contemporary observers. During the 1939 war, when Egypt could not import fertilizers, the yield of crops went down, and since they have been importing again the yield has gone up. That is shown by recent figures.

There is also another problem: in a hot country if you put water on the soil too frequently the soil can often turn saline. We will not go into soil chemistry, but now the position has been reached in parts of the Middle East that irrigation by itself is not sufficient; and one has to consider carefully what happens after the water is put on. It is no good saying that the answer to all problems in the Middle East is simply more water or more irrigation. This was shown in 1941, when there was a big shortage of food, and the British Government spent a million pounds on irrigation in South-West Iran. In two years an expanse of what had been virgin country turned saline and was quite useless. As regards Egypt we can actually say that the main problem now is not irrigation but drainage. Irrigation is now more or less at its limit, and what we have to think of in Egypt now is getting the water away from the land when it has been used, because parts of the Nile delta are showing ominous signs of increasing salinity following over-watering. That is the view of a Syrian economist well acquainted with the country, and I think it eminently well founded.

Another point is that from a given area of land certain crops produce more food than others—*e.g.*, there is more food produced from growing cereal crops than by using the land as pasture and producing meat. It can thus be regarded as uneconomical to live on meat. Measured by the area of land required to produce it, one pound of meat represents six pounds of wheat and ten pounds of maize. In other words, if you feed your population on farinaceous things there is more bulk than if you feed them on meat—a point which has been well understood by our British Ministers of Food. Living on farinaceous food has been practised in the Middle East for a long time and meat is definitely a luxury. But of cereals, certain species may yield much more than others for each square foot of ground—*e.g.*, rice gives much more food per acre than wheat—and so to increase food supplies further people turn to rice and maize instead of the traditional wheat and barley. Barley cultivation is disappearing in Egypt and maize is taking its place. But if a population lives exclusively on those crops there is a risk of acquiring the diseases beriberi and pellagra, owing to vitamin deficiencies in both rice and maize. Moreover, in order to grow rice the land must be flooded for a period of a month or two each year, and this allows the development of mosquitoes and therefore of malaria. It is unfortunate but true: in many parts of the Middle East the cultivation of rice has to be limited by law because of the demands on available water and the risk of increasing disease. The governments do not like rice cultivation; they have to allow it so as to get the people fed, but it is at the expense of a certain amount of disease. Here is a little sample that was actually taken. Kem Ombo, an ancient temple site in Egypt, was irrigated in 1900. It was desert then, but is now under cultivation and supports about 45,000 people. We now discover that 84 per cent. of this population is sick, 24 per cent. from hook worm and about 60 per cent. from malaria.

The larger proportion of the people have both those diseases and almost everyone has one. Irrigation is not therefore a complete answer to the problem. You can irrigate a place but other factors enter in as well, and so when thinking of the Middle East problems it is not altogether a question of engineering. One can lay down pipes and make larger canals, but improvements must not stop there or there may be unfortunate results.

Carrying things a little further, there is this fact that has recently been disclosed. Because of the great increase of population the standard of living in Egypt seems to have gone down. Again local observers have suggested the view that the people of Egypt are now eating very much less than they did twenty years ago. The total consumption of the major foodstuffs is down, yet the population has doubled. As the land under cotton grows so the amount of wheat eaten becomes less; in some cases it is below the 1920 figures. In other words, many people are making do on a great deal less foodstuffs. The only things that have increased in consumption are tea, sugar, and tobacco. Does it not recall the "hungry forties," with a population living on sweet weak tea and dulling its sensibilities with tobacco instead of having necessary food? Consumption of tea and tobacco has increased enormously.

My last point about Egypt is that conditions such as I have indicated are serious, and this means that a good many people may feel there is need for a change. Here is a very unfortunate social background; and how long will it continue? By present showing, fairly shortly the population will double, but it would seem unlikely that the food supply can also be doubled again. It might thus appear that the future points to increasing social distress and hence to the possible spread of extremist doctrines such as communism.

I would next like to consider the Lebanon, though not in so much detail. Here the country is very mountainous, and there is no great valley such as that of the Nile, where large numbers can be supported. It is a question of cultivating fertile patches in the valleys and on the slopes of the mountains. In such areas there has not been much to retain the population, and a great many Lebanese have emigrated. Figures cannot be got exactly, but certainly large numbers of the people are abroad. That fact was brought home to me when travelling in the remoter mountains of the Lebanon. I wanted a drink and asked in my best Arabic for a beer from the lady in a café. She replied in a strong American accent, "Do you want it in a glass or in a bottle?" I said, "How long were you in the States?" and it transpired that she had been ten years in Utica, N.Y., and had come home and set up as a proprietress in a remote village. Most Lebanese can name some relation who is either abroad now or has been and has come back. This has a very important result, because those who are abroad send money home and help support a number of people in the Lebanon who might not otherwise find a living. One can go on with a small job that does not bring in a living wage if one has a supplement. A Lebanese economist, Professor Himadeh, said it was greater than the profit on exports; remittances actually exceed the total of exports in some years. When outside help was cut off by the war of 1914 some Lebanese starved. Another side of the problem of the Lebanon is the number of people who

live by education. The number of schools is surprising considering the small country that it is. There are a large number of missionary activities, teaching and helping the Lebanese, and they bring in students from outside the country. The American University of Beirut was responsible, according to President Dodge, for bringing in a million dollars per annum to the Lebanon in fees and purchasing power. Students come from Turkey, Iran, and other countries, and provide a market for local produce. There is also money from America to support this and other institutions. The Americans are, however, not the only ones, and, added up, French, British, German, and Italian contributions to philanthropic enterprises come to a respectable item. Before the war one would have said that was a strange system of living, but now we regularize it and call it Marshall Aid. Then, the Syrian and Lebanese countries were under mandate and the French spent a certain amount of money on them. It is perhaps invidious to say how much, but the fact is that they built buildings. These may have been barracks or parliament houses, but erecting them provided money for craftsmen and labourers, so some sort of outlay was provided which might not have been there. Then also the Levant as a whole has very strong religious connections. Pilgrimages—Moslem, Christian, and Jewish—bring in tourists and travellers, and the total amount of money accruing can be quite a useful kind of trade item. In the Lebanon there are pilgrimage and tourism together because of the great scenic beauty of the country; and in Syria and Palestine there are shrines of world importance. Between them these activities provide a living for hotel keepers, dragomans, and others. Each individual visitor may not spend very much, but the aggregate sum is important.

There was also before 1939 another source of income, because companies (chiefly Italian) that were anxious to establish a footing in the Middle East would advance loans, and often on favourable terms, to Arab enterprises even although the security might not be good. The Italians, particularly before 1939, would give loans to business houses in Damascus or Jerusalem. Sometimes they lost their money; it was not a good business risk, but they thought it valuable to have a connection. The Italians also offered scholarships for students to travel in Italy in the hope that when the students got back they would buy Italian produce and be favourably inclined to Italian aims.

That was the way some of the Levant people lived—a rather unusual sort of revenue, because foreigners subsidised them in one way or another. Outsiders went there for holidays, there were religious and political organizations receiving funds from elsewhere, children were sent there to be educated, so that by and large it was possible for a population to live as Cambridge lives, by outside interests and rather special activities.

In contrast I turn now to under-populated areas: in Iran and Iraq there are not enough people to use what resources are available. Cultivation tends to be in scattered patches, and as a result there is not much use of machinery, since it is not worth it for a small area. Holdings are isolated, and it is not easy to build a road when there is no one living on it for perhaps a dozen miles. So also with railways and airfields. It is not worth while to provide these amenities if there is nobody to use them. As it is,

cultivators sow some land and raise a crop, then after a while the land decreases in fertility, and they find a new field a few miles away in another patch of land and take that instead for cultivation. We get a shifting population which extracts everything out of the land, exhausts it, and then passes on. That does not lead to good methods. The farming is primitive and wastes the land; trees are cut down and without any replanting. In the area of the Euphrates and Tigris it is reckoned that if people remained on one holding of land they would pay more attention to it and would in the end get better and more consistent yields. That seems to be the root of the matter in the areas mentioned.

Finally, some of my listeners may be heartily relieved to hear that in the Middle East there are some areas in which there is no population problem. For example, in Turkey, where there is land with an adequate rainfall over much of the country, at present only half the cultivable area is actually used. Turkey has plenty of land to spare and enough people to organize its full utilization. Incidentally Turkey has shown a remarkable stability during the last twenty years; the recent rise of Turkey is one of the phenomena of modern Middle Eastern conditions. On reflection it is curious how affairs seem to go in cycles. During the nineteenth century we built up Turkey as a possible ally. Then in 1916 we acquiesced in her dismemberment, and now in 1949 we seem to be entering into friendship again with Turkey. In the face of another and greater enemy, Britain and America are engaged in propping up Turkey and the past is forgotten. The mantle of Disraeli has fallen on President Truman. From the population angle Turkey can support her population, and although this is going to increase there is plenty of room for more, and population conditions are not threatening.

In other parts of Arabia, and to some small extent in Aden, the development of oil resources is going to provide work for a good many nomadic Badawin; it will give them money and thus allow them to import Western food. They cannot grow food on a large scale in their own country, which is too arid for agriculture, and imports will be essential. A good many Arabs are now able to do that. Some time back I was reading a book describing the physique of the nomadic Arabs. In the desert they are small and often stunted because they have not always enough to eat; in the oilfields they have a cash wage, are able to buy imported food, and so have improved physique. It points to some line which we might pursue in the future: oil resources properly developed can have a part to play in supporting a bigger population.

As a last topic I should like to suggest one or two possibilities for the future. What can be done about these problems? What is the possibility of a reasonable solution? First of all, in the Middle East the trend has been to regard the people who live by agriculture as the salt of the earth, the real "people who matter." It is considered that you are doing the right and proper thing if you live in one settled village and engage in sedentary farming. But because of deficient rainfall, cultivation is not always possible, and so in other areas it is necessary to keep animals and move about. Like Jacob, of whom we read that he was a plain man dwelling in tents, some Arabs have to move about and find a living by stock rearing. How-

ever, in view of the restless nature of a good many nomads, such groups have been a problem to the governments concerned with them. The nomad is liable to take the law somewhat into his own hands; hence, acting from the point of view of internal stability, governments have sought to limit the wandering of the nomads and to turn them into cultivators. That is all right when viewed from the political angle, but looked at from the economic angle it has its drawbacks. In a large part of the Middle East you simply cannot cultivate; if you tried to make the nomads grow crops in arid areas, these people would die of starvation.

The future thus may lie in expanding stock rearing, breeding better types of animals, allowing more scope for investigation into the problems of animals, and not being afraid of the growth of the nomadic population. In Egypt the Nile valley ends as desert, but it is possible to farm on the edges of the cultivated land by bringing animals into it at one period and taking them out to the desert at another. If agriculture were not too often regarded as the only solution to the economic problem more people might be supported; if governments would pay attention to stock raising there might be a solution of population difficulties. Then there are other problems concerning animal husbandry in the Middle East. Animals are not of the best and the methods of the herders are not always the most enlightened. That is why I put an improvement in pastoralism first in the list of possible solutions. Secondly, there is the question of progress in growing better arable crops and using the land to greater advantage. That turns on a number of points, such as more capital and improved farming technique. One can see fields of wheat with little stalks eighteen inches, or at most two feet high, and with ears far smaller than in Europe. The crop is always subject to such plagues as devastating locust swarms, mildew, and rust. These handicaps could be fought more than they are if there were international control. For example, the locusts devastating fields in Syria may not have bred in Syria at all, but may have come from Saudi Arabia. If things could be managed on an international basis, with all the countries concerned helping, independently of whether the swarm originated in Egypt or Saudi Arabia; if one could get an approach to a real co-operation in this and other matters, the result would be seen in better economic plans, better yields, and more food.

It may also be necessary to consider some form of land reform. That is a very vexed question. I have no time to say much about it now, but, as I see it, unless there is some change soon, it does not look as if the methods that have served so far will go on being useful. There are various ways of looking at the problem. If land is re-allocated frequently amongst all the village community, then everyone gets a fair share of both good and bad land. But in the Middle East fruit takes twenty or even eighty years to develop. An olive tree will give nothing for ten years, and so if a farmer is told that after five, two, or even one year the land is to be changed round, that seems fair on the surface, but he does not plant olive or fig trees. It means that the cultivation has to be limited crops which give a return in the shortest time. Cereals grow in a few months, and the grower can be sure of a return before the land goes to his neighbour. That is one form of land tenure which might be considered for alteration.

Then there is the serious political problem of actual ownership of land. Is it the best way to have a large landowner and a great number of very poor tenant farmers? That is a social and political problem which I will not attempt to answer. There are people in the world who might be glad to suggest an answer, and that is relevant, I think.

Then also there is the question of water supplies. It is no good trying to organize drainage and long-term supplies if you are only a "small" man. The water is not always on your own ground, but has to be brought through someone else's holding. Co-operation and development of large schemes on a regional basis would probably do something to improve things.

What about turning over to industry? That has been the answer to population problems in this country. We have increased the population and fed and maintained it by developing manufactures. But, as I see it, there is not a great deal of potentiality for industry in the Middle East. There is no coal in the Middle East except for a small field in Turkey. Oil is the chief resource, but it goes elsewhere. Under the Marshall Plan Europe will get 80 per cent. of her oil from the Middle East in the next few years. What can be manufactured? Egypt has the best cotton in the world, but it also has a population at a low standard of living which cannot afford Egyptian cotton. The people have to buy cheaper cottons; although excellent cotton grows in their own country they have the supreme disadvantage that it is beyond the reach of the average fellah to buy, and the expansion of industry in that country is hampered. Otherwise there is very little possibility of expanding industry; they have not the resources in great numbers. It is unfortunate, but that is the inescapable geographical verdict; there is no iron and very few other minerals on a large scale. There is no crop like the jute of Bengal. Fruit growing might be expanded; Jaffa oranges are an example. But this is risky. Markets tend to be in Britain only. If we go out of the market the fruit rots in the streets of Palestine; I myself saw that in Haifa during the war. Citrus fruit exports were nil in 1943, and those engaged in orange farming had to depend on a government subsidy. That sort of farming is fluctuating and does not always provide a final answer to the problem.

Another matter to be considered is social life. In the Middle East all the trades are in the towns, and if you live in the country conditions are distinctly harder than if you are close to a city. Ninety per cent. of all the doctors live in the towns. As a result death-rates are higher for the country, and no one lives there if they have money and can avoid it. In this country we have the social attitude that if one has means one buys a country estate and retires to it for most of the year. In the Middle East, on the other hand, you buy a town house and visit the country only to collect your rents. This has led to disproportion between country and town. Wealthier people live in their town houses; in the country there are very few good dwellings, and until something is done to alter the balance the country will be at a disadvantage. Towns have the leadership because the enlightened groups, the heads of society, and the professions tend all to be in urban areas, and the countryside is poor and neglected. Civil servants, if they can manage it, prefer the town and try to get promotion out of the country

districts. Altogether there is produced a rather inharmonious relationship between the peasant cultivator (who feels that his problems are ignored) and the townspeople. The peasant looks upon the town as being in touch with the West, open to enlightenment and in receipt of information, scientific knowledge, and wealth, but unable to attune its ideas to those of the country. Here is a big social problem in the Middle East, and one which will increase.

Another point necessary to mention is that there may have to be a balance in improving social services. Putting it very crudely and plainly, we have so far taken steps to lower the death-rate by introducing irrigation and providing more hospitals, but if nothing else is done some countries will be in the position that instead of a lot of people dying quickly by flood or famine they will be preserved to live another twenty years and then to die of malnutrition. Babies born in the hospitals may survive when they would have died earlier, but if there is no living for them when they grow up, what then? That has been the problem in India. It seems harsh and a negation of progress to say that there ought to be a slowing down in the provision of hospitals and other social amenities until the standard of living can be improved, but such ideas have already been expressed. It is no use keeping people alive if they are to have too little to eat. What happens to patients after discharge from the hospital where they have been treated for beriberi? They go away and in three months they can have it again, and the disease may stay with them all their lives. We have come to such a situation in parts of the Middle East.

Summing up, I may say that problems of population may seem at times theoretical and a little divorced from reality, but they are nevertheless going to be of increasing importance for several reasons. First, the Middle East has close relations with its northern and western neighbours. On the north is Russia, with an actual land frontier with Turkey and Iran, and farther away are North-West Europe and America. If internal social problems arise and are not settled in a way liked by the larger number of the inhabitants of the Middle East, then they are always at liberty to turn either to the West or to the North, from which interest and intervention are too often forthcoming. So far there has not been much attempt to turn to the North, and the West has had the predominating influence; but there is no saying that such a situation will continue. If we in this country want the problems to be solved our way we shall have to give the Middle East more thought and attention.

Secondly, there is this to consider: Moslems are replacing their members faster than either Christians or Jews. There is one Christian state, the Lebanon, and there are minorities of Christians and Jews in various parts of the Middle East, but if present trends continue these communities will gradually be swallowed up. The Copts in Egypt are losing ground to the Moslems, and their present importance will probably decline during the next few decades. Similarly, in Palestine the Jewish birth-rate is lower than that of the Moslems, and the majority of the Lebanon is only precariously Christian.

Lastly, there is the question of social distress. If a community grows in numbers there must be a growth in food resources; failing this, internal

distress and political trouble appear, leading ultimately to intervention from outside. There are plenty of powers who are willing and anxious to intervene in Arab affairs, and unrest in the Middle East would be their opportunity. Surely it is in the interest of Western countries to find a solution to Middle Eastern difficulties before there is a solution on the Chinese model. The Middle East repeats on a smaller scale the problems encountered in India and China, and in neither of these latter areas have events been settled in a way wholly acceptable to us in this country. In China we have had a severe loss of face, and as regards India, can we honestly say that as the result of British occupation the standard of living is everywhere higher? I suggest that we ought to take an interest in these problems, that we could well devote more attention to standards of living, to crops, and to other economic matters. This is not just interference. It could be, I think, a method of dealing with possible trouble half-way. Let us for once in this country anticipate an unpleasant situation before it really develops and not take hesitating steps when it is almost too late. The trouble seems to be that too often we take action only when we are kicked into it by pressure of events—the old cry of too little and too late. What has recently happened in China is a typical case and a warning. The development of a crisis in social and population conditions is perhaps slow. A sharp, difficult point does not suddenly arrive, situations take shape slowly and inexorably, and if we don't try positively to mould events in the way we want them to go, we may find them turn away from us and that the final answer is no longer in our hands.

Colonel DIMMOCK: There were two problems mentioned—salination and the destruction of timber. One saw both of those in Iraq very strongly from Kut to Qurnub. Is there any method of controlling salination? Are there crops which will absorb salt? You have a marshy area in Iraq that you cannot drain.

The LECTURER: One can make some attempt at washing the salt clear and there are certain plants which are more resistant to salt than others. Cotton is the least tolerant of salt and that goes out first when land turns saline. Oranges are not so bad and you can improve things a little by very careful watering and draining. As regards forestry, it is a very difficult question to make people realize what is being done. If you say, "You must not raise animals here," tribesmen say it is an infringement of their rights: and to keep the place empty until the trees can grow up is not easy. Most has been done in Cyprus to combat this evil. In Iraq replanting has been done only to a very limited extent because of the difficulties in the way.

A VISITOR asked a question about the British irrigation scheme in Iran in 1941.

The LECTURER: It was in Khuzistan, at the head of the Persian Gulf.

Mr. TOMLIN: You did not mention the possible transfer of population.

The LECTURER: That was an omission, and I am glad it was brought up. I wondered if I had time. Proposals have been put forward which deserve very serious consideration about organized migration, particularly from Egypt to Iraq, where the geography is roughly similar. Both coun-

tries have rivers which flood, although it is at different times of the year, and the farming routine which would do for the one country might do for the other. There might be a very useful improvement by organized and carefully controlled changes of population. There is a political aspect to the transfer of population which I am not anxious to go-into, but I think if well done—that is the proviso—it could be a most useful contribution to a solution.

The CHAIRMAN thanked the lecturer on behalf of all the members for his interesting lecture, from which they had learned a lot.

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