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THE LEBANON, 1948-1949

By V. H. W. DOWSON

Lecture before the Royal Central Asian Society, October 27, 1949, Mr. W. H. Ingrams, C.M.G., O.B.E., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: There is one task I need not perform on this occasion in that there is no need for me to introduce our lecturer, because he has already lectured a number of times to this Society, and you know him very well as an objective observer and one with a great sense of humour in telling us about the things he has seen. As you also know, he is an expert on the cultivation of dates—and I hope there will be no misunderstanding here, as I think there has been in the past, as to what dates he is particularly interested in cultivating.

Mr. Dowson during the war came back into Government service and served in Iraq, a country he has known from 1915 to 1945. Then he had the opportunity of travelling in Aden, the Yemen, and the Sudan; and he has, since 1947, been in Syria, the Lebanon, and Northern Iraq, so that there are very few parts of the Middle East which he has not visited.

THROUGH the kindness of the Iraq Petroleum Company I was enabled to spend some months during the summer of last year and the spring of this in the Lebanon and thus renew an acquaintance, or rather a friendship, with that country begun nearly a quarter of a century ago and strengthened by visits at intervals since then.

There is an old book, consisting of eighteen pages of miniatures painted on vellum, some by Paul Veronese, which depict the life of Carolus Magius. One of these is of a female figure symbolizing the Lebanon, seated in a gay garden, with roses in her lap, and beneath is the inscription *Mundi Deliciae*—"The Delights of the World." I should at the outset confess that I do not find this description an exaggeration: I find the Lebanon charming. Some of my British friends, who have been there longer than I have, do not, however, share my opinion. They complain that the bazaars are dirty; but they have never seen those of Calcutta. They complain of the heat; but they have never stayed in Jask. They complain of the graft; but they have never had to do with the officials in—well, some other countries. Of course, my companions, when they considered the number of years I had spent in Basra, may be excused for thinking my critical faculties a little dulled, so that I must make it plain that it is not only from the east that I have approached the Lebanon; I have come to it also from the west and from the north and south.

THE PHYSICAL FRAME

Anatomy books begin with the bones, and this talk may well begin with a few words on the physical geography of the country with which we are concerned.

The Lebanon lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean in the middle of the Levant coast, with Palestine to the south and the Syrian province of



lhaqiya or Latakiya to the north. It shares the climate and characteristics of the Mediterranean seaboard of the southern European countries. The summer on the coast is hot and dry, the winter mild and wet. The olive is the staple culture. Apart from the language difficulty, a peasant from, say, Reggio would find it easy to make himself at home in Jubail or anywhere else along the Lebanese shore.

The dominating features of the country are the two mountain ranges parallel with the coast, the Lebanon nearer the sea and the Anti-Lebanon on the desert side. The highest point in the former range, Qurnat es-Saudā—"The Black Summit"—is over 10,000 feet high, almost as high as Mont Avril, while the highest point of the other range, Mount Hermon, is 1,000 feet lower. Between the ranges is the old lake-bed of the Biqā', meaning "The Plain," the most fertile part of the country and the easiest to cultivate. This depression is a part of the great rift, which is continued to the south as the Jordan Valley, the Red Sea, and the African lakes. The other fertile plain, that of 'Akkār, is in the extreme north of the country. That part of the mountains shown white on the map represents land over 8,200 feet high, the height of the Pyrenees.

I trust this highly coloured map, to which we now turn, has not been alarming you. The crimson patch indicates neither an extension of the imperial power of the Western plutocracies nor of that of the Eastern democracies creeping in over the Palestine frontier and edging down from the country of the 'Alawites. No, it represents something even more permanent—basalt. This is a lithological map. It shows the surfaces of the two mountain ranges to consist of limestones and dolomitic limestones, the bright blue and green patches. The alluvium of the Biqā' plain is shown here between in olive green.

These high mountains of the Lebanon, their tops white with snow for half the year and their slopes clothed in green, receive as rain or snow most of the moisture from the Mediterranean winds, which, when they pass on, are dry; but the mountains cut off from the desert lands to the east much more than rain. They cut off Europe, they cut off the arts, they cut off civilization. It is the Mediterranean seaboard where one finds that combination of learning and simplicity, hard work and leisure, frugality and good feeding, that mellowness, that art of living and of the social life, that toleration, which are marks of civilization, and which one does not find over the mountains, the mountains that border the desert, where the stern creed of the Prophet is law, and where the juice of the grape is forbidden.

Here, then, is the Lebanon, nearly three-quarters the size of Yorkshire, less than fifty miles wide at its widest part, whose whole coastline is no more than 120 miles long—say, the coast of Sussex and Hampshire from Rye to Bournemouth. The country has four towns on the coast, Sūr and Saidā (the Tyre and Sidon of old), Beirut, and Tripoli, and half a dozen smallish towns inland. The other centres of populations are villages or villages overgrown but hardly towns; and yet the density of population is much greater than in any other Near-Eastern country. Beirut, the capital, like London, houses a fifth of its country's population; the rest inhabit the villages that cling to the mountains up to a height of 4,000 feet.

FLORA

Although this is a slight and rapid sketch of the country, I cannot refrain from all mention of its flora. The forests have mostly gone, although Cilian fir still clothes the walls of the high alps in the Jabal Qamūha, and scrub oak is found everywhere at the right altitude away from the roads. The cedar, though common enough on the stamps, the national flag, and the breasts of ministers, is nearly extinct as a woodland tree; it is now reduced to no more than four small patches, the best known of which is that on the road from Tripoli to Baalbak, near the Maronite village of Bisharra, where at 6,000-foot elevation about 400 trees remain, the younger of which are reckoned to be 200 years old and the older over 1,000 years. The trunks of the bigger ones have a circumference of about 40 feet, though Norman Douglas in 1928 made the biggest 56 feet. Maundrell measured one 252 years ago and found it to be 36½ feet. *The Green Guide*, produced in the Lebanon, states that the cedars are 25 metres in diameter, but perhaps the author is referring to the spread of the branches and not patriotically erring on the generous side in an estimate of the size of the trunk.

If you will forgive the digression, I mention a curious small matter. On the trunk of one of the cedars de Lamartine's name has been carved, and the Youth Association of Bisharra, with more piety than accuracy, in 1927 erected a plaque commemorating the poet's pilgrimage to the trees in 1832; but if you will turn to de Lamartine's diary you will find that it was not till 1833 that he actually set out from Ehden to make the journey, and that, though mounted on his best horse, Shām, the animal was in snow up to the withers when still 500 or 600 paces from the trees, which it and its rider, therefore, never reached. Henri Bordeaux has cleared up the mystery. It appears that a friend of de Lamartine's reached the cedars the previous summer and cut out the poet's name on one of them as a surprise for him when he should arrive.

One more small note on these famous trees. Friedrich Rosen is of the opinion that, despite common belief to the contrary, they were never used in Solomon's temple, and in his *Memoirs* gives his practical reasons, despite philological difficulties, for supposing that it was the cyprus that was used. I have not seen Rosen's contention answered, and present the point to the botanists and etymologists for their winter evenings.

THE PEOPLE

The most striking difference between the Lebanon and the rest of the Arabic-speaking Near East in respect of population is that this is the only country where there is a Christian majority. It is only small, and, indeed, the Muslims say that a proper and up-to-date census would reveal that the Christians had now lost their preponderance. However that may be, the Christians are certainly not a small minority, as they are in neighbouring countries, and, therefore, to a great extent are without the minority mentality. I say "to a great extent" because the older generation remembers the days when they were unbelievers ruled by the *ḳirbāj*—the lash—of the Sunni Turk, and the fathers of people alive to-day witnessed

the great massacre of 1860. However, things have certainly changed since the Muslim beggars in Beirut would ask alms of Christians with the cry, *Allah yusāmiḥak!*—"God pardon [or overlook] thee!"—for being a Christian, that is. They have changed since the time when a Beirut Christian, if he wanted to bump a man off, used to have to hire a Muslim to do it for him at a charge of six and eightpence.

The Christians have been preserved by the large size of the community. What also has always saved their faith, their villages, and their independence has been the inaccessibility of the Lebanese mountains. Their co-religionists, and, indeed, Muslim peasants as well, in the open villages on the plains round Aleppo, for example, suffered more than usual oppression at the hands of Turkish pashā, Egyptian commander, and Badu raider, but to raid a village perched on some precipitous crag at the headwaters of, say, the Qadisha River, was difficult and dangerous.

The population of the Lebanon is now put at about a million and a quarter, and there are supposed to be a third as many Lebanese abroad; but these leave their properties in South Africa, their trading posts on the Niger, their garages in Rio, or their restaurants in Brooklyn to retire and die at home in a two-roomed stone cottage whence they see through the vine leaves below them in the distance the blue Mediterranean. Their sons and grandsons take their places abroad, for the Lebanon is too small and too poor to support all its own. The population is nearly as dense as in Italy, yet the country is mostly mountain and has no oil, coal, or other minerals. Perhaps no country in the world, unless it be Scotland, has so high a proportion of its people abroad as the Lebanon has, yet the government and the churches refuse to permit those methods of limiting population that are common in the West. When one considers Sir John Boyd Orr's frightening figures on the growth of the world's population on the one hand and on the decrease in the world's food on the other, one can hardly suppress the reflection that what we want is not palliatives for over-population like sunflower schemes in Kenya, date schemes in Somaliland, or extra height for the Assouan Dam, but a world-wide popularization of birth control.

RELIGION

According to the 1944 figures, the Maronites formed nearly a third of the population, with the Sunnis the next largest group, a little over a fifth. The Shi'ahs, all Mutawalis, are a little less numerous than the other Muslims; the Druzes are one-third as many. The Greek Orthodox, Melkites, or King's Men, the next biggest Christian group, form only one in ten of the population. Less important numerically are the Greek Catholics and the Armenians or Gregorians. There is no sign of any uniting amongst the Christian churches or amongst the Muslim sects, but, on the other hand, there has been of late years a considerable increase in sympathy between Christian and Muslim, fostered by such opportunities as are provided by the American University and other educational institutions for young people of different faiths to get to know one another, and by their common detestation of French rule. It was certainly not without reflection that the gifted Mr. Edward 'Atiyah described himself in his

autobiography as an Arab, but I think he would be hard put to it to prove his descent from Qahtān.

There has been much give and take in the matter of shrines in the Lebanon: some started in Christian hands but are now Muslim, and *vice versa*. Old shrines, here as everywhere, maintain their popular appeal and their qualities, despite changes in the state religion. I had this borne in on me when one day, having left Biskinta before sunrise on a mule and ridden over the mountains, I came at nightfall to 'Afqa. In the gloaming I wandered round the hillock of great squared blocks of white stone, the ruins of Venus's temple, recalling that it was here that Thamuz looked into Astarte's eyes and later fell a victim to the wild boar's fury, when I noticed a light. I approached and found that where the masonry had fallen in such a way as to make a little grotto there burned a lamp of a wick in a crock of oil, and beside it lay an offering of ox-eye daisies, Aphrodite's flowers. I could not but reflect that, though the great Emperor Constantine could destroy a pagan temple, he could not kill the cult.

Here is the source of the Adonis River. As Milton says:

“ . . . smooth Adonis from his native rock
Ran purple to the sea.”

Purple? Well, perhaps, had El Greco painted it (he was colour-blind), but smooth, no. Milton could never have seen how the river dashes from rock pool to rock pool, spattering with spray the walls of the gorge and the maidenhair ferns which cling there.

DRESS

In the towns, change in dress from the local to the European continues, and it is no longer considered impolite for a man, Christian or Muslim, to be bareheaded; but the peasant for the most part retains his traditional costume. The young man, in collarless mauve or cinnamon silk shirt, gathered over either breast, in raven-black trousers, tight round the calf, pleated at the waist, immensely baggy in the seat, comfortable and excellent for smuggling on a large scale, and in Russian knee boots, as he makes his pony, which for six days in the week has been pulling the family plough, do its best to live up to what the picture books demand of the Arab steed, is still a sight to cause flutterings in the hearts of the Maronite maidens as they stroll in gooseberry groups along the lanes between the olive groves on a Sunday evening.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Social changes in the Lebanon since Turkish times have been many and profound, but that country has not suffered so complete a social revolution as ours has since the turn of the century. We have practically built Jerusalem in England's smooth and asphalt land, and we are near the day when there will be neither rich nor poor, or (should we say?) when there will be no rich. In the Lebanon, however, despite other

changes, social inequality is not greatly less than it has always been. Much of the land and most of the best land, despite some cutting up of big estates, is still held by the great landowners; the peasant proprietors are chiefly to be found on the more barren mountain sides. Merchant princes make large fortunes in a country where income tax is low (on £1,500 a year it is only 8 *per cent.*), and where evasion is common, and where local manufacturers shelter behind a high tariff. The poor, however, are not so poor as in the countries to the east and south. That single-garment poverty of 'Iraq, that ever-hungry poverty of Mr. Thesiger's nomads, is not of the Lebanon.

ADMINISTRATION

The last foreign soldier left the Lebanon on December 31, 1946. The country has therefore enjoyed less than three years of completely independent rule, although after the war ended the amount of foreign interference was slight. Indeed, it had been slight, in so far as internal affairs were concerned, ever since the end of 1944, when the Powers formally recognized Lebanese independence.

It appears to be almost a law of nature for man to be dissatisfied with his Government, and, if one is to judge by what one reads in the press and hears in the coffee-shop, the present Government of the Lebanon is no more popular than were the Governments of the French régime. The present rulers, however, have one great advantage over any that have preceded them: they can devote their energies to the improvement of the country instead of, as before, spending most of their effort in trying to be rid of the foreigner. They have the advantage, but the Opposition do not admit that they have used it.

The local press and the Opposition make frequent and grave, though generally vague, charges of a financial nature against the Government. The man in the street, however, finds it difficult to believe in the disinterestedness of any politician and, on the whole, remains unconvinced that putting the Opposition into power would result in an improvement.

The *President*, Bishāra Beg al-Khūri, a Maronite lawyer of great ability and considerable learning, who had served under the French, was elected for six years in September, 1943, and has been re-elected this year for a further term. He is widely respected by both Muslims and Christians.

Parliament consists of a single chamber with fifty-five members, who are elected for a term of five years. Opposition parties complain that the elections are rigged.

The *Prime Minister*, Riad Beg, the son of Riad Beg es-Sulh, a Sunni Muslim, who has been Prime Minister at intervals ever since there has been one, is a person of acute intelligence, great political ability, and a disarming *bonhomie*. He has been prominent in the political life of the country since he was twenty years of age, and only narrowly escaped hanging by Jamal Pasha in World War I for his nationalist activities.

The country is divided into five districts, each under an official called a *Muhāfiz* (the "Preserver" or "Keeper"), who has functions much like those of a French *préfet*; but there is much centralization in the adminis-

tration, and the *muhāfiz* refers most questions to the central Government, although there have been slight changes this year towards decentralization. Each *muhāfiza*, or county, is divided into three or four ridings, called *aqdiya*, each under a *sous-préfet*, and these again are divided into smaller units under Government officials of the lowest administrative grade.

Political Parties

There are several political parties, but on the whole, as in other countries of the Near East, their differences are rather personal than political. That is to say, the rank and file tend to follow a figure-head, even though he wobbles, rather than an idea.

The President is the leader of the *Constitutional Party*. Kamīl Beg Sham'ūn used to be his deputy, but has broken away and is now the leader of the parliamentary Opposition. Alfred Beg Nakkāsh, an influential Beirut Maronite, is the leader of the *Committee of National Liberation*, of which 'Abd el-Hamīd Effendi el-Karāma is the chief Muslim and the most important representative in North Lebanon. Khasruān Beg el-Khāzin, another Maronite from the south, leads the *National Bloc*. The Government last July dissolved the para-military organization, the *Katā-ib*, or *Falangists*, many thousands strong, and confiscated some of their arms and ammunition.

A threat to the Government and to the stability of the régime more serious than that of the Falangists was that of the *Lebanese Social Party*, known also as the *Syrian Nationalist Party*, led by the redoubtable Antūn Sa'āda.

Antūn Sa'āda, a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, was born in 1906. He embarrassed the French in the years before the Second World War, for as early as 1932 he had built up a considerable following supporting the constructive idea of a union of the countries at the western end of the Fertile Crescent—Palestine, Jordan, the Lebanon, and Syria. Later he included 'Iraq in his scheme, thus completing the crescent; but I do not think he had followers in that country. He was an impressive orator and a good organizer, and sought to build up a state within a state, much as the Jews did successfully with their Jewish Agency in Palestine. A *Qaumi*, as a member of the party was called, would try to have his shoes shined by a *Qaumi* bootblack, his hair cut by a *Qaumi* barber, and to buy his vegetables from a *Qaumi* greengrocer. Disputes between members of the party were, if possible, settled by party leaders and not taken to the public courts.

In 1939, when Antūn was in touch with the Axis and was probably receiving help from it, the Lebanon and Syria became too hot for him and he fled to Rio, whence he returned in 1947; but, making an imprudent speech on his arrival at the airport, an order was issued for his arrest. He lay low, however, for several months at Dahr esh-Shuwair, when he apologized to the Lebanese Government and was pardoned. He now took over the leadership of the party from Fāiz Saiyagh, who had been acting for Antūn while the latter was away, and began actively to recruit new members, to intensify propaganda, and to acquire arms. Then, this

summer, party bands raided isolated police posts. There were also clashes between the Nationalists and the Falangists, and it has been suggested that it was the Government itself that subterraneously encouraged them, then, making use of the pretext of the disorders, skilfully suppressed both parties.

After the attack on the police, Riad Beg, who had a restless, unpredictable neighbour to the east only an hour away by tank, and who needed no warning of the danger of disturbances within his frontiers, acting with vigour and promptness despite the smallness of Government forces, rounded up and imprisoned several hundred members of the party, but he did not succeed in catching Antūn, who had fled to Syria. There are at least three versions of what happened then. Some say that Husni Beg ez-Za'im, who on April 23 had abruptly changed his policy, and to whom, after his conversation with the King of Egypt, even the idea of a fertile crescent stank, and, despite his having apparently previously granted Antūn asylum, had him handed over to the Lebanese forces. Others say the Lebanese caught Antūn as he was fleeing from Syria to seek the protection of those unruly tribesmen, the Danādisha, on the eastern slopes of the high Lebanon; but by whatever means his arrest was effected, as soon as he was secured he was tried by a military tribunal and shot on July 8 last. George 'Abd el-Masīh, Antūn's lieutenant, is still at large.

Of course, whether Antūn's idea was good or was bad, his way of trying to make it a reality was thoroughly to be deprecated. All the same, when one considers the hundreds of meetings which Arab League politicians arrange in one capital after another, choosing the cooler ones in the summer, in order to cement the sacred ties that bind one country to its brother, it does seem a little odd, when a man really gets down to the job with real mortar and a trowel, that he should be shot for it.

The *Communist* party is proscribed in the Lebanon. When one reads its manifestos he would think proscription unnecessary, for surely, he would say to himself, such rubbish can find no one to believe it. So that you may know the kind of stuff that is being constantly imported into all the Near East, is being printed in illicit presses in the big centres of population, and is being tapped out on typewriters by students, let me read you a short extract from twenty-five paragraphs that made up a Communist manifesto pasted on walls in Tripoli and dated June, 1948:

"O countrymen, unite! Struggle to bring about the collapse of the conspiracy of the British and American colonizers against Palestine and against the integrity of Syria and the Lebanon! Unite! Exert yourselves to bring the Palestine war to an end! Force the withdrawal of all armies therefrom, foremost among which is 'Abdullah's British army.

"The Soviet Union is the only big state that has no selfish interests in Palestine and that is fighting against the project of a Greater Syria. It has supported in the past, and will support in the future, the struggle of the Arab people for independence and national democratic rights.

"The people of Syria and the Lebanon demand the abolition of

martial law and the state of emergency. They demand the release of the internees, among whom are lawyers, doctors, engineers, labourers, youths, and cultured nationals, who have been arrested on the orders of General Clayton."

Stupid stuff, isn't it? But, unfortunately, being stupid does not prevent its being believed.

WAR AND THE ARMED FORCES

Lebanese forces, in company with those of Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, invaded Palestine at midnight on May 14-15 last year. They soon retired to a little way within the Lebanese frontier, where they remained for the period of the war. There was probably no more than one battalion in the front line, and it lacked equipment. Had it suited the Jews, they could probably have broken through the Lebanese forces any time they wanted. No peace has yet been signed between the belligerents, though armistice talks were successfully concluded on March 23 this year. On May 7 the Prime Minister stated to the press that the Arabs were still fighting for the liberation of Palestine, the return of the refugees, and, somewhat surprisingly, for the liberation of North Africa.

Casualties in the fighting were slight. Beirut was never blacked out, and there were no signs that the country was at war, save for the war-tax stamps, which were compulsory on letters and on official documents. On the other hand, last November all Jewish officials were dismissed, and every now and then there were Jewish-spy hunts, especially in districts where Jews were rarely seen. In the whole country the Jews form one-half of one per cent. of the population (compare with three-quarters of one per cent. in the United Kingdom), but most of them are in the capital. In Tripoli last year there were only eighteen. British officials of the I.P.C. were occasionally mistaken for Jews, Beirut Christians in shorts sometimes got into difficulties, and a Christian priest walking over the mountains from one village to another near Saidā was murdered by the peasants because they thought he was a Jew.

In the event of aggression from beyond the roof—that is to say, the line of mountains from Greece, through Turkey to Persia—the Lebanon would be likely to contribute to the common defence not so much armed forces as her ports, railways, and roads.

Refugees from Palestine, Christian and Muslim, fled to the Lebanon, where many thousands remain, swelling a labour market already full. The Government has been torn between its desire to help the sufferers and its fear that the newcomers will cause further unemployment among the Lebanese. Of course, the whole of the refugees could be settled in Iraq, where there is land enough for them, if only some of the irrigation schemes that have been proposed were carried out. It is quite unrealistic to expect that any will ever be allowed to return to Israel. Indeed, from that unhappy country there is already a brisk steamship trade carrying disillusioned Jews back to Europe. There is certainly no room there for Arabs.

RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN POWERS

Arab Unity

The Palestinian war has shown clearly that, though the sentiment underlying the idea of Arab unity is real enough, yet personal and national jealousies will prevent actual uniting for a long while. It used to be the common complaint of the nationalists that it was Britain and France by their mandatory régimes that kept the Arabs apart; but gone now are the mandates, yet the peoples are more widely separated than ever. The Lebanon, however, has always found it a trifle embarrassing to pay the same hearty lip-service to the cause of Arab unity that is paid to it by other Arab states, for it is a very small country, and its Christian majority would, of course, be quite swamped by the Arab Muslims in any effective union. There is a proverb, to whose truth most Lebanese Christians would probably subscribe: *Jaur ut-Turk wa la 'adl ul-'Arab*—"The oppression of the Turks rather than the justice of the Arabs." Furthermore, it is in the case of the Lebanon more than in that of any other of the states that absorption into a larger unit is a possibility. If Syria had expansionist ideas, the first place in which it would essay to put them into practice would be the Lebanon.

Relations with Syria

It was the fear of being engulfed that made the Lebanese nervous during the 133-day reign of the Kurdish adventurer, Husni Beg az-Za'im, and it was the unpalatability of the news of his accession that made the Lebanon wait twenty-four days before bowing to the inevitable and recognizing the new régime. Fortunately for the Lebanon, revolutions are like cocktails—one leads to another—and Sāmi Beg Hināwi removed Husni, who had not the brains for the job. Power had gone to his head. *Tu'mat ul-asad tukhmat ul-wāwi*—"The food of the lion causes indigestion in the jackal." This time the Lebanon waited only four days before recognizing the new Syrian Government.

The present form of association between Syria and the Lebanon, whereby the two countries have distinct sovereignties and administrations, while the Customs, the passport services, and to some extent the monetary systems and consular representation are united, is excellent, but as Syrian industry expands it may be increasingly difficult to make the Customs union work. Syria has an important textile industry and seeks to encourage a number of others under the shelter of a high tariff, whereas the Lebanon is less industrialized and lives largely by trade, especially the transit trade between the West and East through the port of Beirut. The Syrians have been toying for some time with the idea of turning Latikiya into a port suitable for ocean-going steamers. If they ever do carry out the project, for which they would have to find a large sum of money, a serious blow would be dealt to the prosperity of Beirut. At present, however, the Lebanon and Syria are a pleasant example of comparatively happy political and economic symbiosis: Syria is the granary, the Lebanon the banker. Relations were considerably strained during the summer, when Husni Beg used to close the frontier at a moment's notice if he was annoyed

about anything. It is, of course, the peculiar disadvantage of dictatorial government that a dictator can give orders with far-reaching effects which are immediately acted upon, whereas if there is some sort of parliamentary government, however self-interested, however lazy, however incompetent, however corrupt, there must be at least some discussion before an important step is taken. I apologize for the triteness of this reflection, but I feel justified in making it because there are many people who say that what the Syrians need is a beneficent dictator. I don't believe there is such an animal.

There is much more to be said about the Lebanon, but it cannot all be packed into the time. I must therefore bring this talk to a close, but before doing so I wish, if any son or daughter of the White Mountain (that is what "Lebanon" means) who is here to-day thinks I have been a trifle too flippant now and then, to remind him of the wise French proverb, which says: *On se moque de ce qu'on aime*—"We make fun of those we love."

The CHAIRMAN, in moving a vote of thanks to the lecturer, said: It is a great advantage to be able to have from such an observer a survey of this nature every now and then, on the Lebanon and on other countries in which we are as a Society interested. I feel sure we all wish Mr. Dowson good fortune in his next journey. He is going to Somaliland in the immediate future, again to advise on dates, and I trust the result of his efforts will be to produce some in that very often less than half-nourished country, to provide something extra for the 55,000 mouths I believe there are every morning for breakfast.



