

with him. He rose on tiptoe to reach the distant ear. His face wore a lovely smile of truth and trust and delight.

'My future,' he whispered.

And the words turned the man into ice.

They entered the great station. The last of the daylight was shut out. They reached the ticket office. The crowds of hurrying people surged round them. The man set down the bag. For a moment or two the boy looked about him to right and left, searching, then turned his big blue eyes upon the other with a radiant smile.

'She's in the waiting room as usual,' he said. 'I'll go and fetch her — though she *ought* to know you're here.' He stood upon tiptoe, his hands upon the other's shoulders, his face thrust close. 'Kiss me, father, I shan't be a sec.'

'You little beggar!' said the man in a voice he could not control quite. Then, opening his big arms wide, saw only an empty space before him. He turned and walked slowly back to his flat instead of to the Club, and when he got home he read over for the thousandth time the letter in which she had accepted his love — the ink a little faded during the twelve years intervening — two brief weeks before death took her.

The Saturday Westminster Gazette

A REALIST IN SYRIA

BY BRAVIDA

THE truth, in Syria, is rare. It would appear also, from what is being said in Europe, at Peace Conferences and elsewhere, that the truth *about* Syria is no less so.

We are supposed to be witnessing the dawn of popular diplomacy. This, as it affects Syria, means, I take it, that what is going to be done with Syria will be what the peoples of the

Entente decide, modified by what the peoples of Syria desire. It will be no easy matter to arrange, because the peoples of the Entente know nothing about Syria, while the people of Syria have certainly given no mandate to anybody at the Peace Conference to voice their desires.

There are at least three parties in Syria with distinct views as to the future of the heterogeneous collection of peoples who inhabit that promising country. No effort has been made, or could possibly be made at this stage, to ascertain which is the most numerous. There are too many British troops about for any test — however much some of them might desire it — of which is the most powerful. There may be minor points of doubt, but the one salient fact at the moment is that nobody, however learned, however familiar with the Syrian peoples, can say that he represents them all, or estimate how many of them he does represent.

The rich, as far as one can see, are in favor of the British. But they are, for the most part, quite unworthy of being asked what they want. There are good people in Hell, as Sancho Panza says; but by far the greater part of the rich people of Syria — I am speaking of the natives — have battered on the poor, oppressed them, and reduced them to a misery so abject that it would do people with a grievance good to see them, as a lesson in what real misery is like. 'In a climate soft as a mother's smile, on a soil fruitful as God's love, the Irish peasant mourns,' they used to say. The Syrian peasant has a climate and a soil which (from the purely utilitarian point of view only, of course) make Ireland look like an outlying bit of Labrador; but if he had the rights, and the life, of Irish peasants in the worst of those bad old times, he would say the millennium had dawned upon him. But enough of the poorest. We will come to them later on.

The rich then. They danced with the German officers, and entertained them as gladly and as lavishly as they now do those British officers who, unmindful of the eccentricities of Levantine mentality, freely consort with them. Cosmopolitanism, or internationalism, or whatever one likes to call that all-things-to-all-men habit of mind, is a *forte* of the Syrians. If you are talking to a Syrian and he thinks you would like to hear it, or that it would help to clinch a bargain, he will tell you he is English. How? Well, he lived three months in Manchester or Saskatchewan; or his brother did. And he will produce naturalization papers, either complete or in process of application, to prove it. One rapidly comes to the conclusion that many Syrians have, in different pockets, naturalization paraphernalia for each of the belligerent nations in the late great war. And while they entertained the Germans; and while, at the beginning of our occupation, they entertained the English — in both cases with their storerooms packed with flour and other staffs of life which the poor man saw about as often as we see Halley's Comet — children died at their door: children of two to ten years, with limbs as thick as a hockey stick. This is not put in for dramatic effect. Whether it was merely a *morituri te salutant* sort of irony, or whether they had wandered there on the chance of a stray *metallick*, it is a fact that starving children made rather a point of dying on rich Syrians' doorsteps or at the garden gate. Not that they confined these little unconsidered tragedies to anyone's doorstep. Any evening, when the British first came, you could have seen, if you had taken a half-mile stroll in the streets of Beirut after ten at night, six to a dozen children, stark naked or covered with a sack — and flies — dead. In the early days, before the excellent but rather

long-winded public and private philanthropists got going, some night food queues, collected in front of a bread shop requisitioned by a few British officers who had nothing better to do, produced caricatures of the human form and vignettes of misery that would have baffled Raemaekers to draw or Tom Hood to describe. Rich natives walking — or more usually driving — by, the Christians in their quasi-European clothes at forty pounds Turkish the suit, the Mahometans, clad, as their Koran says, 'in green silk robes and rich brocade,' looked upon the proceeding, to judge by their puzzled stare, as some queer foreign antic.

So much, then, for the upper class. The middle class would, other things being equal, probably prefer to be ruled, or 'protected,' by the French. The French have a very real footing here. Their educational work, carried on almost entirely under Roman Catholic auspices, has been one of the dominantly hopeful features of Syrian life, especially town life; though one cannot say it has overshadowed the splendid and successful efforts of the English and particularly the American Protestants, whose college at Beirut gives a degree no educationist can afford to despise. Nor in justice may one omit the work of the German deaconesses. These three sets of devoted educationists have built up the Syrian middle classes between them; but the leaning has been decidedly to the French. The young Syrian, in so far as he has endeavored to become an imitation European, has aimed at being an imitation young Frenchman rather than an imitation young Englishman. His talent for languages, amounting almost to a national genius, enables him to speak as many as five languages, including English; but French is almost a second native tongue to him.

Against all this, however, we have a

very solid political factor. Above all preferences as to nationality, the Syrian has an eye to the main chance. The middle classes have canvassed the question pretty thoroughly, and without waiting for the Peace Conference have decided for themselves that Britain's sphere of influence will be Palestine up to and including Haifa, with control over the Haifa-Damascus and Haifa-Jerusalem-Kantara-Cairo railways now being run east of the canal by the British Army. The French, they say, will take Beirut and the coastal towns north (Beirut is the only port among them) and the Lebanon, whose commercial future is rather a matter for speculation. The Hedjaz will, so the Syrians surmise, take Damascus and the wheat-bearing plains of the Hauran. The broad and vastly fertile plain between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, from whose red earth Adam is said to have been made, will be taken either by the French or the Hedjaz. (I use the verb 'take' to express 'occupy during the reconstruction era,' rather than permanent acquisition.)

That being so, who gets the commerce? Beirut, it is true, possesses the only harbor; but rumors are already afloat that a great British firm means to throw across the bay, from Haifa to Acre, a six-million-pound sea wall, and so create a port that will be easily first on this coast: for Beirut's harbor, even if it were relieved of the silting which, in places, runs even a whale boat aground, and of the half-dozen wrecks which Turkey has left as legacies of her last war, has wharfage only for one large ship.

More important still, the railway from Beirut, inland, is a rickety rack-pinion affair, which has to climb 5000 feet to get over Lebanon and on to Damascus. Haifa's line to Damascus has no such difficulty. Now the Hauran

is going to be a big wheat producer; and the plain between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, though now cultivated by methods coeval with flint axes, will, under modern farming methods, be no small holding. Haifa's line can get at both more easily than Beirut's. Haifa can collect whatever mineral or oil wealth the Lebanon may one day provide; can tap the Palestine wine and orange trades — both with a future — and can take in silks and fancy goods from Damascus as a side line.

The Syrian merchant feels that if the French take Beirut and the British, Haifa, Haifa will swallow Beirut: whereas, if one firm, so to speak, runs both, Beirut can at all events rely on all its former prosperity as a suburb and feeder of Haifa.

In effecting a settlement, religious difficulties have to be taken into account, for the various conflicting faiths — Greeks, Roman Catholics and Maronites, Mahometans, Druses and Metoualis — are all game to score off each other politically. But, in general, the Syrian middle classes would be more happy, I believe, under the French — if it were not for the bogey of Haifa.

The chiefs, inland, do not much care by whom they are ruled so long as they do not see too much of the ruler. It is many a long year since a Sultan's, King's, or President's writ has run the other side of Lebanon. The Germans and Turks combined never controlled the inland Syrio-Arab's penchant for indiscriminate rifle practice, and we have had a little trouble with him in that direction. With these folk, too, the religious difficulty crops up here and there. Possibly they would prefer the Hedjaz.

As to the poor Syrians, it is ridiculous to talk of what they want. They would have plumped for the English at first. The English were such fools. A

blind baby could have stolen from them: and if he could n't steal, he could always get bully for the asking, with his whining song of 'mafeesh mungaree.' The English hired him, and paid him twice as much as he thought of asking and five times what he was worth, and they were too busy to catch him idling more than four times a day. Then, however, the French started rather good bread and cold-boiled-rice institutions, and the poor Syrian, if he had known the Acharnians, would have jilted the English with a quotation from the chorus:

Your designs and public ends
 First attracted us as friends;
 But the present boiled and roast
 Surprises and delights us most.

How can the poor Syrian say — or anyone else say for him — what he wants in the way of government? He has no education. There are thousands who have no home — who sleep in the ruins of Beirut, where a go-ahead governor once began to make boulevards, but had to halt for lack of cash as soon as he had pulled the requisite number of houses down. They live in filth that passes all understanding. Réaumur — for scientific purposes merely, be it understood — hatched flies in his bosom, so 'Selborne' tells us. The poor Syrian — because he could n't wash and change his clothes if he would, and at present would n't if he could — hatches collections in his bosom which would astonish an entomologist. Not that he has had much encouragement from his betters. In Beirut the one and only drain — itself something of a curiosity — runs into the middle of the harbor.

The morale of the Syrians is not that of nation-makers: Of truth they have no idea. Perhaps one may apply to them the comment of Tartarin de Tarascon on '*les gens du Midi*': 'The men of the South do not lie, they are mistaken. A lie with them is not always

a lie, it is a kind of mirage. You will see that the only liar in the South is the sun: all that it touches is exaggerated.' Be that as it may, any British officer who has employed Syrian 'laborers' — and searched them at the end of the day's 'work' — will tell you that such lying has not been heard since Ananias was a child. Naturally, with such a 'home' life as theirs, they have moral habits that would form a *cause célèbre*, and sanitary habits that would start a plague in a rabbit hutch.

The well-fed German out here used to call the Turkish soldier an '*artiste de faim*.' The poor Syrian is a genius at it. Begging is the most flourishing trade in Syria, and the only one at which the craftsman gets a proper apprenticeship. Interspersed among the real starvers you will find child actors who would win a *furore* in London. They lie in an attitude of death in a woman's lap, their well-rounded limbs carefully covered with verminous rags. You will see them ten minutes later, when mamma has gone home for lunch, playing touch. Thieving in all its branches — piracy from off-loading ships, fraud, smuggling of stolen goods, pilfering, and pocket-picking — had such a boom on the arrival of the British as was never known in the best Turkish days, though now it is waning beneath a somewhat determined police surveillance. Animals? They talk at home of selling army horses out here. Well, the Arab and even the Syrian knows the value of his horse, and that while he is in working order it pays to keep him so. That is the utmost limit: and as to worn horses, or any other animals, it would need all the staff of the R.S.P.C.A. to keep even the streets free of eyesores.

Nevertheless, the poor Syrian (which is to say the Syrian in bulk) has hopes in him. He has a country richer in possibilities than many much more

coveted lands. He is often a good craftsman (shoemaking, here, is a thing of delight), and if he were taught he would make a passable farmer. He has a climate which — except in the very hot months, and then one goes to the hills — the Riviera cannot approach. He cannot help developing, given two things — education and, for the next fifty years, an unchallengeably strong, unwaveringly stern, and unimpeachably just government. He must be taught — rich and bourgeois and poor alike, they none of them know it yet — that if there is a tariff and he sells goods above it, he goes to prison and is terribly fined: that if he juggles with the coinage after he has been told not to, he is chastened severely; that if he is warned not to carry arms and continues to carry them, he is looking for trouble and will find it; that if he commits the more obvious breaches of sanitary laws, he must pay; that if he goes to prison, there he stops till his term is ended, and neither agility nor ‘backsheesh’ will get him out. He must be made to work and not to idle or beg. He must be made to wash — and compulsory disinfection once a week, to which his distant and very superior cousin in the Egyptian Labor Corps submits so cheerfully, would not be amiss. He must be shown what a good city street is like — a lorry fell through the main ‘street’ of Beirut the other day. He must be shown what a good country road is like. From Beirut to anywhere is a steeplechase at present. He must be shown what a well-governed country is like. *Then* we can put it to him, as Machiavelli so neatly puts it to ‘The Prince’ — ‘The sea is divided, a cloud has led the way, the rock has poured forth water, it has rained manna . . . you ought to do the rest. God’ — or in this case France or England — ‘is not willing to do everything.’

But weakness will retard the progress of what may one day be a great little country. Syria wants fifty years of the best European governorship the Allies can spare. The Syrian of promise is not wanted in Europe and should be kept out. He is wanted in Syria. We must teach him that it is better worth while to be a real Syrian than an imitation Frenchman or Englishman. Then it will be time to talk of ‘trust the people.’ Who governs meanwhile does not matter. The French want Syria. Let them have it by all means. But may we, as old hands at this game, ask the French to give Syria the best colonial régime they have established yet: to make of their stay there, not a commercial adventure, but the birth of a nation?

The Anglo-French Review

THE READING OF CONTEMPORARY POETRY

BY WALTER DE LA MARE

THERE is but one unfailing method of reading poetry, whether it was written yesterday or centuries ago — that of the bee in the blossom, or, as the Puritan might prefer to put it, that of puss in the dairy. We need but take pleasure in it, all the pleasure, delight, happiness, that it has to bestow, and that we are capable of receiving. That pleasure for one man — ‘hapless wight’ — may be instruction, for another edification, for a third the greed of the moth for the candle, for a fourth the desire of the eyes, or thought, or wisdom, or peace, or oblivion, or these in company; but all such readers are robbers, Ali Babas who steal the inexhaustible, and all are honest men who pay — into some inconceivable treasury — the price of what they carry away.

A poem may transport us but a