

IRAQ AND THE PROBLEM OF THE ASSYRIANS¹

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THE subject of this paper, the Assyrians in Iraq, covers a period of the fifteen years 1918-33, years which have been full of interest. I must, moreover, say something about the origin of the Assyrians and how they came to Iraq. As for their origin the question is, are they the original Assyrians, the survivors of the ancient Assyrian Empire, which had its capital at Nineveh in the last millennium B.C., or are they a fragment of the eastern Christian church which flourished in Mesopotamia from 200-600 A.D.? It would take too long to discuss the various arguments for and against. On the whole, however, it appears probable that the Assyrians of to-day retain something of the ancient Assyrian strain, though they may not be absolute pure survivals of this people. The important point is that the Assyrians themselves are convinced that they are the descendants of the ancient Empire, and this pride of race explains some of their more extravagant claims.

At any rate in the nineteenth century the Assyrians were discovered living in the tangled mass of mountains rising to about fourteen thousand feet in height north of what is now Iraq and west of Persia. Others lived on the shores of Lake Urmia in Persia, while some even then lived within the present-day boundaries of Iraq. These last were subject to the Kurdish Aghas and their position was not much better than that of serfs. In this lecture I shall have little to say of the Persian Assyrians. Their lot is not happy, but it is infinitely happier than their co-religionists in Iraq.

The mountain Assyrians belong to the Nestorian church, to which they had ever remained faithful. Living in the high mountains they possessed most of the characteristics of mountaineers everywhere. They were divided into clans, their life was hard, they were naturally independent and resentful of control. They were surrounded by, and even intermingled with, Kurds,

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who by race and religion were their opposites, but who in other ways were not unlike them. The Archbishop of Canterbury had sent a mission to them in 1886, while they also had certain contacts with Russian civil or religious authorities. Their ruler, temporal as well as religious, was the Mar Shimun, and it was through him that the Turkish Government dealt with the Millet. The temporal power of the Mar Shimun waxed and waned through the years, depending largely on the personality of the holder of the title, but his religious authority was never challenged.

Normally the Assyrians had held their own fairly well with their Kurdish neighbours, who, though far more numerous, were split by bitter feuds and were quite unable to unite. In 1847, however, a serious massacre occurred, and this called down upon the Sublime Porte the remonstrances of the British and other European Governments. As the Turkish Government gradually strengthened its administration in these wild mountains, the position of the Assyrians grew worse. Now they had to compete, not only with the Kurds but with corrupt officialdom. It was clear that, even had not the Great War intervened, a crisis was at hand. Soon after the outbreak of the War, the Russians, who had reached Urmia in Persia, invited the mountain Assyrians to rise against Turkey. The Assyrians at first hesitated, especially as the Turks made many promises to them as to preferential treatment, being very anxious to keep them on their side, so that they could say that a Christian group was content under Turkish rule. Finally, the Mar Shimun who led the pro-Russian party won the day, but not before it had been found necessary to murder in cold blood the leaders of the opposition party.

The help expected from the Russians never materialised and the Assyrians found themselves faced with the attacks of both Turks and Kurds. For some time they held out most valiantly, but eventually, with their ammunition running out, they were forced to abandon their mountain villages and to move to Urmia in Persia by an unexpected route. This retirement was successfully carried out in the face of enormous difficulties. At Urmia the Assyrians again got into contact with the Russians, and were used as irregulars. In the course of the next two years they gave at least as much as they took and they obtained a bloody revenge for what they had suffered during the past year.

The outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917 found them again deserted. They were, however, better placed than in 1915, as when the Russian armies retired, plenty of ammunition was left behind. For over a year the Assyrians were able to resist

the attack of two nominal Turkish divisions backed up by Kurds. By the summer of 1918 their ammunition was almost all gone and the Assyrians were again in desperate straits. It was now that the first contact between the Assyrians and the British military took place. A small British force had been sent up from Hamadan and got to within 150 miles of Urmia. A British aeroplane actually landed at this place and this greatly encouraged the Assyrians. Now lack of unity and the absence of a strong leader ruined the Assyrians. They could not agree on a plan of campaign. Eventually practically all of them, both the mountaineers and the Persian Assyrians from Urmia, to the number of over 70,000, fled south in July-August 1918. They were only saved from destruction by a small detachment of the 14th Hussars. After incredible hardships and great losses they arrived at Hamadan, whence they were evacuated to Baqubah, a town 30 miles north-east of Baghdad. Here a refugee camp was established, which cost the British taxpayer upwards of £2,000,000. This was the beginning of the Assyrian connection with Iraq. It was also the beginning of the development of that refugee mentality which now can be said to be the curse of the Assyrian people. For as Dr. Wigram rightly remarks in his book *The Assyrians and their Neighbours*—

“The administration of the camp erred on the side of kindness. Maintenance in idleness is good for neither Eastern nor Western, and the Assyrian is a type that shows the evil results of it sooner than others.”

It was the express desire of the British Government that the Assyrians should be repatriated to their original Hakkari homes. The unratified Sèvres treaty and the Anglo-French agreement of November 30th, 1918, are sufficient proofs of this. It does not appear that any definite promises to this effect were made by the British Government, but it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Assyrians were encouraged, not necessarily officially, to think that their return was assured. They certainly took this for granted and the inability of the British Government to bring this about has been a never-ending source of grievance.

As regards those who came from Urmia their return was comparatively easy, and in due course, though not at once, most of them did return. But after the Armistice the Hakkari lands remained in Turkey, and the Turks absolutely refused even to consider the return of the Assyrians. As you are well aware, the peace negotiations with Turkey dragged on for years, and the delays brought misery, ruin, and death to many millions besides.

the Assyrians. Attempts at repatriation were made. Agha Petros, the most prominent warrior among the Assyrians, led one. This had the ostensible object of reaching Urmia via Zab. But it failed completely, partly owing to poor organisation and leadership, partly owing to the outbreak of the Arab rebellion in the summer of 1920, which caused such delays that Agha Petros and his followers could not set out till late in the year. Then the climatic conditions in the mountain passes proved a serious obstacle to success. But the chief reason for failure was because the Hakkari mountaineers broke away from the main body and attempted to reach their own homes. In this they, too, were unsuccessful, and their attempt was unfortunately marked by many episodes of murder and rapine against the Kurds in the Amadiyah district. After this failure the Assyrians returned to the Mindan camp some 30 miles north-east of Mosul, which camp had been formed at the time that at Baqubah was shut down.

Following the failure of Agha Petros, piecemeal attempts at settlement were carried out, and some of these had considerable success, each Assyrian, man, woman, or child, receiving £9 from the British Government. Some, mainly Jilu and Baz, settled in the Mosul plain and flourished there. Others even reached their old Hakkari homes, which it was hoped and believed would be allotted to them, when the Turko-Iraq frontier was finally delimited by the League of Nations. These people, however, were expelled by the Turks in 1924. But all these hopes proved vain, as the League, despite all the efforts of the British Government, left this area to Turkey. The League Council appears to have been, in part, influenced by the argument that the Assyrians were rebels against the Turkish Government, and as such deserved little consideration. It must have been forgotten that King Feisal of Iraq and his supporters had also risen against their masters, the Turks. But I must confess that, personally, I feel that, even if the Assyrians had recovered their old homes, this would not have been the end of their troubles. The existence of a semi-autonomous people, of the character of the Assyrians, living on the frontiers of three different countries, must sooner or later have led to an impossible situation.

I have made little mention yet of the Mar Shimun. The Mar Shimun Benjamin who led the retirement to Urmia was murdered in 1918. He was succeeded by his nephew, who died of consumption at Baqubah. He, in his turn, was succeeded by a younger brother, who now holds the position. At the time of his suc-

cession, this Mar Shimun was a boy of eleven years of age, and naturally his influence was very small. The title of Mar Shimun is hereditary and generally passes from uncle to nephew, never from father to son, as the holder of the title is not permitted to marry. The Mar Shimun's family had not favoured Agha Petros' enterprise and was not on good terms with him. A great opportunity was given to the family to recover its authority when the levies were formed in 1921. At first the Assyrians were reluctant to join the Levies, but were eventually persuaded to do so by David, the father of the Mar Shimun, who later became chief liaison officer to the force. The Mar Shimun's family thus obtained a hold on the Levies which has never been relaxed. This hold has undoubtedly increased the Mar Shimun's standing with the whole Assyrian people.

I have not time to say much about the Levies. They became very smart troops and did excellent work in the guerilla warfare against the Kurds. They have been enthusiastically praised by their British officers, but their fighting value under heavy losses remains unproved. For during their service in the Levies they never suffered anything like heavy casualties; probably it was no greater than that of the Kurds or Arabs, if similarly officered. Their esprit de corps was, however, very great and was fostered by their British officers, as is the way with British officers all over the world. Perhaps there was too much of slighting the young Iraq army, which was then being formed, and which in its first operations in the mountains was far from successful. In any case the seeds of jealousy and bitterness were sown, and this accounts, in part, for the excesses committed by the Iraq army last summer. Another contributory cause was the Levy outbreak at Kurkuk in 1924 which led to the death of fifty townspeople, and it must be admitted that this outbreak, on the part of disciplined troops, however great the provocation, was a serious blot on the good name of the Assyrians.

Looking back one may doubt the wisdom of recruiting Assyrians into the Levies. The Levies were imperial troops, and, as such, the object of suspicion to the ardent Iraq nationalist. It is true that the Arabs who had served in the Levies were now required for the new Iraq army and that the Kurds were not too reliable, but the recruiting of the Assyrians as British troops did give the impression that they were alien to Iraq. And the Iraq politician has always been terrified of the minorities question. Before leaving the Levies it must be said that the Assyrians in one way profited greatly from their service. They received good

pay. In fact there is no doubt that much of the money which the Assyrians now possess was derived from this source. On the other hand, the British Treasury was also able to economise very considerably by the employment of Assyrians rather than British or Indian troops.

When it was finally known that the Assyrians could not return to Hakkari it was obvious that there was no alternative but for them to settle in Iraq. Settlement had been going on for some years and it received a great impetus when Captain Fowraker, a Levy officer, who spoke Syriac fluently, was appointed Settlement Officer at the beginning of 1927. He worked for two years and, though handicapped by shortage of funds, actually did settle most of the agricultural Assyrians. The Iraq Government, for its part, assisted with certain remissions of taxation. The Turks still refused to accept the Assyrians back in Hakkari and in 1928 barred the way to some who sought to return. But the agricultural Assyrians were by no means the only problem. Since 1917 a new generation had grown up, which knew nothing of the hard life of the mountain villages. Some of these had found employment in the towns, but many could obtain no work. For this, they themselves were partly to blame, as few of them had learnt Arabic. These were naturally discontented and their discontent spread among some of the settled Assyrians. In fact after all the settlements, some of which appeared to be quite successful, many of the Assyrians still persisted in considering themselves to be refugees. They had many grievances. They objected to living in villages owned by Kurdish Aghas, as they feared that the landlords would evict them. Actually these fears were not really justified and the majority of Arabs and Kurds live under the same conditions. They also demanded that they should live in a compact body, claiming that there were ample empty villages for this to be possible. It is just possible that in 1920 most of the Assyrians could have been settled in a compact body. In 1926 it was quite impossible without evicting many Kurds, an obvious injustice, and an equally obvious cause of trouble in the future. As it was, the Kurds were complaining that the Assyrians had obtained possession of villages rightly belonging to them. The Assyrians had other grievances directed against the administration. The standard of Iraqi officials was certainly not high, but it is doubtful whether the Assyrians had greater cause for grievance in this respect than had the Kurds, the Arabs and the Yezidis. The Assyrians also complained that their villages were unhealthy. Many certainly were, but not

unhealthier than those of their Kurdish neighbours, and the malaria was fostered by the rice-growing, of which the Assyrians are particularly fond.

The final blow to the Assyrians was the termination of the British Mandate. Though this had been much talked of, the Assyrians could not believe it possible. Many Arabs, incidentally, had held the same view. In June 1932 the Assyrians acted. The Levies submitted their resignations in a body, and for a time were in a state bordering on mutiny. A battalion of the Northants Regiment was flown over from Cairo. This induced the Assyrians to come to their senses, but it was the Mar Shimun who was chiefly used to persuade the Assyrians to withdraw their resignations. It was not until he had written to them, under his patriarchal seal, that they were to continue serving, that they were persuaded to do so. The fact that the Mar Shimun was so employed by the High Commissioner undoubtedly encouraged him in his subsequent claims that his temporal as well as his religious authority should be officially recognised. It was most unfortunate that the expression "temporal power" was ever used.

This Levy mutiny, as it must be called, was, in effect, in support of the Assyrian National Pact, which had been drawn up at a meeting of Assyrian leaders at Amadiyah in June 1932. This pact dealt with a number of demands. I will only deal with the more important. The first was that the ancient Assyrian homes in Hakkari should be returned to them, or failing this, that the Assyrians should be settled in a compact body in Iraq in the districts of Amadiyah, Dohuk and Zakho. Here it is to be noted that the Assyrians were in a small minority in this area, numbering approximately 14,000 to 60,000 Kurds and 7000 other Christians. It was also demanded that this area should be considered as a semi-independent Millet with an Arab Governor and a British adviser. Further, that the temporal as well as the spiritual authority of the Mar Shimun should be recognised. These demands were clearly unacceptable to the Iraq Government. After much correspondence, it was arranged that the Mar Shimun, who had been nominated at the meeting as the representative of the Assyrian people, should go to Geneva to present the demands in person to the League. He does not appear to have been told that the British Government would lend the power of its support to Iraq.

The Mar Shimun failed completely at Geneva. The League accepted the Iraq Government's undertaking to appoint a foreign expert to settle those Assyrians who wished to have land, and

also its undertaking to place no obstacle in the way of any Assyrian who wished to leave Iraq. Whether the Mar Shimun would have accepted the position is, perhaps, doubtful; but what finally determined him not to do so was his discovery on his return to Iraq at the end of December, that the Iraq authorities in Mosul had on instructions from Baghdad been very active in building up a party against him, and had, in fact, appointed his greatest enemy as President of the Assyrian Advisory Settlement Committee. From then on he did his utmost to oppose settlement on these lines. He succeeded, as no applications for settlement were made, and the efforts of Major Thompson, who arrived in Mosul in the beginning of June, were in vain.

The Iraq Government was greatly incensed at the Mar Shimun's attitude, and at the end of May he was told to come to Baghdad from Mosul. Here discussions took place between him and the Minister of the Interior, which only had the effect of creating further suspicion and estrangement, and eventually resulted in the Mar Shimun being ordered to stay in Baghdad where he was living at the Y.M.C.A. His obstinacy had destroyed the not very great patience of the Cabinet, the members of which were much irritated by telegrams sent by King Feisal from England saying that the Mar Shimun should be allowed to return to Mosul. Such indeed was their irritation that several of the ministers threatened to resign. The King indeed was out of touch with the rapidly changing situation. It is possible that the affair had been clumsily handled, but in the end a position was reached which meant that the Mar Shimun could not be allowed to go back on his own terms without a fatal blow to the prestige of the Cabinet.

In the meantime a serious situation had been reached in Mosul. A certain Yacu, the son of Ismail, Milik of the upper Tiyyiri, one of the biggest Assyrian tribes, had been behaving in a most truculent manner. He had been touring the country on admittedly Mar Shimun anti-settlement propaganda, accompanied by an armed following. He was ordered to come into District headquarters to explain his conduct. He refused. The Government had no alternative but to bring him in by force. Troops were concentrated, though it was published that any military action was directed against Yacu as an individual and not against the Assyrian people. Happily I was in the end able to induce Yacu to come in and I brought him into Mosul myself, so the situation was saved for the moment. But unfortunately the Iraq Government showed signs of wishing to break its word

regarding the terms of surrender, and was with difficulty prevented by British advice from doing so.

On July 10th, 1932, a meeting was held at Mosul attended by all the Assyrian leaders, except Mar Shimun, who was still detained in Baghdad. This meeting should certainly have been held six months earlier in order that the League's decision should be clearly understood, because it had not been properly reported to the Assyrians. The results of this meeting, which was addressed by the Mutaserrif, Major Thompson, and myself, were rather negative. In the absence of the Mar Shimun this was fairly certain to be the case, but anyhow the Assyrians could not now say that they did not understand the position. They were also clearly told what was the procedure for anyone who wished to leave the country. Many people have accepted the Assyrian statement that in leaving for Syria, they were merely following my suggestion, but actually they had been given clear instructions with regard to the proper procedure. The meeting showed the strength of the Mar Shimun and anti-Mar Shimun parties as far as the leaders, at any rate, were concerned. It also showed the bitterness of the feeling between the two parties, as the first meeting broke up in some disorder, and two separate meetings, one for each party, were held the next day. On the whole it appeared that a small majority of the leaders were opposed to the policy, if not to the person, of the Mar Shimun. With the rank and file it was otherwise. After the meeting it was suggested to Yacu and one or two other leaders of the Mar Shimun party that they should go to Baghdad and try to persuade the Mar Shimun to sign the simple acknowledgment, which he had been asked and had refused to sign, of the Minister's letter, so that he might return to Mosul, and cooperate with Major Thompson in the settlement. After some discussion they agreed to do so and left Mosul. But they did not go to Baghdad; they went to Syria instead. There they met the local French frontier officials, who appeared to have inquired from Beyrouth as to what was to be done. Beyrouth, unfortunately, did not inform Baghdad at once. In the meantime Yacu had sent word to the Assyrians in the villages that they were to come to Syria. The French, he said, would accept them, give them lands, and exemption from taxation for a period of years. About 800 Assyrians started off; the numbers have been greatly exaggerated. They left their women and children behind in the villages. This showed that they had at that time no warlike intentions. It also showed that they felt that their families, even if unguarded, were quite safe. In this they were

correct, as not even the smallest incident occurred until August 8th, when the fighting at Faish Khabur had entirely changed the situation. The news of the exodus reached Mosul on July 21st. The Assyrians had crossed the Tigris at Faish Khabur, a small village some two miles from the Turkish frontier. It was decided that the military should guard the river crossings and disarm any Assyrians who wished to return. Unfortunately it appears doubtful whether the Assyrians were told clearly enough the terms on which they could return. Actually no one did return till August 4th. The army was, however, successful in preventing other Assyrians joining their friends in Syria. Some, who tried to cross later, were disarmed, all were turned back. It has been argued that the Iraq Government should have allowed the Assyrians to return without disarming them. It is difficult to see how it could have done so. Yacu had shown much aggression and had defied the Government. Steps had to be taken to prevent the recurrence of such actions, which were greatly exciting the Kurds. It was the intention of the Iraq authorities to return to the Assyrians sufficient rifles for self-defence. Here it is to be noted that the Assyrians, man for man, were better armed than the Kurds, though in the aggregate the Kurds were much stronger.

The situation was rendered even more difficult by the absence of any information by the French. It was not at first known whether the Assyrians would be allowed to remain in Syria or not, or, if they were to be evicted, how this would be done. Another complication was uncertainty as to the actual frontier. This had recently been delimited afresh by a League of Nations Committee, but neither we in Mosul nor the French officials had been told when the new frontier came into effect. The Iraq Government, immediately it heard of the move into Syria, made diplomatic representations to the French Mandatory authorities for the prompt application of the provisional agreement for the administration of frontier tribes. Under this agreement between the two countries, the Assyrians should be disarmed and moved some distance from the frontier. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful whether this agreement really covered an extraordinary case of this nature. On July 30th, however, information was received that the French had disarmed a portion (about 400) of the Assyrians. This was good news, but it was still thought at that time that there remained 1200 armed, though the French asserted—correctly as it subsequently proved—that there were only 300. On the afternoon of August 2nd a meeting took place between

the Iraq political officer attached to the troops and the French frontier officials. The French said that on no account would they keep the Assyrians, who would have to return to Iraq. The Iraq political officer requested the French to let him know if the French intended to return the rifles to the Assyrians when they were evicted from Syria. This request is important in view of what took place on August 4th, the rifles being returned by the French without warning.

By July 30th it was known that a number of Assyrians on the right bank of the river had realised that they had been led astray by their leaders, and that the French, far from giving them lands and exemption from taxation, would not have them at any price. These Assyrians were desirous of returning to their villages in Iraq and appear to have been quite willing to surrender their rifles. The diehards among them, however, were anxious to prevent this. Such was the position on the evening of August 3rd.

I will pause here for a moment in my narrative. Some of you may have read the Blue Book which was prepared by the Iraq Government for the League of Nations. This Blue Book gives the impression that the Iraq Government had a tremendously strong case to put forward in respect of its dealings with the Assyrians. It appeared to have shown great patience in dealing with a difficult people for whose early misfortunes the people of Iraq were in no way responsible. Actually, though the Iraq Government did have a strong case, it was, perhaps, not so strong as all that. The Blue Book consisted largely of reports written by British advisory officials. It did not contain any of the many reports, often foolish and sometimes even worse, though, of course, some were quite sensible, which had been written in the two previous years by Iraq administrative officials. It did not, for instance, include the recommendation of the Mutaserrif of Arbil (who was now Minister of Defence), written in 1932, in which he in all seriousness recommended that the best solution of the Assyrian problem was to turn the poor Kurds on them. This and many similar reports revealed a great lack of sympathy towards the Assyrians and a distinct disability to understand the other side's point of view. The Assyrians, of course, fully recognised this, and it is this which made them nervous and suspicious as to the good intentions of the Iraqis. It would indeed be idle to suggest that there was any real sympathy between Iraqi officialdom and the Assyrians, but I must admit that the Assyrians were themselves largely responsible for the Iraq officials' state of mind. They had always adopted a most distant

and indeed truculent attitude towards Iraqi officials, and this had infuriated these people, who, in their heart of hearts, were by no means confident of their ability to run the country. On the whole, however, there is little doubt that all responsibly minded Iraqis had been genuinely anxious to see the Assyrian question peaceably settled, and the Assyrians living as contented citizens of Iraq. But in June and July of last year their attitude gradually changed. Their irritation over the Mar Shimun's obstinacy in Baghdad and over Yacu's behaviour in the north induced them to consider that the Assyrian question must be settled once and for all and that the only way to do this was to teach the Assyrians a really severe lesson. Unfortunately King Feisal, Sir Francis Humphreys, the British Ambassador, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, the very experienced adviser to the Ministry of Interior, and the three ablest Iraq ministers were all in Europe. In their absence there was no brake to the hot-heads. I am not saying that anything so horrible as the Simmel massacre was intended, but there is no doubt that the Ministers did intend that a severe lesson should be given to the Assyrians.

To resume my narrative. At 8 p.m. on August 4th a telephone message was received from Zakho saying that the Assyrians had crossed the Tigris into Iraq territory and had attacked the army and that heavy fighting was still in progress. It was not known until the following day that the French had returned the rifles to the Assyrians. It is always difficult to find out who starts a fight and it is no less difficult on this occasion. I have had far more opportunity than anyone else to ascertain who first opened fire, but I must confess that even now I am unable to say. Both sides, as usual, accused the other. The weight of circumstantial and contingent evidence is about equal, for while it was well known that the army did not intend the Assyrians to escape a second time as it considered they had escaped by the peaceful conclusion of the Yacu affair, it was also known that Yacu was prepared to do almost anything to prevent the return to Iraq of those Assyrians who wished to surrender. One thing is certain, namely, that the bulk of the Assyrians who crossed the river at first did really intend to surrender. It is possible that the first shot was fired by some individual, either Assyrian or Iraqi, who let off his rifle, and that, with the tension existing, was enough to bring about a general engagement.

The following is a brief account of what took place that evening. About 6 p.m. the headman of Faish Khabur village reported by telephone to the G.O.C. troops in Dairābun camp, which was

situated on high ground about a mile and a half from the river, that large numbers of Assyrians were crossing the river. Here it is to be noted that the first information did not come from the military pickets. The army had neglected to watch the really vital reach of the river between Faish Khabur and the Turkish frontier. He was told to send four men to inform the Assyrians that they would have to give up their rifles. At the same time a company of infantry and a squadron of cavalry with machine guns were sent to intercept them. Unfortunately the political official did not accompany this force. Shortly after firing broke out. The first man killed on either side appears to have been an Iraqi officer. The troops were forced back, or retired, to some low hills underneath the Dairabun camp and firing ceased about 8 p.m. It now appears that the rest of the Assyrians, who had not intended to surrender, and who had not crossed the river, did so. They thought that their comrades had been treacherously fired upon, and this was quite enough for this hot-headed people. At midnight a deliberate attack was made on the eastern and northern pickets which guarded the camp. The Iraqi troops appeared to have fought quite well, rather to the surprise of those who knew of their behaviour at Barzan the previous year, and only one picket was lost, that on the extreme left. The successful Assyrians did not press home their attack, probably owing to the failure on the right, and early next morning the lost picket was recaptured with the assistance of artillery and aeroplanes. When the Assyrians realised that they had failed in their attempt—and they must have been intensely surprised at their failure as they had the greatest contempt for the fighting value of the Iraq army—the majority of them recrossed the river. They were unmolested by the Iraq army, which remained in camp, though later in the day a certain number of Assyrians, who had lost their way, were rounded up and shot out of hand. For on the recapture of the lost picket, it was reported that the dead soldiers therein had been burnt and mutilated. Such reports must, of course, be accepted with reserve. Atrocities stories inevitably accompany the outbreak of hostilities. In this case they may or may not have been true, but there is nothing in the character of the Tokhuma, the tribe concerned, to suggest that they were impossible. Unfortunately, the army fully believed all the stories and this undoubtedly explains the shooting of all the prisoners during the next few days. And still more unfortunately, these and other atrocity stories, all exaggerated, and some entirely unfounded, were published by the Iraq papers throughout

the country, and these enormously inflamed public opinion, already sufficiently excited. It is important to bear in mind that after the morning of August 5th there was no further fighting whatever. In this fighting the Iraq army lost 33 killed and 40 wounded. The Assyrians, though they were the attackers, lost considerably less.

The absence of news from the army, who were controlling the military zone, was a very grave embarrassment to the civil authorities in Mosul. These kept their head fairly well, but it was otherwise in Baghdad. Here there was the greatest rage and alarm. The rage was directed as much against the French as the Assyrians, as it was now known that the French had returned the Assyrians' rifles. The French, indeed, had long been suspect owing to their alleged intrigues in the north. The alarm was caused by the real facts not being known, and by the thought that nearly 2000 armed Assyrians had to be dealt with. It must be said that this alarm showed remarkable lack of confidence in the army. I must, however, say that there are no foundations for the statements that had the Assyrians been successful, a first-class war would probably have followed. I have heard this suggested by a few Iraqi officials, in their attempts to condone the subsequent massacres, but I have not heard it even hinted at by any British official who knew the true facts. But the alarm in Baghdad did cause certain prominent persons to make remarks of the "rid me of this turbulent priest" order. They cried, "Kill all the Assyrian men but leave the women and children, as the eyes of the world are on us. Let the Kurdish and Arab tribes be raised against the Assyrians, and let trouble be raised in Syria against the treacherous French." Saner counsels soon prevailed, but verbal instructions as to severity to be used against the Assyrians certainly did reach the army. The army officers, in any case, needed little urging on, and, in particular, their Commanding Officer, Bekir Sidqi. This officer was known to hate the Assyrians, and to be determined to punish them as severely as possible. His transfer had been asked for by all the British advisory officials, and, indeed, had been promised by King Feisal in May. But he remained all the same.

By August 7th it was apparent that the civil authorities had lost all control in the districts of Dohuk and Zahko, and that the military were supreme. The Minister of Defence, accompanied by the Director-General of Police, had arrived at Mosul on that day, but neither of these individuals were likely to have a calming effect; nor did they. I reported the situation to Baghdad and

on August 11th the Minister of Interior flew to Mosul. Hikmet Beg Suleiman had kept his head better than most of his colleagues. On his arrival at Mosul he took prompt steps to recover control. In this he was largely successful. It is true that he was too late to prevent the massacre at Simmel, but he was able to stop the killings which were going on at Dohuk, and to prevent an even worse massacre at Alqosh which had been planned by the army. It was not until after the details of the Simmel massacre were known and its implications understood that Hikmet Beg was otherwise than sound.

If only the civil authorities had been fully informed of the facts on the evening of August 5th, practically all the subsequent bloodshed could have been prevented. But fantastic rumours were being received hourly regarding movements of large bands of Assyrians. The real facts were that the majority of the Assyrians recrossed into Syria on the morning of August 5th; these, 533 in number, were interned by the French. About 50 Assyrians were killed in the neighbourhood of Dairabun, most of them shot after being taken prisoner. The remainder, less than 200 in number, passed on with the sole idea of getting back to their villages as soon as possible. Some did so, but some were rounded up by the Kurds, who had been organised by the Qaimaqum of Zahko, and were handed over to the army. These, too, were promptly shot, even before they had been questioned. The employment of Kurds in this manner was entirely contrary to the orders which the Mutaserrif had, on my recommendation, issued. We had always been anxious as to the intervention of the Kurds, and strict orders had been issued to keep them under control.

On August 8th reports were received that the Kurds and Arab tribes were commencing to loot the Assyrian villages near Simmel. These reports became more and more serious, and added greatly to our anxieties. I will deal with this looting later. In the meantime the army had left Dairabun, and had joined with the second column which had been at Bashikli Bala: the total number of the troops was just under 3000. On August 11th the columns passed Simmel, where the worst massacres of all took place. The following is an account.

Simmel is a large village some ten miles from Dohuk and on the main road to Zahko. Here lived 100 Assyrians and ten Arab families, about 700 souls in all. There is a Police Post in the village with a normal garrison of a sergeant and four men. The Assyrians of Simmel did not all belong to the same tribe. Most of them were Baz, but the headman belonged to the Diz. The

great majority of the Baz were peaceful cultivators, and their leading man at Simmel, Gabriel, had long been one of the strongest supporters of the Government policy, *vis-à-vis* the Assyrians. When the exodus to Syria took place about 50 men left Simmel. They were mostly of the Diz section, and are now interned in Syria.

On August 8th Kurdish tribes commenced looting the Assyrian villages lying five or six miles north of Simmel. All the men of these villages, who had all along been the strongest supporters of the Mar Shimun, had gone to Syria, leaving their families behind. The next day large numbers of Arabs from the right bank of the Tigris began to cross the river with the intention of looting the Assyrian villages on the left bank. The villagers were naturally alarmed. At first the tribes looted the livestock of the Assyrian villages, in spite of the efforts of the police to prevent them. Fear among the villagers increased, and on August 9th and 10th they fled to Simmel, hoping to find protection under the Police Post. On August 8th the Qaimaqum of Zahko, with a small part of the army, had come to Simmel and advised the Assyrians to hand in their rifles. He said that he was afraid that some incident might occur, and that it would be better if they had no arms. He assured them that they would be quite safe under the protection of the Police Post. On August 9th the army came again and took away the rifles of the villagers who had come in from outside. The next day, August 10th, passed quietly. Most of the Assyrians remained near the Police Post, which is situated on a high mound. Arabs and Kurds were seen looting the grain from the threshing floors. The police, owing to their inadequate numbers, could do nothing to prevent this.

Early on the morning of August 11th the Arab villagers from Simmel left the village, driving their sheep with them. They had been warned. Shortly afterwards tribesmen entered the village and commenced looting the houses. After about two hours they left. A little later, about 8 a.m., the police sergeant told the Assyrians, who had come in from the surrounding villages, that they must leave Simmel. They protested that this was unsafe, whereupon the sergeant told them to go down from the Police Post into the Assyrian houses in the village. While the Assyrians, who were now in a state of panic, were obeying this order, some army troops on lorries and some motor machine guns arrived at Simmel. Suddenly, and without any warning, fire was opened by the troops. A number of casualties, including

four women killed, occurred before the Assyrians could take refuge inside the houses. The soldiers then entered the village. An officer, who has since been identified as Ismail Abbawi Tohalla of the Motor Machine Gun Company, then drove up in a car. He shouted to the soldiers not to kill the women and children, who were ordered to go up to the Police Post. Many of them did so. The soldiers then proceeded methodically to massacre all the men. In some cases machine guns were fired through the windows into the crowded rooms. In others the men were dragged out, shot, and their bodies thrown on to the pile of dead. A few men hid among the women, but these too were hunted out. The soldiers left the village at about 2 p.m., whereupon the tribes returned and completed the looting. The tribes had taken no part at all in the massacre. About 6 p.m. some of the soldiers returned. The police sergeant had sent word that about 20 Assyrian men had survived and were in the Police Post. These were then killed. The conduct of the police sergeant, who is an old Turkish gendarme, was, throughout, in marked contrast to that of the rest of the police, who, though powerless to prevent the slaughter, are testified by the Assyrian women to have given them every help possible.

The number of killed will never be accurately known, it was probably about 320. Among the men, six priests were killed, and Gabriel, the staunchest of the Government supporters, met the same fate. Four women and six young children were also killed and about twelve were wounded. All or practically all the killed were peaceful citizens, who had committed no offence whatever against the Government. They had come into Simmel to be under the protection of the Iraq flag which flew over the Police Post. They had no arms and no means of resistance. All these Assyrians had taken no part in the Yacu adventure.

Terrible though the account of this massacre is, the aftermath was as terrible. The army buried and burnt the corpses the next day (August 12th). They did so, however, so badly that the stench from the bodies was overpowering. A thousand terrified, weeping women and children who had seen all their male relatives killed before their eyes were crowded into the Police Post. In this atmosphere they lived without food and with little water until August 15th. For, incredible as it may appear, the administrative authorities did not realise the full horror of what had occurred until the Minister of the Interior himself visited Simmel; not indeed with the intention of inquiring into the massacre, but in order personally to see the condition of the women

and children who had the evening before been reported to be starving. It was another two days before the women were removed from Simmel and sent to Dohuk and thence to Mosul.

This massacre, though the worst which took place, was by no means unique. At Dohuk and the neighbouring villages men, in three cases priests, were taken out of their houses by the army. They were shot in batches.

It had been difficult to ascertain with any accuracy the number of Assyrians who lost their lives. The Assyrians themselves claimed that nearly 2000 had been killed. The local Iraqi officials at first talked of about 1000. My own inquiries have, however, led me to consider that not more than 600 were killed. Of these not more than 20 could, by any stretch of imagination, have been said to have been killed in action. The army killed in cold blood over 500 others, and perhaps 50 lost their lives at the hands of the Kurds. Here I must say that the Kurds, on the whole, behaved much better than was expected, especially in view of the encouragement to murder and loot which they had received. They were guilty of a bad massacre at a place named Savora, where 20 Assyrians were murdered in cold blood, and of vile atrocities at Qalla Badri, where some women were killed in horrible circumstances. Much treachery was shown in the looting of friendly villages—the Yezidis, too, were guilty in this respect. On the other hand, there were instances of Kurdish Aghas protecting women and children, and sometimes men as well. Fortunately the presence of an exceptionally able and strong Qaimaqum in Amadiyah prevented much trouble there. The still more distant Assyrians in Aqra, Zibar, and Rowanduz were also unaffected. The civil authorities, where they were not terrorised by the army, behaved, with one or two exceptions, reasonably well. The police were guilty of much omission and were often hopelessly weak and incompetent, but neither the regular nor the newly-recruited irregular police committed many crimes. These were the work of the army.

It had been stated at different times and by different people—the Iraqi delegates at Geneva for instance—that these excesses merited and had received their condemnation. Actually, the officers responsible were praised and promoted. Bekir Sidky, who was in command, on his arrival in Baghdad drove through the streets sitting on the right hand of the Prime Minister amid the plaudits of an enthusiastic crowd. However much responsible Iraqis may deplore these excesses—and in private many of them expressed their genuine disgust—no one has made any official

announcement to declare that the army behaved otherwise than well.

I must say a word about the looting. In all there were sixty-four Assyrian villages in the Qodhas of Dohuk and Sheihkan. Of these 60 were looted. Of course the degree of looting varied considerably. Six villages were entirely burnt out, in many others the houses were destroyed by the wooden roof beams being destroyed. The household effects were all looted except the more portable, in the few cases where the villagers had some warning and were able to flee. Most of the live-stock and most of the grain was looted. The losses of the Assyrians must have exceeded £50,000 and were quite possibly twice as much. As with the killed, the heaviest sufferers were innocent Assyrians who had taken no part whatever in the Yacu venture and who had been loyal supporters of the Government. The Iraq Government promised compensation, and indeed the following telegram from the Iraq Minister of Foreign Affairs was published in the English newspapers of August 20th :

" There was some trivial looting in certain villages evacuated by families of the rebels, but the Government restored the stolen goods to their owners, and indemnified the people whose property it was impossible to recover. There is no truth in the reports of the burning of villages, but a few insignificant outbreaks of fire occurred in deserted villages. The whole damage does not exceed a few pounds in each village."

This statement was a travesty of the facts, as indeed were practically all the official statements from Iraq sources. Nor has the Government yet taken any serious steps to compensate these innocent Assyrians for their losses. In about twelve villages the roofs were repaired, a few sheep were returned, but taking it as a whole, much less than 5 per cent. of the loot has been recovered, and this though it is quite well known where much of the loot is. I reported again and again that nothing was being done, but I quite failed to get anything done. Eventually a British Land Settlement officer was sent up to help, but his terms of reference were limited, nor have any of his recommendations been carried out. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Assyrian villagers had refused to sow. I did my best to persuade them, whenever I visited the villages, but I met with little success. The villagers were cowed and dispirited. They were living on the borderland of starvation, as the very small sums which had been distributed by the Iraq Government were totally inadequate. They had been disarmed, whereas upwards of 1000

rifles had been distributed among the Kurds, and they were afraid to leave their houses. After several months a few rifles have now been returned to people who had been quite unjustifiably disarmed. But these are not enough. There is no confidence had been partly and twenty-three fully reoccupied.

This account is sufficiently gloomy, but it is only fair to say that the stories of daily murders of Assyrians are untrue. After August 20th, when it may be said that things began to return to normal, up to November 10th there were five separate murders of Assyrians. In no case were the murderers caught. Petty thefts of animals are certainly common, and despite the establishment of thirteen temporary Police Posts, are likely to continue. A normal state of public security can hardly be expected to return at once.

The one bright spot is the refugee camp at Mosul. This has been run with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of fuss by Major Thompson. He had at first to be as firm with Iraqi officialdom as with the refugees. And here it must be said that what little has been done in the way of relief has only been done on the pressing insistence of British officials. The Iraqi officials were callous to a degree. There has been a steady population of 1550 women and children in this camp, which costs about £200 a week to maintain. Of these women and children about 600 have relations amongst the internees in Syria, the remainder have no male relations left. Apart from these refugees the R.A.F. took to Baghdad upwards of 800 dependents of the serving Levy soldiers. In this humanitarian work the A.O.C. met with every possible hindrance from the Iraq Government. The A.O.C. also lent a doctor to the refugee camp, and this doctor did most excellent work.

The reactions of these events on the town were naturally great. There was much excitement in Baghdad, and offers of help, perhaps not all of them very sincere, poured in from all over the country. For a moment there was an appearance of national unity and indeed the Assyrian peril, as it was called, served to put an end to the Shiah-Sunni strife, which during the summer had shown signs of becoming really serious. The exuberant demonstrations which took place in Baghdad on the return of the so-called victorious army were largely artificial. They had been organised by the Cabinet with the double purpose of im-

pressing foreigners and of impressing the King, for, as I have noted earlier, the Cabinet had greatly resented the King's attempts at interference during the summer and feared that now he might show weakness. The Cabinet intended to make it clear that he would suffer if he did. In Kirkuk, too, where the memories of the 1924 Levy outbreak still rankled, there was much excitement, but the authorities were able to maintain order.

It was naturally in Mosul, a town of 100,000 people, 10,000 of them Christian, that the most serious reaction took place. Mosul had had far more to do with the Assyrians than Baghdad and disliked and feared them. There were two critical periods. The first was on the receipt of the news of the fighting at Dairabun. Feeling in this fanatical town was at once aroused, and was further inflamed by a violent press campaign in which Assyrians, British and French were all attacked. Anti-British feeling was very strong. The British were accused of helping the Assyrians and British aeroplanes were said to have dropped food and ammunition on them. The British Inspecting Officer of Police, whose name, curiously enough, was Sargon, was the object of particularly bitter attacks, and was transferred, on the nominal grounds that his life was in danger, but really because he was not trusted. When it was realised that the Assyrians had failed to defeat the army, excitement grew less, and there was less danger of an outbreak in the town, but the respite was short. As the news of the Simmel and other massacres spread it was expected by everyone, Moslem and Christian alike, that intervention was certain, either by Great Britain or by the League. For whatever may be said of the meaning of the words "Moral responsibility," the Iraqi knew that the Assyrians had claimed to be the friends of the British, and had loyally served them in the Levies. They could hardly doubt that the British would come to their aid. But such intervention would threaten the newly-gained independence of Iraq. It must be averted at any cost. The best weapon was the threat of massacre of Christians in the north. Such a threat was not directed against Christians because of their religion but because it was thought that they were politically the weak link in the national unity. Such massacres would put in the shade those which had just occurred. Nor was this an idle threat. The Minister of Interior himself said to me: "If there is any outside interference or demand for revenge, far worse will take place than has already happened." In consequence, the passions of the mob were deliberately inflamed, and for some days the situation was extremely critical. A small incident might have brought about a general massacre. This state of affairs continued

until it was known that no intervention was intended. The British Ambassador had returned to Baghdad on August 23rd. The King had returned on August 2nd, but he was a very sick and a very tired man. There is little doubt that all this killed him. My personal opinion is that any intervention or any attempt to force a League inquiry might have precipitated a massacre. This risk had to be avoided. Any action by any outside power would have come too late to avoid much loss of life or property. But it does seem that some diplomatic pressure might have been brought to bear on the Iraq Government to carry out an inquiry of its own. It might well have been told that the accounts of the massacres, which had been published in the papers of the world, had blackened the good name of Iraq. To clear its name, an inquiry was essential, and if the charges were proved, the guilty persons could be punished. At first such an inquiry would have been impracticable but later on it might have been possible. For the Iraq army is rent by internal dissensions and a large part of it expressed its indignation at the massacres and the promotion of the officers concerned therein.

I must say something of the future of the Assyrians. It is clear that anyone who wishes to leave must be able to do so. A special committee have been appointed by the League of Nations to try to find a place for them to go to. It is obvious that this will not be easy. Apart from anything else the financial question is difficult. One of the places suggested is Parana in Brazil. It has, I understand, been estimated that the cost of transport and settlement would be about £120 per family. Say that 4000 families wished to leave: this would mean nearly half a million pounds. The Iraq Government has promised to assist to the utmost of its financial ability. No sum has been mentioned, but I have not heard anyone suggest that this can be more than £100,000. And in passing I must remark that even when I left Baghdad early in December, murmurs were heard of objections to providing any money at all. The Assyrians themselves, or those who were not looted, might pay something, but £50,000 would be an outside figure from this source. Who is going to find the balance of £350,000?

I have stated above that 4000 families would probably have to be moved. That is to say practically all the Assyrians now in Iraq. The Mar Shimun will naturally advise his followers to move, and his followers are probably, at least, two-thirds of the whole. But his opponents are equally anxious to go. Just before I left Mosul, Khoshaba, who may be termed the leader of the anti-Mar Shimun party, told me that he realised that the

Assyrians would never obtain such satisfactory agricultural conditions as they possessed in Iraq, but, in view of what happened, it was quite impossible for them to remain. He said, emphatically, however, that he was not prepared to settle in the same country as Mar Shimun. When it comes to the point, and when the first shock of last summer's tragedies is over, it is just possible that some will wish to remain, but I do not think that they will be many. It is, therefore, to be hoped that fresh homes will be found, and the financial difficulties overcome as soon as possible.

In the meantime the position of the Assyrians in Dohuk and Sheihkan Qodhas, and indeed in Mosul town itself, is serious. Most of them lost nearly everything they possessed. They are living on the charity of their more fortunate friends. But this charity will soon dry up. I venture to suggest that the appointment to Mosul of a representative of the League of Nations with a watching brief is advisable until such time as the Assyrians can be moved. The former objections to such an appointment are no longer valid.

I have endeavoured to give as clear an account as possible of what happened last summer. Could these tragic events have been avoided? With an extremely difficult, suspicious and truculent people like the Assyrians on the one hand, and hot-headed and ill-experienced Iraqi officialdom on the other, it appears that a clash was inevitable. It is easy to be wise after the event, but it is hard to avoid the impression, that in giving up the Mandate with the Assyrian question still unsettled, a very grave risk was taken. It is certainly not clear why operations against Sheikh Ahmed of Barzan were undertaken in 1932, in the course of which British aeroplanes were forced to drop delayed action bombs on Kurdish villages, while the infinitely more serious Assyrian problem was left unsettled. For the Assyrian problem was not only one of land settlement. It was essentially political.

British prestige in Iraq certainly, and probably throughout the Middle East as well, has suffered a severe blow. The dwellers in Iraq, rightly or wrongly, think that we have let down our friends. A few Iraqi politicians pay lip service to the assistance which we gave them at Geneva, but the rank and file are frankly contemptuous. During the last three months that I was in Mosul no Christian and very few Moslems would willingly visit the British Consul, myself, or any other British official. They feared to be tarred with the brush of being friends of the British. It was difficult to blame them, for it could hardly be expected that they should understand the enormous difficulties which the

British Government had encountered in its attempts to settle this difficult problem.

Summary of Discussion.

BRIG.-GENERAL SIR PERCY SYKES sketched a balance sheet of the services rendered by the Assyrians to the Allies and by the British to the Assyrians. At the beginning of the War the Assyrians joined in with Russia and indirectly helped the Allies a good deal. In 1918, when General Dunsterville led his men to Hamadan and towards the Caspian Sea, the Assyrians protected his lines of communication and rendered valuable service by preventing spies from getting through. In return, in July-August 1918, when the Assyrians had to leave their homes, they were saved from extermination at the hands of Turks and Kurds by the amazingly gallant action of the 14th Hussars. At Baqubah the refugee camp cost the British a great deal of money, but in 1920, when the Arab rebellion broke out, the services of the Assyrians were so valuable that Sir Elmer Haldane, who commanded, said that their valour saved the British forces, and Sir Arnold Wilson, the chief civil authority in Mesopotamia at the time, agreed. It must be remembered that the Assyrians were made unpopular in the countryside by reason of the prestige pumped into them by British officers.

He deeply deplored the idea of terminating the Iraq Mandate without having settled the Assyrian question and his view was shared by the members of the Royal Central Asian Society, of which he was Honorary Secretary. The members of the League of Nations Commission which laid down the frontier between Turkey and Iraq were simple people who did not understand Oriental mentality and believed the Turkish assurances that the Assyrians could go back and live at Hakkari. The Assyrians who tried to return had to run for their lives. The Commissioners definitely laid it down that the Assyrians must be given a homogeneous settlement, and naturally that was what the Mar Shimun claimed. He had certainly not been given a "square deal" at Baghdad.

With regard to the future of the Assyrians, they were very tiresome, like all primitive people, and he felt sure they would not get a square deal outside the British Empire. He had been instrumental in an attempt to bring the question before the Canadian Government, pointing out that the Assyrians were a pastoral and agricultural people, and devoted to the British. There were between ten and fifteen thousand of them happily settled in Illinois and Wisconsin and he was convinced they would make loyal Canadian citizens.¹ As for the question of money, the Nansen Committee had settled thirty thousand Armenians in Syria and had been repaid 98 per cent. of the money expended. He believed the same thing could be done for a hard-working people like the Assyrians.

¹ Sir Percy Sykes had previously consulted the Mar Shimun and found him strongly in favour of Canada, both as securing for the Assyrians a fair deal and because of its proximity to the Assyrians settled in the United States.

CANON W. A. WIGRAM emphasised the fact that promises were definitely made by the British to the Assyrians, first of their own home, and when that proved impossible of a home of their own, and valuable services were accepted from the Assyrians, given on the strength of those promises. The British were therefore bound in honour to redeem their word. Secondly, when Great Britain relinquished the Mandate, for her own convenience, fifteen years before the allotted time, she assured the world that the people of Iraq were civilised and tolerant, and thereby took the moral responsibility if the Iraqi failed to keep the pledges given on their behalf. With regard to the cost of settling the Assyrians in the British Empire or elsewhere, this was estimated at half a million; Great Britain's annual expenditure was eight hundred million, and to say she could not afford it was as if a man with a thousand a year refused to pay 12s. 6d. for damage done by a revolver which he had himself put in the hands of an irresponsible boy.

The Mar Shimun had been accused of claiming temporal power, but all that this meant in his mouth was that if the Assyrians, being primitive and ignorant tribesmen, found themselves oppressed, though bound to obey the law of the land and the officials of the land, they might be allowed to ask the Mar Shimun to intercede for them with the government authorities. Was such power dangerous to any State? The Mar Shimun had been kept under arrest at Baghdad when the people were still being told that they had to accept the government terms and had then been deported from the country by virtue of an *ex post facto* law. Was that treatment likely to make hot-headed highlanders sympathetic towards a government they suspected already?

The fact that the British had taken services from the Assyrians and had not given them a square deal reverberated throughout the whole of the East. Was it to be said that Great Britain used a small nation as long as it was convenient to her and then left them defenceless in the hands of those who hated them just because of the services they had given to her?

CANON J. A. DOUGLAS said that he appreciated Colonel Stafford's frank avowals and obvious impartiality which were in accordance with the finest tradition of British officials in the Near East. He happened to know that though at times Colonel Stafford had had difficulties with the Assyrian leaders, he possessed the Mar Shimun's respect, good-will and confidence. He (Canon Douglas) only desired to put a question to Colonel Stafford. Mar Shimun had more or less made his house his headquarters since he came as a youth of seventeen to England in 1925 and had been staying with him since he came to London in early November. He thought that he knew Mar Shimun's character and mind. In the public Press and in official documents it had been stated again and again that Mar Shimun had demanded "temporal power" for himself, for his own aggrandisement and that

of the Patriarchal Family. Even Lord Hailsham appeared to have made that suggestion in the House of Lords. Before leaving Cyprus Mar Shimun had been required to give his parole that he would indulge in no propaganda. In consequence he was precluded from defending himself against this injurious suggestion. He (Canon Douglas) had studied all the documents very carefully and had been unable to discover what was this "temporal power" for having demanded which Mar Shimun was arraigned. The Shariat or Sacred Law of Islam laid it down that Christians should be allowed communal life under their spiritual leaders, should have their *statuts personnels* and so forth administered by them and that those spiritual leaders should be their spokesmen. In asking for this Mar Shimun had asked for nothing for himself. He had only asked for what as Orthodox Moslems King Feisal and the Ulema of Iraq, in which the Shariat obtains, must have admitted to be the right of the Assyrians. He or rather the Assyrians had asked for no more than Great Britain gives the Moslem communities of India and Cyprus, or the Greek and Yugoslav States give their Moslem communities, or the Egyptian State gives the Copts and Greek Orthodox. So far from asking for "temporal power" in any usual sense of that term, Mar Shimun had declared his readiness to be a loyal subject of King Feisal and his desire that the Assyrians should become good citizens of the Iraqi State. It was true that Mar Shimun had asked that the League of Nations should guarantee the above communal rights to the Assyrians until such time as the needlessness of that guarantee became evident. But he had expressed himself always as regarding the need for that guarantee as provisional. Could Colonel Stafford quote any demand made by Mar Shimun himself for what could be described as "temporal power"?

COLONEL STAFFORD said he did not think anybody knew what was meant by "temporal power" though everybody used the expression. One point on which the Mar Shimun clashed with the Iraq authorities was the appointment of the tribal *maliks*; the Government thought they should appoint them and the Mar Shimun thought he should. In fact it was an honorary title and not an appointment at all. In the National Pact of 1932 there was a definite demand for a semi-independent Assyrian State in the north of Iraq; though the Assyrians would consent to have an Arab governor and a British adviser, the administrative appointments were all to be reserved for Assyrians. Another demand was that the temporal, as well as the religious authority of the Mar Shimun should be officially recognised.

A MEMBER said that allotting the blame would not help anyone. There were two obstacles in the way of moving the Assyrians, finance and the Assyrians themselves. The question of location was not so great a difficulty. Armenians, Greeks and Turks had been successfully moved in masses under financially remunerative conditions, and if the Assyrians were supplied with the means of developing the land they would be an asset to any of the Dominions, as they were not bad

agriculturists. It would be a great pity if they were moved out of the Empire. Brazil was not likely to prove a satisfactory home for them and it would be most unfortunate if they were given any further chance of blaming anybody for their misfortunes. Labrador and Newfoundland were both not unsuited to the Assyrians. The Nansen Committee would organise the move if certain that the British and Iraq Governments meant to help, and no doubt they would as they wanted the problem out of the way. Then the future of the Assyrians would depend on themselves.

MR. JOSEPH NISSIM contended that a judicial inquiry should be held on the rights and wrongs of the massacre of the Assyrians. The Iraq Government had given solemn undertakings as to the security of minorities and yet the people who brought about the massacre had been treated as heroes. Could not the League of Nations be moved by the British Government to request that Iraq agree to an early inquiry by the Hague Tribunal? If Iraq declined, the League would have power to act, and if it consented, something would have been done to secure against a repetition of such atrocities. The question of the future of the remnant of the Assyrians was a separate matter. Investigation should not be put off.

MR. W. A. YOUNG said the deplorable incident raised the question whether it was not a mistake, from the point of view of British prestige, to place British officials in a position where they gave advice but had no power to see that their advice was carried out. They were regarded by the rank and file as representing all Britain stood for; yet they themselves were powerless to see that the principles for which Great Britain stood were maintained.

MAJOR-GENERAL H. ROWAN ROBINSON said that whatever might be the technical position the whole world regarded the treatment of minorities in Iraq as Great Britain's special responsibility. Yet when it came to implementing that responsibility, British advice was not taken and the British advisers could do nothing. That was very lowering to British self-respect and prestige. Was a similar position to be allowed to arise in the future? If the Assyrians were not expatriated, and if they and the Kurds gave trouble, there might be further atrocities, and the same loss of prestige would result again. It seemed advisable, therefore, to change the terms of the Treaty with Iraq, in order that a repetition of such events might be avoided.

THE CHAIRMAN, in closing the meeting, said that the important thing was to find a national home for the Assyrians and he agreed that it would be disastrous if they were sent somewhere which proved unsuitable. Canada seemed much more promising than Brazil. He was uncertain as to whether the majority of the Assyrians were prepared to leave Iraq. Certainly if they were sent to Brazil or Canada they should be supplied with the means to establish themselves properly, and in his opinion the British and Iraq Governments should be prepared to provide the necessary funds.