



HIS HOLINESS THE PATRIARCH'S HISTORIC VISIT TO IRAQ

All the Assyrians are acquainted to some extent, depending on the time in which they were born and their proximity to the events either in distance or actual relationship thereto, which led to the act of denationalization and expulsion from Iraq of His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII Catholicos Patriarch of the East some thirty seven years ago.

This is not the place to go into the tragic history of the Assyrian people during the First and Second World wars, or during the intervening years, and the value of these services to the Allied cause in general and the British in particular, but rather to point out the fact that the fate of the Assyrian nation was decided upon without its consent or knowledge in a conference held in Tiflis, Russia, in 1914 between the representatives of the four great Allied powers, Great Britain, the United States, Russia and France, and at which it was decided that the small Assyrian nation, then living in the mountains of Kurdistan, Turkey and around Lake Urmi, must be drawn into the conflict. The American representative on the occasion was the Reverend Dr. William A. Shedd who combined the profession of the Presbyterian Mission in Urmi with that of the American Vice Consul.

The far reaching value of the services rendered by the Assyrians to the Allied cause in general and the British in particular (who were later to occupy the theatre of the conflict where the Assyrians were located and therefore, make the fullest use possible of them) and the manner in which the Assyrians were betrayed, by the Allies in general and the British in particular, has already been recorded by various historians.

But it is hoped that a more complete narrative of these tragic events which are correlated, especially from the beginning of the 19th century (the events leading to what has been referred to as the massacre of Bederkhanbeg) which showed very clearly the pattern of the British Foreign Office policy regarding the Assyrians and hence, the successive tragedies and untold suffering caused to this first Christian Church and nation as the result of that policy, will be recorded fully by an Assyrian possessing a true and unbiased knowledge of these events.

It may be said that the Assyrians are not only victims of that policy and that the existing bitter conflict in the Middle East is of the same source and origin. How true!

But this did not help the unfortunate Assyrians. To the contrary it has made it more difficult of the local governments

created after the First World War, and now independent, to give any serious attention or study the Assyrian question in its proper historical context!

This was the situation until the present Iraqi Government decided to study seriously the Assyrian question leading to the denationalization and deportation of His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII Catholicos Patriarch of the East without a trial.

DEPORTATION FROM IRAQ

We are not going into the tragic events known as the "Semel massacre" nor its far reaching political aspects, but just to say that it was at this time that on a very hot day in July, in Baghdad, where His Holiness was at the time under house arrest, that the British acting Ambassador, (the Ambassador himself, Sir Francis Humphreys, being at the time fishing in Norway) Mr. George Ogilvie Forbs, (later knighted and appointed counsellor to the British Embassy in Berlin, during the Hitlerite Regime) called His Holiness to the Embassy and informed him that "His Britannic Majesty's Government had decided to take him to the Island of Cyprus, until the existing situation had quieted down. About two or three days later a written order from the Minister Of Interior was brought to the Patriarch by a policeman denationalizing him, and the actual act of deportation was carried out by the Air Marshal, Burnette, in a British military plane. Thus the "existing situation" which was supposed to take no more than two or three months was to last thirty-seven years!

THE FINAL BLOW

During the last thirty-seven years of his exile, His Holiness has appealed many times to the British Foreign Office, either directly, or through His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had presented himself a champion of the Assyrian cause, to either visit his spiritual flock in Iraq or be permitted to meet with

his bishops (who were then all in Iraq) in order to discuss the sad state of the Church of the East, but all without avail. Since a meeting in Iraq was dearly impossible, the Patriarch requested that a meeting with his bishops be permitted in some other country considered most favourable from the British point of view, and the names of Island of Cyprus or England were especially mentioned, but this also was not acceptable to the British Foreign Office.

It is well known that all during the period of the royalist regime in Iraq, the British influence was predominant, and the Iraqi Government was not more than a "Rubber stamp Government;" nevertheless, according to the instructions of the Foreign Office, given to His Holiness through the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Patriarch appealed also directly to the Iraqi Government, but alas! There was not even an acknowledgement of these communications.

About two years ago this seemingly endless, tragic situation was worsened by the exportation of the suspended metropolitan of the Church of the East in India, Mr. Mansour Darmo, and the seizure of all the Churches and Church properties in Iraq, and which was handed over to Darmo and his small following led by a handful of unprincipled Assyrian members of the other Churches under the leadership of one Yosip Khoshaba, a member of the Presbyterian Church and ardent hater of the Holy Church of the East.

The readers of the Light From The East already acquainted with the details of this story, especially the part which certain supposedly, Christian Churches, played in this inhuman and tragic plot against the Holy Church of the East, from the answer which was given by the "Church of the East Committee on Iraqi Situation" to the deliberate false reports circulated widely by the Secretariat of the World Council of Churches, and it is not therefore necessary to repeat these facts.



His Holiness being received at Beirut Airport by the Honourable Shahib Shahab, representing the President of Lebanon.

AN ACT OF PROVIDENCE

Thus, the tragedy which had befallen this Church and Nation at the outbreak of the First World War, seemed now to be complete, and its enemies made no secret of their jubilation, completely forgetting the oft-repeated maxim "Man proposes, but God disposes."

This was indeed an act of God! The situation seemed so hopeless, that the only and wisest course was considered to be to do nothing about it except through prayer to entrust it into the hands of the Almighty.

The day before last Christmas a young Assyrian, Ammanuel Scopila who had just arrived from Iraq, presented to His Holiness a letter from His Grace Mar yosip Khannishoo, Metropolitan of Rustaqa and

Patriarchal Representative in Iraq, informing His Holiness that on a visit to His Excellency, Ahmad Hassan Al-Baker, President of the Republic of Iraq, for Eeed Al-Rammadan (the Moslem feast), His Excellency had opened the subject of the Church in Iraq. The Metropolitan had assured the President that His Holiness had always in all his epistles exhorted the Assyrians to be loyal to any country that they are living in.

The President suggested such an individual letter from His Holiness to the Assyrians of Iraq, and the Metropolitan promised to convey the message to the Patriarch without delay.

Accordingly, His Holiness was more than happy to send such a message to the Assyrian community in Iraq along with a

