MOSLEM EDUCATION IN SYRIA.

(Before the War.)

It was only with the opening years of the nineteenth century that the need of reform in all departments of state began to make itself felt in Turkey. With regard to education, the Arabs of Syria were in a woeful state, in spite of the glorious heritage which was more directly theirs than it was their masters, the Turks. For we must not forget that the Turks in originally adopting Islam had had to learn sufficient Arabic to read the Koran, and in learning the religious texts had had to depend on the 'Ulema who alone could expound to them the laws and dogmas of Islam. These 'Ulema consisted of the few who carried on the traditions of learning through the centuries from the glorious times of Harun-al-Rashid and Ma'mun. Their studies were confined on the one hand to grammar, lexicography, prosody, and rhetoric, and on the other to the interpretation of the Koran and the traditions, with the whole system of jurisprudence that was based on the Koran. The theological motive was the main one in all this study, with the result that gradually interest in other branches of learning died out, and a dull uniformity of scholastic traditional method remained. We may say that the population of the empire at the outset of the nineteenth century consisted of two distinct classes—the great mass of the people who were ignorant, and the few who were included among the learned, who belonged in other words to the class of the 'Ulema.

Selim III. (1789-1807) had felt something of the need for reform in education, but only a few military schools were established in his reign; the reign of Mahmud II. (1808-1839) formed a transition period in Turkish history, when old laws, old customs, and old institutions were all more or less modified; it is, however, to the reign of 'Abd-al-Mejid (1839-1861) that we must turn

for the first serious attempt on the part of the government to take in hand and put in motion educational reform. Up till then there had been no government control of education, everything practically being in the hands of the 'Ulema. Their mosque schools or Medrasehs, the representatives of the ancient higher learning of the Arabs, and the Mektabehs or elementary schools, representing the old primary system of Moslem education, had dragged on a weary existence through the centuries, and were still at the beginning of the nineteenth century the only channels for educational progress.¹ Speaking of education in Egypt during his sojourn there in 1833-35, Edward W. Lane tells us that parents seldom devoted much time to the intellectual training of their children, generally contenting themselves with instilling into their young minds a few principles of religion, and then submitting them to the instruction of a schoolmaster. Most of the children of the higher and middle classes and some of those of the lower orders were taught to read, and to recite and chant the whole or certain portions of the Koran by memory. Afterwards they learnt the most common rules of arithmetic. "All who are learning to read, recite or chant their lessons aloud, at the same time rocking their heads or bodies incessantly backwards and forwards. . . . The noise may be imagined. The boys first learn the letters of the alphabet; next, the vowel points and other orthographical marks; and then, the numerical value of each letter of the alphabet. . . . It is seldom that the master of a school teaches writing; and few boys learn to write unless destined for some employment which absolutely requires that they should do so. . . . The schoolmasters in Egypt are mostly persons of very little learning; few of them are acquainted with any writings except the Koran, and certain prayers, which, as well as the contents of the sacred volume, they are hired to recite

¹ Educational reform had begun in Egypt as early as 1811 under Mohammed 'Ali; by 1824 training schools in various departments were initiated, and during the ten years when he annexed Syria (1831-41) education had reached the first stage of consolidation.

on particular occasions."² This may be taken as descriptive not only of elementary education in Egypt in the early decades of last century but of Syria as well, and one might add, has continued to be the condition of things until now in those parts of Turkey where the influence of the West has not been strongly felt. In such schools corporal punishment was a daily occurrence, being considered indispensable. After six or seven years of that training most of the children began to learn some trade, only the few who could afford it being taken to the mosque school in order to go on in the higher studies of language and theology: from this latter class were recruited naturally the ranks of the 'Ulema.

With Sultan 'Abd-al-Mejid began the struggle to free education from the control of the 'Ulema and place it under government control. In 1845 a commission was appointed to draw up a programme for general education, and the following year saw the first imperial announcement regarding the systematization of schools and the substitution of State for 'Ulema control.³ Ten years later, in 1856, the famous edict—the Hatti Humayun—was promulgated, containing the following educational reforms: "In towns . . . where different sects are mingled together, each community inhabiting a district quarter shall . . . have equal power to repair and improve . . . its schools. When there is the question of erection of new buildings the necessary authority must be asked for through the medium of the Patriarchs and heads of the communities from my Sublime Porte. All subjects of my empire without exception shall be received into the civil and military schools of the government if they otherwise satisfy the conditions as to age and examination

² Cf. Edward W. Lane: *The Modern Egyptians*, vol. 1, p. 91 f.

With regard to higher learning in Egypt, he adds (vol II, p. 18): "Learning, indeed, has much declined among the Arabs universally; but least in Cairo: consequently the fame of the professors of this city still remains unrivalled: and its great collegiate mosque, the Azhar, continues to attract innumerable students from every part of the Moslem world." It is to Al-Azhar that those must resort who purpose devoting themselves to religious employments or to any of the learned professions, having previously learned nothing more than to read, and perhaps to write, and to recite the Koran.

³ The Rushdiyyeh schools were founded at this time, but only after 1860 did they become common in the different provinces of the Empire.

which are specified in the organic regulations of the said schools. Moreover every community is authorized to establish public schools of science, art and industry. Only the method of instruction and the choice of professors in schools of this class shall be under control of a mixed Council of Public Instruction, the members of which shall be named by my sovereign command." This first edict of reform gives us a glimpse of the far-reaching nature of the government's ideals regarding education; it formed the first step towards government control of all the schools of every religion and towards the official recognition of the educational rights of all Ottoman subjects. The ideal had by 1914, after almost sixty years, not yet been realized. Government schools have all along been mainly frequented by Moslems only. The official educational law of the Turkish Empire, however, was not published until 1869 in the reign of 'Abd-al-'Aziz (1861-1876). By his Imperial Irade the following provisions for education were set forth:

- (1) Each village shall have at least one elementary school; in towns of more than 500 families an elementary school of a higher grade shall be established.
- (2) Each town of more than 1,000 shall have a secondary school, and the capital of each province a Lycée.
- (3) At Constantinople there shall be an Imperial University and a great Council of Education.⁴

For some years there was little done to put these provisions into effect, but the reign of 'Abd-al-Hamid (1876-1908) saw efforts put forth to develop higher grade schools, not only in the capital but also in the provinces, and since the constitution was proclaimed in 1908 until 1914, one of the main tasks of the Young Turkey party was ostensibly to further realize the provisions of this law and spread education over the whole empire. With the incidence of the Great War and its results, the government educational system, as far as Syria is concerned, has been

⁴ Cf. *Al-Kulliyeh*, vol. 4, No. 5: "*Ma'arif fil-Mamalik al-Othmaniyyeh*," by Professor Bulus Khauli.

shattered, but the following pages will reveal the nature of the attempts made up till that time.

According to the above law of 1869,⁵ two classes of schools were distinguished:

- (1) Public or Government schools (*les écoles publiques*) which were under the direct administration of the government.
- (2) Private schools (*les écoles libres*) which were under the general surveillance of the government, but founded and controlled directly by private individuals or by communities. These included all the foreign schools.

The final authority in all educational matters was the Imperial Council of Public Instruction at Constantinople, presided over by the Minister of Public Instruction, but in the capitals of the different wilayehs there were subordinate or provincial Councils, whose business it was to see to the carrying out of all instructions from the central department of public instruction, and the general surveillance of all schools within their respective spheres.⁶

Three grades may be distinguished in the government schools, viz., Elementary, Secondary, and Advanced.

- (1) Under the name Elementary, we must distinguish a lower and a higher grade—(a) the lower primary school (*Ibtida'iyeh*), and (b) the higher primary school (*Rushdiyyeh*).

Every village was to have at least one primary school, but this was never fully carried out. Larger places had more according to the population. No fees were charged, the community being responsible for expenses incurred. The course usually covered three years⁷ and the entrance age was about six.

The curriculum was as follows:

First year:—Alphabet, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Religious Instruction.

Second year:—Koranic and other reading, Religious Instruction, Writing, Arithmetic, Elements of Islamic History and Geography.

⁵ This law has never been fully put in force and modifications have since been made in many of its provisions.

⁶ Cf. Geo. Young: "*Corps de droit ottoman*," vol. II, pp. 365 ff. More recent regulations provided for provincial councils also at each of the *Lewas* or *Mutasarrifiyehs* and the *Kadas* or *Kaimmakamiyehs*.

⁷ The law of 1869 laid down four years for the primary schools.

Third year:—Koran, with proper Enunciation, Religious Instruction, Catechism, Moral Maxims, Turkish Grammar, Elements of Ottoman History and Geography.⁸

The language of instruction in the lower primary schools was the vernacular—which means Arabic, as far as Syria is concerned. The instruction was compulsory for boys and girls alike, the latter, however, being taught in a separate room or in a separate building. According to the law of 1869 only female teachers were to be allowed to teach girls, but until such could be forthcoming male teachers “of a mature age and approved morality” were allowed to teach in girls’ schools. A great deal of time was spent in memorizing Suras of the Koran and giving religious instruction. The teacher’s method was to read the Sura or Section with the pupils and make them repeat it in unison until they could say it without a mistake in vowelling or enunciation.

As for the higher primary schools there was here also a course of study covering three years, and the language of instruction for Syria was the vernacular, i. e., Arabic, though a larger number of hours was devoted to the teaching of Turkish than in the lower primary schools. No fees were charged, expenses being paid out of the funds of the Provincial Council. The following was the three years’ curriculum:

- First year:—Koran, Religious Instruction, Catechism, Turkish Grammar, Reading, Elementary Science, Arabic Grammar, Arithmetic, Facts of Civilization and Morals, History of Islam, Geography.
- Second year:—Koran, Religious Instruction, Turkish Grammar, Reading, Elementary Science, Persian Grammar, Arabic Grammar, Exercises in Arithmetic, Elementary Geometry, Survey of Ottoman History, Geography, Facts of Civilization and Morals, French—Elementary Reading.
- Third year:—Koran, Religious Instruction, Turkish Accidence, Reading, Persian Grammar, Arithmetic, Practical Geometry, Survey of General History, General and Ottoman Geography, Facts of Civilization and Morals, French (*méthode rationnelle*).⁹

The scarcity of female teachers retarded the development of these higher primary schools as far as girls were

⁸ Cf. Al-Kulliyeh, *supra*.

⁹ Cf. G. Young: *supra*, p. 369. A four years’ course was at first set down for the Rushdiyyeh schools.

concerned, for they were often left in the hands of men well advanced in years; more recently, however, only female teachers were in charge of girls' primary schools. At the center of each Kaimmakamiyeh these schools were found, some centers having two—one for boys and one for girls. There were also such schools for both sexes at the center of each Mutasarrifiyeh, though the education of most girls ended with the lower primary school.

(2) We come to the second or higher grade of government schools, which we have called Secondary, and here again a subdivision has to be made, viz., (a) Preparatory schools (I'dadiyeh) and (b) Lycées (Sultaniyeh).

According to the law of 1869 preparatory schools were to be set up in towns with upwards of a thousand families, and a Lycée in the capital of each wilayah. These, however, were never definitely differentiated, the only Lycée properly so-called being that of Galata-Serai at Constantinople. This, at first a French institution, became later a Turkish institution and had a varied history, which however lies beyond the scope of our present purpose. The preparatory schools at the capital of each wilayah were latterly changed in name to Lycées throughout twelve wilayehs of the Empire, including those of Beirut and Aleppo in Syria. The curriculum of such preparatory or I'dadiyeh schools covered a period of seven years in large centers like Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus, but only five years in smaller centers as Hama, Jerusalem, Nablus, Acca, Tripoli, and Latakia. The raising of the status of the schools at Beirut and Aleppo by calling them Lycées was meant to give an opportunity for increasing the seven years' curriculum by two years to allow for advanced studies in French.^{10 11}

¹⁰ Cf. *Official Statistics of Government Education Department*: Constantinople, 1914. In Syria this seven years' course actually consisted of three years of Rushdiyyeh grade and four years of I'dadiyeh grade, while the five years' course implied three years of Rushdiyyeh grade and two years of I'dadiyeh.

¹¹ Cf. *Mitteilungen und Nachrichten des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*: 1907. When the I'dadiyeh school was founded in Jerusalem less than thirty years ago, there was under it properly only the Ibtida'iyyeh, but the last year (in this case the fourth year) of the Ibtida'iyyeh and the three first of the five years' course of the I'dadiyeh covered the Rushdiyyeh curriculum. The Government program which was to come into operation in 1905-6 included: (1) a three years' course in Ibtida'iyyeh; (2) a three years' course in Rushdiyyeh; and (3) a four years' course in I'dadiyeh.

According to the program of the Education Department for the year 1910-11, the following was to be the seven years' curriculum:

- First year:—Koran with proper Enunciation, Jurisprudence, Arithmetic, Elementary Science, Geography, History of the Prophets and of Islam, Arabic Accidence, Turkish, Writing.
- Second year:—Koran with proper Enunciation, Jurisprudence, Arithmetic, Geometry, Elementary Science, Geography, Survey of Ottoman History, Arabic Accidence, Persian, Turkish, French, Facts of Civilization, Writing.
- Third year:—Koran with proper Enunciation, Jurisprudence, Arithmetic, Geometry, Elementary Science, Geography, General History, Arabic Accidence, Persian, Turkish, French, Facts of Civilization, Writing.
- Fourth year:—Jurisprudence, Arithmetic, Geometry, Physics and Chemistry, Geography, General History, Arabic Syntax, Persian, Turkish, French, Elements of Ethics, Arabic Translation, Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian, Writing.
- Fifth year:—Jurisprudence, Geometry, Algebra, Natural History, Geography, General History, Arabic Syntax, Persian, Turkish, French, Bookkeeping, Elements of Ethics, Arabic Translation, Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian, Writing.
- Sixth year:—Jurisprudence, Geometry, Algebra, Trigonometry, Natural Philosophy and Mechanics, Chemistry, Zoology, Geography, General History, Arabic, Reading with Grammatical Rules, Turkish, French, Bookkeeping, Political Economy, Civil Law, Arabic translation and Poetry, Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian.
- Seventh year:—Catechism, Geometry, Astronomy, Natural Philosophy and Mechanics, Mineralogy, Botany, Geology, Hygiene, General History, Arabic Reading with Grammatical Rules, Turkish, French, Civil Law, Arabic Translation and Poetry, Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian.¹²

This program was of course for all the provinces of the Empire, and the languages taught in any particular school were to depend on the district and the needs. With regard to the language of instruction, provision was made for two kinds of preparatory schools—a Turkish I'dadiyeh (latterly known as a Sultaniyeh or Lycée) where the Turkish language was the medium of instruction, and an Arabic I'dadiyeh (latterly Sultaniyeh) with Arabic as the language of instruction. These were boarding schools,

¹² Cf. *Al-Kulliyeh*, vol. 4, No. 5.

but there were also preparatory day schools at the capital of each Mutasarrifiyeh. Next to Turkish and Arabic, in the Government plan, came French in importance, but English and German also found a place in some of the curricula, e. g., at Beirut. Nominally these preparatory schools (as also the higher primary) were open to all Ottoman subjects, but practically they were confined to Moslems, the few non-Moslems who attended being there in order to qualify for government positions. Fees were being charged in these schools—for tuition in the case of day or outside students, and for board and clothing in addition in the case of boarders or inside students.¹³ A system of "monitors" was followed in the boarding establishments, whose duties were to look after the inside students at their studies and in their dormitories. Punishments took the following forms, according to the gravity of the offence: (a) Verbal reproof; (b) detention after school with prescribed tasks; (c) no permission to leave school on a Friday, i. e., the Moslem Sunday; (d) public announcement in the school of the offender's name and the offence; (e) suspension from school for a period; (f) expulsion from school. Oral and written examinations were held and external examiners helped the teachers in conducting them. For a fortnight or more before any such examination teaching was brought to an end and all the time was devoted to reviewing the work covered. A passmark of 50 per cent. was necessary for the school certificate at the end of the course, which entitled one to enter the Advanced Schools at Constantinople without further examination. The standard attained in these preparatory schools—especially in the teaching of the sciences, which was more or less elementary in all of them—varied greatly with the locality, and depended on the efficiency of the teacher. Many received posts as teachers for no other reason than that they were unemployed and in need of work of some kind, little account being taken of their

¹³ Boarders were only found at the Preparatory Schools of the capitals of the Wilayehs.

educational qualifications, but that state of things was fortunately passing away, and greater strictness was being applied to the appointment of teachers. These schools were confined to boys, girls seldom going beyond the primary school, as we have seen; in Constantinople, however, provision for secondary education was made for girls as well as for boys.

(3) The third grade of government schools we have called the Advanced Schools; these included the Imperial University and the various special or professional schools at Constantinople. The University, founded in 1901, but up to 1914 of a more or less nominal character, had officially six Faculties or Departments, viz: Religious Science, Literature, Law, Mathematics, Natural Science, and Medicine, while among the special schools may be mentioned those of Engineering, Agriculture, Commerce, Finance, Fine Arts, Administration, as well as those for Veterinary Science, Military Science, Naval Science, and the Normal Schools for male and female teachers. In Syria there was a Medical School at Damascus, which however was about to be removed to Beirut—the intellectual center of that part of the Empire. There were also two special schools at Beirut—a Law School and a Normal School, the latter being meant to meet the needs of the primary schools in Syria. Damascus had a Normal School like Beirut. The Lycée at Aleppo had two departments, civil and military, the latter of which is worthy of mention in this connection. The staffs of the preparatory schools in Syria were recruited from the graduates of the Normal Training Schools in the capital. The revenue for educational purposes was obtained by land taxation, which fell on Moslem and non-Moslem alike; by the so-called “wakf,” i. e., property originally donated to mosques by pious men, but now rented to private persons on condition that the land shall revert to the mosques in case of absence of direct heirs; and also by private donations, especially, from the Sultan.

Besides these public or government schools, which were to all intents and purposes Moslem schools, though theoretically for all Ottoman subjects, there were other schools which were entirely Moslem in character, viz: The mosque schools which were under the control of the 'Ulema. Some consideration of the present position of these schools is necessary. As far as the primary mosque schools are concerned, what we have said about the government primary schools applies to them, so that we need add nothing further except that many of them were taken over by the government, and that those that remain are still as they were before the days of reform—under the care of the 'Ulema. It is the Higher Mosque Schools, or as we might call them, the Theological Schools, that we have to look at. These are the direct descendants of the ancient abodes of learning of the Moslems, and to this day, in spite of attempts at reform, retain most of their primitive characteristics. Their purpose is to train the religious leaders of Islam, who form at the same time the legal guides of the people, for the law of Islam is based on their sacred book, the Koran. The highest and largest of these schools are to be found at Constantinople and at Cairo (the famous Al-Azhar University). In Syria, Aleppo and Damascus have been the main centers for theological training, but steps are being taken to focus attention on Beirut as the future theological center of the country. The establishment of a Theological School was being planned there just before the Great War. The course of such higher study embraces the two departments of Language and Theology as these have been handed down from the past. Under Theology comes the study of the Koran, the Traditions (Hadith), and Jurisprudence (Fikh), while Language means the study of Arabic Grammar, Poetry, and Rhetoric. Persian is also studied, and a place is given to Logic and Moral Philosophy. Many have received a general education by attending one of the government secondary schools before entering

the mosque school, but within the latter the atmosphere is that of tradition, leaving no scope for freedom of thought or investigation. The deadening hand of authority holds sway in philosophical as in theological discussion. While the memory is undoubtedly much exercised, the understanding is undeveloped. Modern ideas and methods have no place in the system, for if these were introduced it could no longer maintain itself. Not all students however who attend these schools are admitted to the ranks of the 'Ulema, for a process of "elimination" goes on throughout the whole course. Those students, for example, who show themselves unfit to pursue satisfactorily the more advanced subjects are dropped out and given positions as teachers of primary schools. Those who cannot master the intricacies of Arabic grammar, but have received a good training in the Koran and the Traditions, are likewise dropped and become Imams or Pastors. These two grades are the lowest, and strictly are not included among the 'Ulema, but the next grade, viz: that of Mudarris or Teacher in a mosque school, is the starting point of the learned class proper. If the Mudarris continues his studies he may later graduate as a recognized authority on religion and have the possibility of becoming a Professor or a Judge. Further study may raise him to the still higher rank of Chief Judge in one of the five cities—Damascus, Aleppo, Cairo, Adrianople, or Brussa. The highest grade of all is that of Sheikh-ul-Islam, whose seat is at Constantinople, next to the Sultan. Often in the past he has kept in check the authority of the Sultan, and even under the recent Turkish constitutional régime his position as head of the Moslem hierarchy, has been perhaps the most influential and potent in the Empire. The system of elimination in these 'Ulema schools has at least this in its favor that only men of ability are likely to rise to the highest ranks. Control of those schools was being sought by the Turkish government, which got a test examination set up, with the result that many students, who

entered simply to escape military service without any definite intention of studying, were exposed. The students who enter receive tuition and board gratis, expenses being met by the Wakf funds and other gifts. Some of the teachers were salaried by the government. The age of reform, for those mosque schools, is only beginning, and progress is likely to be very slow in view of the power of tradition in all matters that affect directly the faith of Islam. With the mosque schools and the government schools we have now before us the Moslem system of education as it existed up till these last years in Syria—and for that part, as it existed throughout the, as yet uncurtailed, Turkish Empire.

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