



A Journey in Dersim

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impossible to prove its deep-seated source, but if Mr. Parkinson be right as to the plutonic origin of the sodium bicarbonate, some silica would also have come from the same source.

Mr. Parkinson's paper seems to me a valuable contribution to the geology of British East Africa.

A JOURNEY IN DERSIM.

By Captain L. MOLYNEUX-SEEL.

THIS account of a journey in Dersim in July, August, and September, 1911, has been written with the hope of familiarizing the readers of this *Journal* to some extent with this as yet little-explored tract of country, and more particularly of recording information gathered by the writer concerning the curious religious beliefs and traditions of the Dersim inhabitants such as may perhaps throw additional light on the difficult question of their racial origin.

The Armenian bishop of Kighi, who has made a long study of the Dersim Kurds, maintains that they are of pure Armenian race. What grounds in support of this theory it was possible to find during a visit extending over less than two months have been set forth; at the same time other facts or traditions pointing to other conclusions are stated, and the reader is left to formulate his own hypothesis.

The country known as Dersim is geographically clearly defined. It lies in the angle formed by two large branches of the Euphrates, called respectively the Frat Su and the Murad Su,* and a line drawn through Kighi, Palumor, and Erzangan (see sketch-map) would form the north-eastern boundary. The area thus comprised is roughly 7000 square miles.

The whole of this is extremely mountainous and rugged. Between the higher mountains is a tangled mass of deep V-shaped valleys and ravines for the most part thickly covered with forests of stunted oak, containing also a sprinkling of hawthorns and wild pear trees.

Here and there a stream valley widens for a short distance, and what before was a turbulent torrent becomes a smooth-flowing river, meandering through park-like meadows studded with gigantic oak trees. The higher slopes of the mountains are, for the most part, devoid of forests, and it is consequently here that the tribesmen find pasture-land for their flocks. The Dersim villages are very superior to the collection of mud hovels which pass for villages in other parts of Kurdistan. Here the houses are of stone, well constructed, and sometimes of two stories. The villages, however, are small and often consist of a number of small hamlets scattered throughout the length of a valley. Their position is usually marked by woods of very fine walnut and mulberry trees, which afford the most perfect shade that a tired traveller could desire. Almost everywhere in Dersim, water is abundant. Springs and mountain streams, ice-cold and of

* Su means river; Dagh means mountain.

absolute purity, are providential compensations for the arduousness of travel in a country where a march of from 12 to 15 miles will usually occupy the entire day. Distant views are seldom obtained, which makes it difficult to grasp the general physical features, and the tracks, never visible for any considerable distance ahead, often wind about in a most bewildering way in their efforts to minimize the difficulties of the country.

The general impression of Dersim received by a traveller whose eye has become accustomed to the bare parched mountains of Kurdistan, is that of an oasis—green, fresh, and full of grateful shade.

Stretching along the south bank of the Frat Su from Egin to Palumor, and yet further east, is a great barrier of mountains from 10,000 to 11,000 feet high, called the Muzur Dagh and the Merjan Dagh. This mountain range forms the real northern boundary of Dersim. The western portion, called Muzur Dagh, as viewed from the plain to the south of it, presents the appearance of an immense wall. Its steep slopes, in striking contrast to the green mountains to the south, are absolutely bare. Its continuation, the Merjan Dagh, equally bare, bends somewhat to the south-east, and the austereness of its outline is relieved by several lofty and craggy peaks.

This mountain barrier is traversable at four points by passes 8500 to 9000 feet high, leading into the Frat Su valley. None of these passes are practicable in winter. One, very rough and rocky, leads from the west end of Ovajik valley to Kemakh, and is passable only in summer. Another, not difficult, called Deve Chukur Gedik, passes from the eastern end of Ovajik to Erzingan, and forms a dividing line between Muzur and Merjan Dags. Between these two are two others seldom used and impassable for pack-animals.

At the foot of Muzur Dagh is Ovajik, a stony plain about 15 miles long and 3 miles broad, having an elevation of 4200 feet. Its length is traversed by the Muzur Su, augmented by a tributary from the west. With the exception of small patches around villages, the plain is uncultivated and does not look as if it would repay labour spent on it. The Muzur Su, after traversing Ovajik in an easterly direction, turns south, and receiving numerous affluents from the east and the west, both large and small, drains practically the whole of the Dersim. Falling 1000 feet during its course, it eventually throws its not inconsiderable waters into the Peri Su, a few miles to the west of Peri. The general configuration of the country is thus that of a series of broken ridges running, roughly speaking, east and west and of successively diminishing altitudes, until the southernmost ridges slope by gentle undulations down to the Murad and Peri rivers.

On a clear day an impressive view of Dersim is obtained from Kharput, and travellers, as they gazed at these mountains rising range above range until capped in the far distance by the snowy peaks of Merjan Dagh, can hardly have escaped being influenced by the fascination of mystery which hangs over an almost unknown and impenetrable land. This completes a very general survey of the physical geography of Dersim.

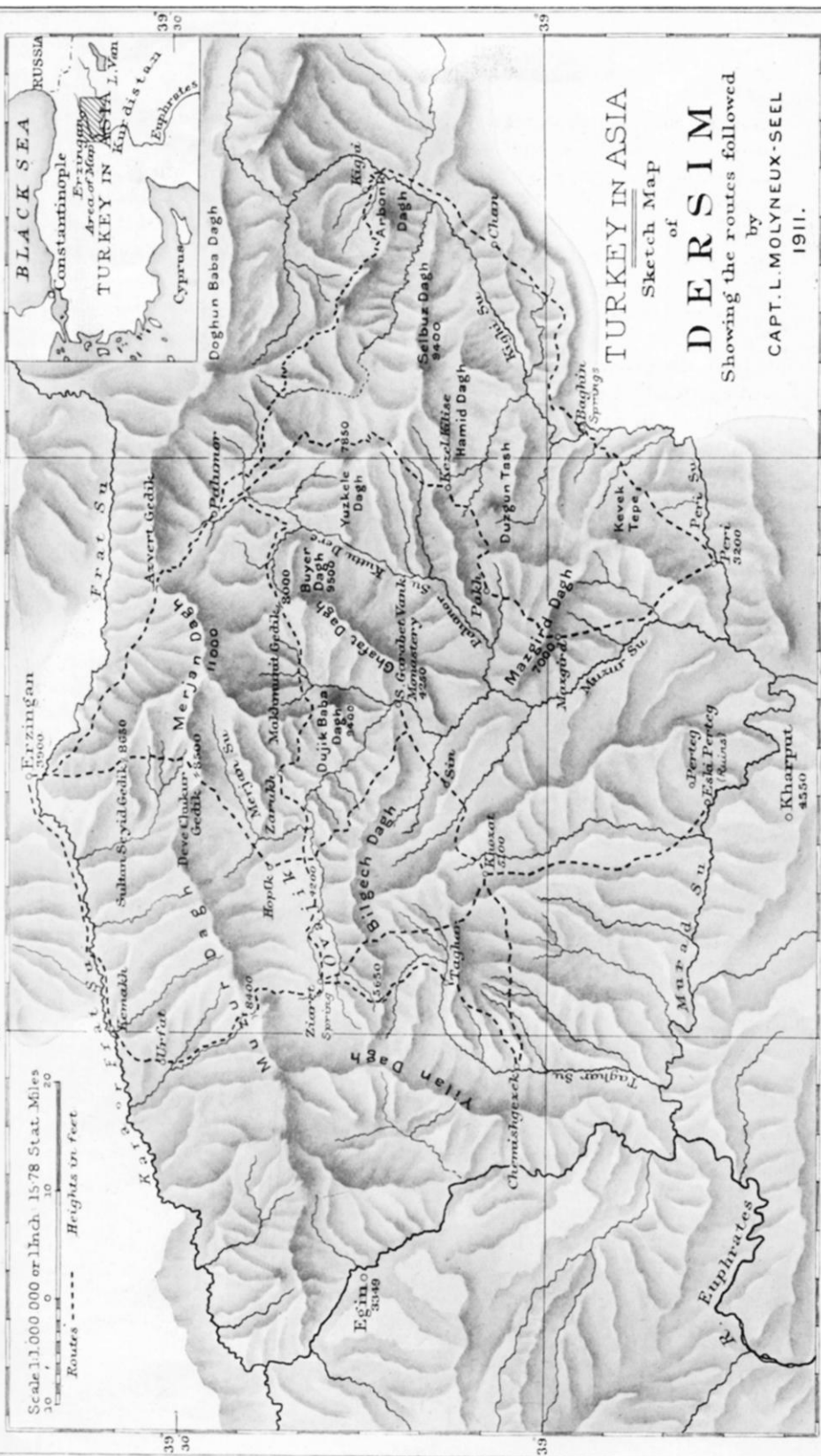
Scale 1:1,000,000 or 1 inch = 15.78 Stat. Miles

Heights in feet

Routes - - - - -

39°

40°



TURKEY IN ASIA

Sketch Map

of

DERSIM

Showing the routes followed

by

CAPT. L. MOLYNEUX-SEEL

1911.

It would be well now to briefly recount what is known of the political history of this country. Dersim, probably, became nominally, or rather geographically, a part of the Ottoman dominions at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when Kurdistan and the province of Diarbekir were subjected and annexed by Sultan Selim I. Subsequently the Kurds, who had always enjoyed special privileges, became practically independent and very turbulent, and in 1834 an Ottoman army was sent to pacify the country. No attempt was then made, however, to enter the mountain fastnesses of Dersim, and its tribes remained wholly independent, paying no taxes or tribute and recognizing in no way the Ottoman authority. In 1848 Dersim became a Kaza, the seat of government being at Khozat; but the Ottoman Government still exercised no effective authority over the Dersimli. Resolved to put an end to this state of affairs, the Turks, in 1874-75, sent a military expedition into Dersim. Though the troops completely failed to subjugate the tribesmen and suffered severe losses, a footing was obtained in the country and governorships were established at Mazgird, Ovajik, Kezel Kilisé, and Chemishgezek. In these places the Turks constructed barracks and Government buildings, utilizing for this purpose the stones of the then numerous but half-ruined Armenian churches. The garrisons of these towns sufficed merely to maintain at their posts the governors, whose authority did not extend beyond their immediate environs. The Dersimli continued to defy the Government. They paid no taxes, contributed no soldiers, and plundered and pillaged as they liked. This state of affairs continued until 1908, when a second expedition, under the command of Ibrahim Pasha, Mushir of the 4th Army Corps, was sent to complete the subjugation of the country. The troops penetrated into the mountains simultaneously from Khozat, Palumor, and Kezel Kilisé. The Dersimli, though they offered a stout resistance, as is testified by the graves of the fallen Turkish soldiers to be seen in various parts of the country, were in the end reduced to complete submission. Their villages were destroyed, their flocks seized, and they were left in a state of wretched poverty.

The Government of Dersim is now being gradually assimilated to that of the rest of the Ottoman dominions. Practically the whole of Dersim is comprised in what is known as the Dersim Sanjak, the headquarters of which is at Khozat. The Sanjak is divided into kazas, and the kazas into nahies, the mudirs of which are mostly tribal chiefs.

We now come to the inhabitants. The Dersimli are styled by the Turks "Kezelbash," which means "red-head," a term of opprobrium which they apply also to the Persians and to other unorthodox Mohammedans. But a native, if he be asked what is his religion, will say that he is a "yol oushaghi," a picturesque term which might perhaps be best translated as "a child of the True Path." The sect called Kezelbash, though themselves repudiating the term "Islam," are Mohammedans of the Shiite branch, their religion embodying also certain Christian rites. The Kezelbash

religion is not confined to the Dersimli nor to the Kurd race, but, on the other hand, the dialect Zaza, which differs widely from Kurmanji, does appear to be confined to this sect.

The Dersimli have a tribal organization similar to other nomad Kurds, and have in all about forty-five tribes, some of which are quite small, being merely fragments of larger ones. The chiefs of the most important tribes are Seïds. These Seïds are religious chiefs, and hence exercise an unbounded influence over the tribesmen. The Dersimli are semi-nomads, that is to say, they inhabit their villages in winter and "yailas" in summer, though the latter are never at any great distance from their villages. When not engaged in inter-tribal warfare, they occupy themselves entirely with pastoral pursuits, only growing enough corn in the vicinity of their villages to supply their own immediate needs. The Dersimli number about sixty-five thousand.

This brief account of the geography, history, and inhabitants of Dersim will serve, it is hoped, for an introduction to a more detailed examination of the country.

Dersim is most conveniently entered either at the north from Erzincan or at the south from Kharpüt. Peri, however, is also a good point of entry, as fair routes up to that point exist, and it is proposed to first describe the country to the north of it as far as Palumör.

Peri is a small town geographically within Dersim, but is very little visited by the Kurds of the interior, and hence has no special points of interest.

Immediately to the north of it, and some 20 miles distant, is the town of Mazgird. The track leading to it from Peri ascends a gentle incline of cultivated but uninteresting country for about 4 miles until unexpectedly a saddle is reached whence our first view into the interior of Dersim is obtained. And a very impressive view it is. The ground in front falls abruptly and we look down into a valley 1500 feet below, which stretches far away to the north. This is the valley of the Muzur Su. Silhouetted against the sky is the bold jagged outline of a precipitous range of hills, 15 miles distant, beneath which nestles the town of Mazgird. The rock fortress can just be distinguished. From between the Mazgird hills and the less scarped slopes on the left emerges the Muzur Su. For some miles it winds its way straight towards us, and then, slightly changing its direction, it disappears through a gorge to our left to join Peri Su, a few miles west of Peri. From the west bank of the Muzur Su, the hills rise in rounded slopes, crest upon crest, until the view is shut out by a high distant range whose summits are wrapped in mists. The hillsides are covered with scrub oak, save on a few of the rounded tops and in the immediate proximity of the river. After descending to the valley bed, the track leaving the river winds its way up among rocky underfeatures, difficult in places, until Mazgird is reached.

This little town of 350 houses is snugly ensconced in a small valley

sloping gently down to the river between two rocky spurs of Mazgird Dag. Similarly to all other towns in Dersim, the houses are built of stone. Two-thirds of the inhabitants are Armenians. There are evidences that Mazgird was a much larger town in the past, extending a considerable distance down the valley towards the Muzur Su. A tombstone over an Armenian grave bears the inscription: "I am the tailor of 9000 Armenians." Without accepting as exact the tailor's estimate of the number of his clients, we may infer that the number of Armenian inhabitants in his day was considerable. In the upper part of the town is a picturesque little mosque with a ruined minaret. The Turkish inhabitants state that it is 750 years old, thus placing the date of its erection in the century before the Ottoman dynasty. All the Armenian churches in Dersim have long been destroyed, but the Armenians of the towns (there are none now in the villages) zealously guard the memory of the sites of those near them. Above the town on the west slope of the rock fortress is one of these ancient sites. Though no stone remains of the former church, the Armenians assemble at the spot twice a year, Christmas and Easter, for the performance of a religious service. There exist altogether seven ancient sites of churches and three of mosques.

Natural rock-fortresses or citadels are numerous in Dersim, but with the single exception of the one at Baghin (on the Peri Su) they seem to be devoid of inscriptions. These either did not exist or the stones on which they were inscribed have been shaken down by earthquakes and buried, or removed to form material for houses.

The Mazgird citadel lies to the north of the town. It is an imposing isolated mass of black weathered limestone rising several hundred feet high and surmounted by a peak. Its northern and eastern sides are precipitous, but it is more accessible in other directions. Portions of the old walls still exist, and also of staircases cut in the rock. One of these leads round on the north side to a large rock chamber not dissimilar to the one at Toprak Kale in Van, but access to it is difficult. On one side there is a detached crag where a portion of a spiral staircase and the entrance to a rock chamber are visible. This, however, is quite inaccessible. On the perpendicular north side of the fortress, I was pointed out what the natives maintained to be a cuneiform inscription; but the rock was so worn and so difficult of inspection by reason of its position that it is impossible to say if really an inscription existed thereon or not.

Two routes lead over the Mazgird Dag to Kezel Kilisé. The winter route which crosses to the east of the town is longer but easier. The summer route, the one selected, crosses the mountains due north of the town. The track is extremely steep and rough and zigzags up what resembles a rock staircase. However, as there are few loose stones, ponies can negotiate it. A climb of 2300 feet brings us to the summit of the range, which has a veritable razor-edge. The reverse slope is more precipitous and huge craggy buttresses which project from its side here

and there add to its wild aspect. The view from the summit is unique, and in order to convey some idea of it it is necessary to briefly describe the configuration of the mountain on which we stand. The Mazgird ridge, running approximately east and west, has a length of about 8 miles. On the west it slopes down to the bank of the Muzur Su, but on the east the range, losing its rocky character, bends round to the north, and continues in the direction of Kezel Kilisé. From the lower slopes of this semicircular range jut forth towards a centre innumerable little spurs covered with stunted oak forest, which meet together in a seemingly tangled mass. Looking down from the summit of the ridge on this valley, the lowest portion of which is 3400 feet below, the eye falls upon a sea of little green rounded summits and depressions—the summits lit up by the early morning sun and the depressions left in deep shadow. On the north the valley is bounded by the Pakh hills and the village of Pakh can just be discerned on its slopes. Above these hills rise the crests of more distant ranges, broken here and there with rugged peaks prominent among which is the snow-clad peak of Selbuz Dagħ.

The first part of the descent into this valley has been facilitated by a zigzag track cut in the rock side. After a descent of some 2000 feet, one enters the forest area, which continues until the lowest part of the valley is reached, when the country again becomes open, and a steep climb up the opposite hills brings us to Pakh. The village of Pakh is one of the older established mudirliks, and a detachment of soldiers is stationed here to aid in collecting the taxes. On the crest of the Pakh hill, and a mile and a half west of the village is an old fortress, but hardly anything remains of the walls. It stands on the edge of a precipice overlooking the Palumor Su and affords a fine view of the valley which runs up in a north-easterly direction. The Palumor Su is an important affluent of the Muzur Su. Rising in the hills north of Palumor it passes through that town as a little brook, then flows through the Kuttu Deré, a rocky gorge, and continuing along this deep valley joins the Muzur Su, 6 miles west of the fortress. The remains of a Roman road which once passed down the valley is said to exist. A native of this village informed me that there were many ruins of Armenian churches in the valley, but that since the Armenians were driven from the interior of the country, none of them dared set foot west of the river.

From Pakh onwards, until the long descent into Palumor is reached, the track follows the watershed between the Palumor Su and the Kighi Su, keeping more or less on its bare summit. Between the watershed and the Kighi Su is a so-to-speak interpolated broken chain of mountains, the most prominent of which is the majestic Selbuz Dagħ with its conical snow-clad peak. The name Selbuz is a corruption of Surpluis, which signifies in Armenian, "Holy light." The western slopes of the watershed break up into many thickly wooded valleys and ravines which drain into the Palumor Su.

An hour or so before reaching Kezel Kilisé, one crosses an outlier of an isolated rocky mass, 7300 feet high, called Duzgun Tash. Its eastern slopes are nearly perpendicular, and on its flat summit an ancient fortress is said to exist. Kezel Kilisé (red church), or Nazmié, as it has now been named after a daughter of the reigning sultan, lies on the comparatively level slopes below the crest of the watershed. To the east is Hamid Dagħ, a flat-topped wooded mountain forming the southern portion of the Selbuz Dagħ range. Between it and Duzgun Tash is an open valley which descends to the Peri or Kighi Su, close to a village called Bagħin, of which I shall speak later.

Kezel Kilisé is the residence of a Kaimmakam and has a garrison of half a battalion. The Kezelbash call this town "Haïdara," after the Haïderli tribe which inhabits the neighbouring mountains. It hardly merits to be called a town, as it consists merely of some thirty houses, including various well-built stone Government buildings. The inhabitants consist mainly of civil and military officials. The remainder comprise a few Armenian craftsmen, some Turkish merchants, and four houses of Kezelbash Kurds. An Armenian, who has been employed many years as bread contractor for the troops, stated, on the strength of what was related to him by an octogenarian now deceased many years, that sixty-five years ago there were Armenians in all the villages throughout Dersim, and that the number of churches, in addition to four monasteries, amounted to 136.

To the south of Kezel Kilisé, on the right bank of the Kighi Su, there is an interesting village called Bagħin. It is only a few hours distant and is reached by the valley which I previously mentioned between Duzgun Tash and Hamid Dagħ. According to statements of the inhabitants, this was formerly a prosperous village of 300 houses, but it consists now of not more than a dozen miserable huts inhabited by two or three Armenian and Kurd families. To the north-east of the village is a rock-fortress, and the village and fortress both stand on a narrow-necked peninsula formed by a loop of the Kighi Su. The fortress is of fair size and one of the typical black rock kind rising to a peak. It contains rock chambers, which are not, however, accessible. In the village are the ruins of an Armenian chapel, and in the eastern wall is a stone bearing a cuneiform inscription, which without doubt originally formed part of the fortress rock. Prof. Sayce, to whom I sent a photograph of the inscription, has translated it, and it proves to be of interest as recording the boundary of the Vannic kingdom in the time of King Menuas.

Immediately to the south of the loop, the Kighi Su flows through a rock gorge. From the rocks on both sides innumerable tiny springs of mineral water force their way between ledges and drop into the river below with a ceaseless patter. The action of the water has smoothed the surface of the rocks and covered them with mineral incrustations of gorgeous colouring. High up on the right bank there is an accessible

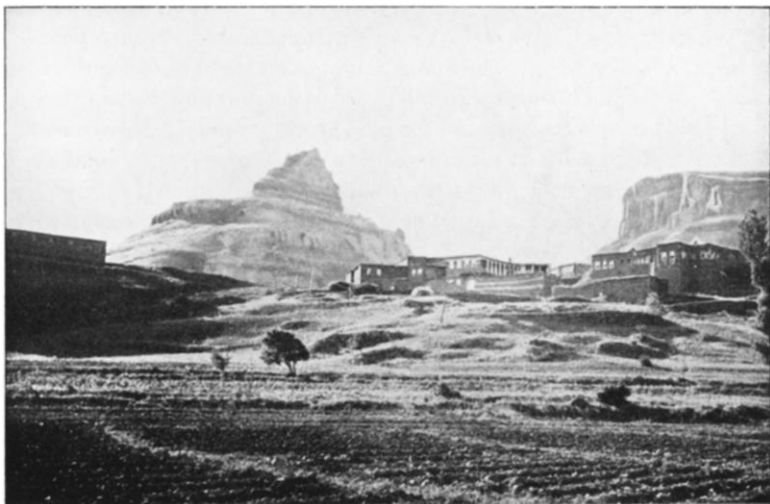
rock shelf of considerable size in which are three hot mineral springs which serve as baths. One of them is sufficiently large and deep to permit of swimming. They vary conveniently in temperature from tepid to a heat only just bearable. The medicinal properties of these springs are renowned throughout Dersim, and the Kurds come from far to do a "cure," no matter what their malady may be. The chief mineral constituents of the water appear to be iron and sulphur. At the time of my visit I found a young Kezelbash Kurd Agha installed with his family in bough huts alongside the springs doing a cure, and was fortunate in being able to take the photograph here reproduced of the Agha's wife, accompanied by a servant-girl returning with water.

We now return to Kezel Kilisé. The country between here and Palumor requires little further description. One route follows the deep thickly wooded valley at the foot of Selbuz Dag range, but the mountain route, which is more direct, keeps along the watershed, and a view of the valleys opens out sometimes on the east and sometimes on the west. Travelling is extremely arduous on account of the steepness of the ascents and descents.

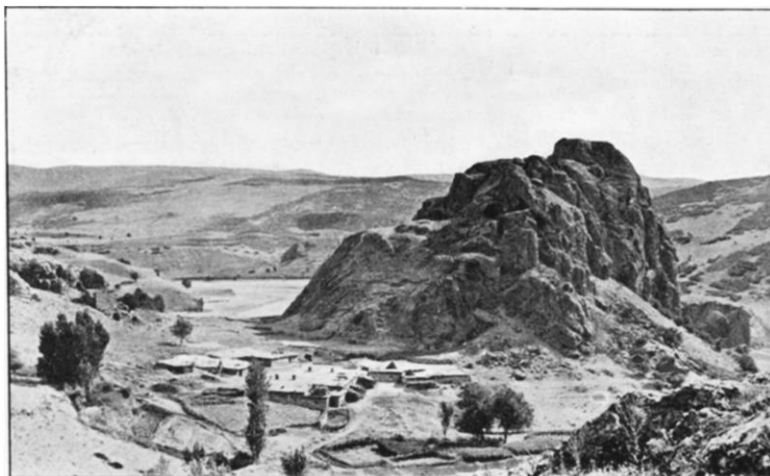
Soon after leaving Kezel Kilisé one enters a small oval valley called Der Ova. Der Ova is a corruption of Der Ohan, which signifies in Armenian, "Seigneur Jean," a monastery thus styled having given its name to the little valley. The following is the story of how it came to be evacuated by the Armenians, as related twenty-five years ago to the bread contractor at Kezel Kilisé.

Forty years ago there lived in Der Ohan village a certain Armenian Melik, very rich and influential, who had acquired such renown for his wisdom and learning that the Kurds, whenever a dispute arose among them, used to appeal to him and accept his decision thereon. One day, forty Kurds from Kuttu Deré came to the Melik and asked his decision in the case of a dispute which had arisen among them and threatened to lead to a bloody conflict. During their stay at Der Ohan, the Kurds one day ventured to address some words of love to the beautiful daughter-in-law of the Melik as she was drawing water from the well. The young Armenians of the village were so incensed at this that the same night they massacred the entire Kurd deputation; then, fearing a terrible vengeance, they collected their animals and portable possessions, and, abandoning their homes, took refuge in some villages around Erzincan. The fugitives numbered about 300, only a few old men with their wives remained in the village, and of these one survivor, who must be at least one hundred years old, remains at the present day. The old man has two sons and two daughters; the sons have become Moslems and married Kurd girls, and the daughters similarly have married Kurds.

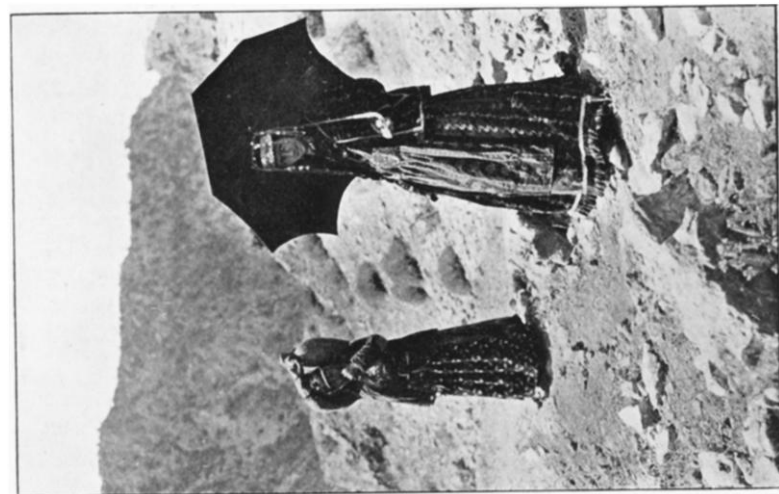
After passing Der Ova, the track ascends until an elevation of nearly 8000 feet is reached, and then a long descent down the north-west side of the watershed completes the journey to Palumor. Palumor is quite a



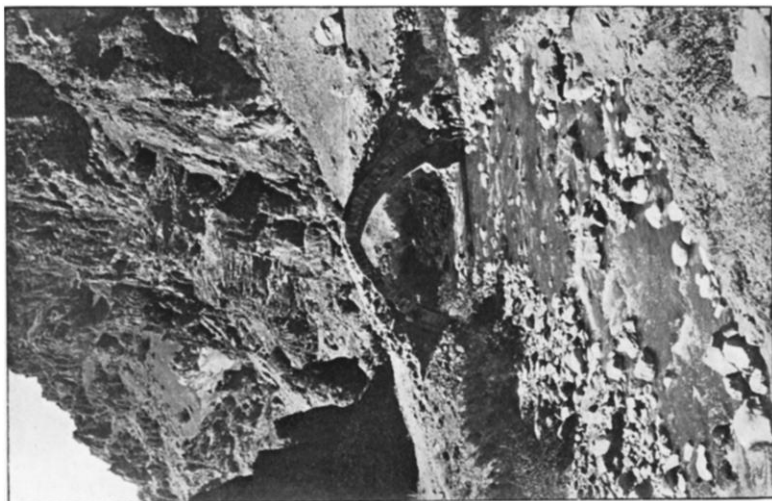
VIEW IN MAZGIRD, SHOWING FORTRESS IN BACKGROUND.



CITADEL AND VILLAGE OF BAGHIN.



KEZELBASH KURDS, AGHA'S WIFE AND SERVANT.



VIEW OF KUTTU DERÉ STREAM, NEAR PALUMOR.

small township, but is the seat of a Kaimmakam under the Vali of the vilayet of Erzerum. It is on the main route between Mush and Erzincan, and used to be connected with the latter town by a cart road which crossed the Merjan Dagħ by an easy pass known as Azvert Gedik. This road has, however, like many others, fallen into disrepair and is now no longer passable for wheeled traffic.

Forty miles to the west of Palumor lies the small plain called Ovajik.* The track which leads to it first crosses a large outlier of Merjan Dagħ at the Makhmunit pass, then skirts the north edge of Dujik Baba Dagħ, and finally enters the plain by the valley of the Muzur Su. Our original intention to traverse the Kuttu Deré† took us first along the bed of the Palumor Su valley. This is a deep V-shaped valley with slopes thickly wooded with small oaks and many trees also in its stony bed. After about a four hours' march, a village called Mezre, situated at the entrance to the Kuttu Deré, is reached. The valley here closes in and the stream passes through a deep rocky gorge with nearly perpendicular sides. This is the renowned Kuttu Deré, which is always mentioned with awe on account of the reputation for wild turbulence borne by the Haiderli tribe who inhabit this region. No strangers ever ventured to pass through this gorge, and the general air of mystery surrounding it was increased by the contradictory and unsatisfactory nature of the geographical information furnished by our guide and others whom we questioned. Hence our disappointment was the greater when we found that it was impracticable for baggage horses, and were compelled to leave the Palumor Su and strike northwards up another valley which opens out on the right and rises gently up to the steep slopes of Merjan Dagħ.

After some distance the track turns eastwards up a small branch valley, down which tumbles a boisterous little stream of pure blue water. Following this stream up its course, we eventually reach the summit of Makhmunit Gedik. This pass over the southern outlier of Merjan Dagħ is 8000 feet high. On the south side of it rises Buyer Dagħ, which overlooks the Kuttu Deré. The summit of this mountain, which I estimate to be 9500 feet high, is flat, and in its centre there is a remarkable spring about 350 yards in diameter, whose ice-cold transparent blue water is carried off to the Palumor Su by the stream which we followed up to the pass. On this mountain-top the Sheikh Hassanli tribe have their summer pasture lands.

From the summit of the pass looking westwards there is a fine extended view. On the left is seen the sharp snow-clad peak of Dujik Baba; straight in front, 50 miles distant, is Yilan Dagħ,‡ also streaked with snow; while to the right is the stern barrier-range of Muzur Dagħ, at the foot of which the westernmost corner of Ovajik is just discernible. The descent of 3000 and more feet from the top of the pass into the

* Little plain.

† Box valley.

‡ Snake mountain.

Lertig valley is very steep. At first the hillsides are bare, but after the steepest part of the descent has been accomplished one enters a narrow winding stream-valley whose thickly wooded slopes shut one off completely from the exterior world. At the entrance to this little valley is an isolated rocky hill with precipitous sides, beneath which is a small village. Tradition says that this hill was in ancient times a fortress, and that a gold treasure has been left buried on its summit. The tradition adds, however, that all efforts to obtain this treasure are unavailing, as whoever attempts to climb the hill is seized with such a fit of uncontrollable laughter that he is compelled to desist.

If an apology be needed for relating this legend, and others which are subsequently to be recounted, I would remind the reader who has followed me so far, that he is now in the heart of Dersim; that the rocks, the rivers, the mountains, and the forests are not here the dull, lifeless things pictured by the Western mind, but a part of animate nature bound intimately to the life of each inhabitant by the strange and grotesque legends, handed down to him through countless generations. Such stories are necessary, therefore, to a sympathetic understanding of these wild tribesmen.

On reaching the western end of Dujik Baba Dagħ, we leave the streams which continues south-west round the base of the mountain to join the Muzur Su near Surp Garabet monastery, and clamber up a rugged ravine to the right, skirting Dujik Baba's northern edge. Not far from here one passes a high rock split in two, the upper portion of which bears a striking resemblance to a head surmounted by a fez. This, the Kezelbash say, was the head of a hated Turk cleft in two, and the rock on which he stood with it, by a blow from the mighty sword of Hazreti Ali. At a village hard by, called Kard  r  , there is a stone wall much venerated by the Kezelbash for the part it played in the miraculous demonstration of the superior sanctity of one Se  d over another. In the old days, much rivalry existed between the various Se  ds as regards their respective degrees of sanctity, and as humility was not one of the virtues that counted, they did not hesitate to parade their miracle-working powers. The tradition of the wall of Kard  r   is as follows.

The Se  d of the Gureshan tribe one day mounted a lion and went to visit his neighbour, the Se  d of the Bamasurli tribe, with the intention of thus displaying his sanctity. The latter, seeing from afar his brother Se  d approaching on a lion, felt himself challenged; so he mounted the above-mentioned wall, took in his hand a snake which he brandished as a whip, and thus equipped went forth to meet his guest. At this sight, the Se  d Gureshan was compelled to avow that his sanctity was as nothing compared to that of Se  d Bamasurli, and dismounting from the lion he kissed the latter Se  d's hand. In memory of this incident, the Gureshan tribesmen to the present day salute the Bamasurli tribesmen by a kiss of the hand.

Dujik Baba Dag is a fine mountain rising to a single peak nearly 10,000 feet high, which, in August, was still buried in snow. No mountain is more revered by the Kezelbash in the whole of the Dersim, for hereon abides the soul of Hazreti Hussein. In times of danger it is here the Dersimli flee for safety, and invisible cannon thunder against any enemy daring to approach. During the last Turkish expedition in 1908, nothing but the precipitous retreat of the soldiers saved them from utter annihilation by Dujik Baba's death-dealing cannon.

Between Dujik Baba Dag and the outliers of Merjan Dag is a small plateau, from the north-west corner of which the track descends through very rugged country to the valley of the Muzur Su. On reaching this valley, for a moment one might imagine one's self in England. Stretching down to the bank of the river are park-like meadows of veritable green springy turf, such as is rarely met with in the East, studded with grand oak trees, of which any park might be proud. From the further bank the hills, green with forests, rise in gentle undulations. The river here is about 40 yards broad, rapid and unfordable, and the water is of a beautiful blue colour and clear as crystal. After following up the left bank for a short distance, the junction of the Muzur and Merjan rivers is reached. The latter is crossed by an easy ford, and one immediately enters Ovajik.

It is strange to find this practically flat and stony plain in the midst of all these rugged wooded mountains. The change of scene is complete. The lofty mountain range, the Muzur Dag, which bounds the plain on the north side, is of that desolate light-brown colour so familiar in Kurdistan, and is unrelieved by the existence of a single tree or indeed of any sign of vegetation. The smoothness of its slopes and consequent absence of shadow rather than their steepness lend it the imposing wall-like appearance which I have previously mentioned. As the eye travels westward along the plain it meets here and there a clump of trees or a patch of green cultivation which indicates the presence of a village, but the Muzur Su with its fringe of trees lies completely concealed in the deep bed it has cut for itself. The plain contains in all some thirty villages. The residence of the Kaimmakam is at Pellur, a hamlet of not more than a dozen houses. The Kaimmakam's authority is supported by half a battalion of infantry, who are quartered in barracks on the south side of the Muzur Su.

At the north-east corner of the plain, and right at the foot of Muzur Dag, lies the little village called Zialet, which, as the name indicates, is a place of pilgrimage. It is here that the Muzur Su has its source. The water gushes forth from several places in the rocks at the foot of the mountain in such abundance that it forms immediately a considerable stream. There are several rocky basins through which the water flows, where the pilgrims bathe and leave behind them the sickness or infirmity with which they may have been afflicted. This they do also symbolically in the time-honoured fashion by tying a rag torn from their garments to a branch of one of the trees overhanging the pool. Apart from its miraculous

curative properties, the water of this spring fully justifies its fame throughout Dersim. It is ice-cold no matter what be the season of the year, of extraordinary purity, and has a delicious sparkle. Trout seem to revel in the Muzur Su's clear blue depths and are extraordinarily numerous. Everything connected with the memory of Muzur Baba commands great reverence, and consequently the inhabitants abstain religiously from the pollution of this river throughout its entire course, an abstinence which means much to those acquainted with Oriental habits.

The following, related in four short chapters, is the tradition of the miraculous origin of the Muzur Su.

CHAPTER I.

A certain Agha, named Sheikh Hassan of the Topuzanlı tribe, had a son called Muzur who used to shepherd his father's sheep. Even in winter, when the mountains were covered with snow, Muzur used to drive out his flock to pasture in spite of his father's prohibition. It was noticed, however, that the sheep always returned with a well-fed appearance. To satisfy his curiosity regarding this mystery, Muzur's father one day secretly followed his son when he drove out his sheep to graze. What he saw was this: Muzur, arrived in the mountains, struck the snow-covered trees with his staff, whereupon green leaves fell therefrom, which the sheep ate. Muzur, however, turning, perceived the presence of his father, and in wrath left the sheep and disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

On leaving his father, Muzur went to be a shepherd with a certain Ali Haider Agha in the village of Buyuk Keui. The following year Ali Haider, leaving Muzur at home, went on pilgrimage to Kerbela, and while there one day expressed a desire to eat some helva (honey-cake) which his wife used to prepare for him in his house. Five minutes later Muzur appeared before his master with a plate of helva.

CHAPTER III.

During this time the following is what occurred at the village of Buyuk Keui. Muzur returned with his flock for the midday milking, which duty the mistress of the house set about to commence; but Muzur, approaching her, said:

"Mistress, my master has a great desire to eat a helva."

"That is all very well, Muzur," replied his mistress, "but you know your master is a long way off."

"Never mind, make the helva and I will undertake to carry it to my master."

"It appears our shepherd wants to eat a helva," said the mistress to herself, "but never mind, he looks after our sheep well and I will make him one."

So she prepared the helva, and putting it in a plate gave it to Muzur, saying with a smile : " Here, take it to your master."

Muzur took it and disappeared, but a moment later returned without the plate.

" Well, Muzur, and where is the plate ? " said his mistress.

" My master will bring it on his return," was the reply.

CHAPTER IV.

Following Oriental custom, all the inhabitants of Buyuk Keui went forth to meet Ali Haïder Agha on his return from pilgrimage and to kiss those hands which had touched the sacred places. But Ali Haïder, on the approach of the crowd, refused to allow them to kiss his hands, saying—

" The real pilgrim is my shepherd Muzur. Go you and kiss *his* hands."

So the crowd returned to the village to look for Muzur. At this moment the latter was leaving the village, bearing a cup of fresh milk for his master. Bewildered at seeing the crowd pressing upon him, Muzur turned and fled in the direction of the mountains. But the people, intent on kissing his hands, pursued him. As he ran, the milk from the cup which he held in his hand was spilt, and at each spot where the milk fell a stream of water gushed forth from the rocks. Muzur at length wearied sat down, and then disappeared.

As an anti-climax to this legend, it is related that some centuries later a certain Shah of Persia had come on a pilgrimage to these holy springs, and undertook some excavations for the purpose of recovering the cup which Muzur Baba had with him at the time of his disappearance. In this the Shah was successful, and, taking it back with him, deposited it in the Teheran Museum.

At the commencement of September, the anniversary of Muzur Baba's disappearance, the centre spring, so the Kezelbash say, throws forth milk instead of water. At the same period the trout in the river ascend towards the source on pilgrimage to Muzur Baba.

As I have already mentioned in the general description of Dersim, there are two principal passes which lead across the Muzur Dagh into the Frat Su valley. The easiest one leaves Ovajik at the north-east corner. It is a stony track, not difficult, which follows the general direction of the Merjan Su until the Deve Chukur Gedik is reached at an elevation of 8500 feet. Between here and the next pass, the Sultan Seyyid Gedik, some 10 miles further on and slightly higher, lies a stretch of well-watered green pasture lands where the Kurds find good summer quarters for themselves and their flocks. On the east the slopes of Merjan Dagh rise steeply and break up into many craggy peaks ; on the west there is a deep, narrow gorge through which the numerous little streams which water these pastures escape into the Frat Su valley. From the summit of Sultan Seyyid Gedik there is a magnificent panoramic view of the entire Erzingan plain. The descent of over 4000 feet is extremely steep, but otherwise not difficult.

The other principal pass leaves the north-west corner of Ovajik and enters the Frat Su valley near Kemakh. Unlike the Erzingan pass, which crosses a depression in the mountain range, the Kemakh pass traverses a deep rocky defile which, though it widens in places sufficiently to afford good summer pasture lands, is bounded on each side by the steep and wall-like slopes characteristic of this mountain range. The bed of the pass is in places strewn with rocks and boulders, which makes its negotiation by horses very difficult.

As Kemakh is so rarely visited by travellers, I think a word about this extremely picturesque little town on the south bank of the Frat Su would not be out of place. The bulk of its seven hundred houses lie grouped in a deep, thickly wooded hollow which surrounds the fortress. This hollow is formed on the west side by a valley which runs up to Muzur Dagh, and on the south and east side by a deep ravine which offshoots from the valley and is drained by a small stream that runs into the Frat Su. Houses also extend about a mile along the left bank of the river. Some seventy years ago the town used to be on the flat top of the fortress, but after its destruction by an earthquake a new town was built among the trees in the valley and ravine below.

The fortress, standing about 300 feet above the river's level, is circular in shape, with a diameter of rather less than half a mile. It is quite flat on the top and precipitous on every side. Cut in the rock of its eastern face are some large subterranean galleries which descend to the level of the bed of the ravine, where they have exits. The farther bank of the river Frat, facing the town, rises up perpendicular to a height of 100 feet, and in the rock side are the entrances, about 5 feet square, of several chambers. There is said to be a subterranean passage passing under the river from these rock chambers to the fortress. Save for sixty Armenian houses, Kemakh is entirely a Turkish town and is the seat of a Kaimmakam. However, a Turkish Bey of an influential family long established there, is the real governor of the town, and to his credit it may be said that the people prefer to submit any cases of litigation or complaint to his decision rather than have recourse to the tedious processes of the Turkish law courts. Just east of the town, the Frat Su is spanned by a picturesque log bridge constructed on the cantilever principle, the engineer being one of the local inhabitants.

The valley west of the fortress leads up to a difficult pass over Muzur Dagh into Ovajik. We were advised to take this route for a peculiar reason. According to statements of the natives, in the drifts of never-melting snows near the summit of the pass are found certain worms. If these worms be placed in water, the latter becomes icy cold and remains so for twenty-four hours or more. I should have attached little credence to this statement were it not for the fact that the existence of the same worms has been told me by villagers in districts widely separated from Dersim, among them being the mountains of Meuks.

It is only in the never-melting snows that these worms are said to be found.

There remains now to describe the country south of Ovajik, lying between the Muzur Su on the east and Yilan Dagħ on the west. It differs rather in character from the country east of Muzur Su in that it possesses no high distinctive mountains, but is extremely wooded and very intersected by narrow-deep valleys and ravines. The streams of these valleys and ravines mostly have their origin in Bilgech Dagħ, a wooded mountain bounding Ovajik on the south, and flow some eastwards into Muzur Su and some westwards in the Dagħar Su, which latter flows south past Chemishgezek into the Murad Su. The country south of a line drawn between Chemishgezek and Khozat becomes open in character, and descends gradually by gentle undulations to the Murad Su.

Chemishgezek is the largest town in Dersim. It has a thousand houses, of which two-thirds are inhabited by Ottomanized Kurds and the remainder by Armenians. It is pleasantly situated in a valley sloping steeply down to the Dagħar Su, and the shade of its orchards and other trees which overhang the numerous little tumbling brooks that traverse the town is very agreeable. The bed of the Dagħar Su is wide, and in the face of its further precipitous bank, 150 feet high, are some ancient rock-chamber excavations, in which tradition says a certain Greek prince named Chemish once took refuge, and originated thus the name of the town.* In the neighbourhood are several Armenian villages and also several villages inhabited jointly by Armenians and Greeks. These Greeks have lost their language and speak either Turkish or Armenian, but maintain the tradition of their Greek origin.

Khozat calls for mention only as being the capital of the Sanjak of Dersim and the seat of government. It is a typical Turkish town, and has a considerable garrison. Away to the north-east in the deep valley of the Muzur Su, but 300 feet above the river-bed buried in the heart of Dersim, is the sole remaining Armenian monastery, Surp Garabet Vank (monastery of St. John the Baptist), called also Halvori Vank. This monastery owes its immunity from destruction by the Kurds to its possession of a reputed miraculous relic of St. John the Baptist. To this day the Kurds make pilgrimages to the monastery to be cured of diseases. Curiously enough, the disease which most frequently brings them to the monastery is said by the monks to be insanity. The community consists of one monk and his three nephews, without exception the dirtiest and most degraded-looking people I have seen in Dersim. The church is small, in the usual form of a cross, and devoid of all embellishments such as the belfry, which has been added on at later periods to nearly all Armenian monastery churches. It is said to have been built 1000 years ago. In the interior of the church is a carved ebony door which has an inscription bearing the date 890, but which, according to tradition,

* Chemishgezek = holes of refuge of Chemish.

was placed there long after the church was built. The date would be according to the Armenian Ecclesiastical era, which is reckoned from the date at which Armenia received Christianity. Close to the monastery is a disused gold-mine which has not been worked for many years, and the entrance to which is filled up with *débris*.

Connected with the Kezelbash Kurds, nothing is of more interest than their curious religious beliefs. As I have before mentioned, they must be considered as Mohammedans of the Shīte branch, although their religion contains practices and beliefs borrowed from Christianity. The Kezelbash repudiate the term "Islam," which they apply to the hated Turks, and call themselves "Yol Oushaghi," or "Children of the True Path." Their hierarchy contains the dignitaries Seid or priest, Murshud or bishop, Murshuden Murshudu or archbishop. All Seids and Murshuds claim descent from a certain Imam Bakir, who is therefore the founder of their religion as apart from other Mohammedan sects. According to their traditions, this Imam Bakir was miraculously born of an Armenian virgin under the following circumstances :—

When the Mohammedans of Damascus killed Hussein, the Son of Ali (nephew of the Prophet), they cut off his head and carried it away with them. On the road they entered the tent of a certain Armenian priest, named Akh Mrtouza Keshish. This priest, having observed that the head of Hussein showed certain supernatural signs, wished to keep it. Whilst turning over in his mind how he should possess himself of this precious relic, his eldest son came to him and told him the manner in which his object could be achieved. "Cut off my head," he said, "and give it to the Turks in the place of the head of Hussein, which you will then be able to keep." This the father did, but the Turks refused to accept it, insisting on the return of the real head of Hussein. The priest then cut off successively the heads of all his seven sons, meeting each time with a refusal of acceptance by the Turks. Then suddenly he heard a voice which said : "Smear the head of thy last son in the blood of the head of Hussein." The priest obeyed the voice and offered the head of his last son to the Turks, which this time was accepted without demur. The head of Hussein thus passed into the possession of the Armenian priest.

The latter's first care was to place the precious relic in a special apartment, which he befittingly adorned with gold and silver and silk. Now, the priest had an only daughter who, one day entering this apartment, saw to her astonishment, in the midst of sumptuous surroundings, a plate of gold filled with honey. (The girl perceived the head of Hussein in the form of honey.) She tasted the honey and immediately became enceinte. Some days later the priest, remarking the condition of his daughter, wished to kill her. She, however, succeeded in convincing her father of the true cause of her approaching maternity, and so appeasing his wrath. One day the girl complained of a cold, and on sneezing, her father saw suddenly



A "YAILA" IN MERJAN DAGH.



A GROUP OF KEZELBASH TRIBESMEN.



SURP GARABET MONASTERY, OR HALVORI VANK.



VIEW TOWARDS OVAJIK, LOOKING NORTH-WEST.

issue from her nose a bright flame, which changed at the same instant into the form of a child. Thus did Imam Bakir, son of Hussein, come into the world.

The fact that a descendant of Ali had been born immediately became known to the sorcerers of the Turks, who thereupon sent people to search for the child and slay it. They came to the priest's house. At this time the young mother was engaged in washing the household linen, and being told the reason of the visit of the Turks, hastily put her child into a copper cauldron which was on the fire and covered him with linen. The Turks knew by their magic arts that the child was in a house of copper, but unable to find any such house in the precincts of the priest's dwelling were baffled, and the child's life was saved. On account of this incident, the child received the name of Bakir, which in Turkish means copper.*

The following fragmentary items regarding the religious beliefs of the Kezelbash have been gleaned from conversations with various Seïds. They believe in the Unity of God and in His omnipotence, and that He has neither son nor companion. In one of their religious hymns, however, which they frequently sing, occurs the following couplet :—

“ Biz Isai Haq biliriz
Isa rouh 'ullah.”

This is translated by Armenian priests as—

“ We know Jesus to be God,
Jesus the Spirit of God,”

and appears to be the basis of their assertion that the Kezelbash believe, or at one time believed, in the divinity of Christ. The word “Haq,” however, besides meaning “God,” signifies also “Justice” or “just,” and “rouh 'ullah” is an Arabic expression which, translated literally, means the Spirit or breath of God, and is used to designate Christ (as created by the special interposition of God).

The couplet might thus bear the following meaning :—

“ We know Jesus to be just,
Jesus the breath of God,”

which does not necessarily involve an assertion of the divinity of Christ. All the Seïds whom I have questioned assert that Christ and Ali were one and the same person who came into the world at different times and under different names. As regards Christ, they believe in His resurrection, but consider Him only as a prophet. They believe in Hell, Heaven, and the Last Judgment.

Their greatest prophets are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Mahomed, and Ali. But Ali is much greater to them than Mahomed. After these follow the twelve Imams. These they imagine to be the twelve Apostles under different names.

* In reality the name of Bakir is the Arabic surname of Imam Mahomed, the fifth of the twelve Imams of the Shïite sect, and has no connection with the Turkish word meaning copper.

The names of the twelve Imams are as follows: Hassan and Hussein (the two sons of Ali, whom they assert are the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul), Imams Abbas, Zemal Abudin, Bakir, Jefer, Abul Kassem, Riza, Ali Aghzar, Ali Kekbar, Kazem, and Meit-i-sahib-i-Zeman, who will come to judge the world at the Last Day. It will be noticed that these names only agree in part with those of the twelve successors of Mahomed in the line of Ali (the twelve Imams of the Shii sect).

The Kezelbash have no special religious book, but they accept as inspired the New Testament, the Pentateuch, and the Koran. They are instructed in their religion by the Seïds, whose hands they kiss and whose words they accept as the message of God. According to their means they pay to the Seïds a certain tribute called "Kharaj."

They have neither church nor mosque, nor do they perform the "Namaz." But in the morning, commencing with prostrations before the sun, they invoke the aid of Ali. Public devotions are performed also in the houses of the Seïds, where both men and women are received, provided they be true Kezelbash.

All the Seïds keep with them a certain stick and a leather bag about the uses of which there is some mystery, and which are said to be employed in the performance of certain pagan rites. However, the Seïds say that the stick is a portion of the rod of Moses, and the bag an imitation of that carried by St. John the Baptist.

The Kezelbash fast twelve days for the twelve Imams and three days for Keder Ellaz, for whom they have a great veneration. This saint figures only in the Oriental Calendar, and is the St. Serkis of the Armenians. The Kurds make pilgrimages to Armenian churches which have St. Serkis as their patron saint.

The Kezelbash have no religious feasts, but on Fridays they meet for prayer in the houses of the Seïds.

On the night of January 1 (old calendar) also they meet at the house of the Seïds for a ceremony resembling the Communion. After prayers the Seïd blesses the bread, which is called "Haq loqmase,"* and distributes it to the communicants, who approach two by two. The blessed bread is not distributed to any person who may be declared by the inhabitants of his village to be unworthy. The communicants are called "Musseib."†

The Turks maintain that this meeting on January 1 is for the performance of immoral orgies; but there is no evidence in support of this accusation.

The Kezelbash do not visit Mecca, but have various other places of pilgrimage. The chief ones are the shrines of Hunker Hajji Bey Tashi Veli and of Hassan at Sivas, the tomb of Ali (Shah-i-Nejib) at Kulfa, four

* God's food.

† This word is apparently identical with that of the name of the ancient town a few miles north of Baghdad.

days distant from Baghdad, the tomb of Moussa at Baghdad, the tomb of Hussein, and the tomb of Abbas at Kerbela.

The Kezelbash have not a very high standard of morals, though the worst vices of the Turks are not practised. Theft receives religious sanction, for they say that the Archangel Michael appeared to them and ordered them to steal the nails which the Jews had prepared for the Crucifixion. "Nevertheless," they add, "we were only able to steal one."

Their statement that their women only veil before Mussulmans and not before Christians was scarcely confirmed by our experiences, as only on one occasion did we see any unveiled women.

Their relative hatred of Turks as compared with Christians is mathematically expressed in the confidences once made to me by a certain Seïd, who averred that it was more meritorious to kill one Turk than thirty-six Christians. The same Seïd also stated that every morning on rising they cursed the false Khalifs, Abu Bekr, Osman and Omer, and all the Turks who had deformed the true religion.

Certain Armenian bishops and priests, who have been in relation with the Kezelbash of Dersim with a view to converting them to Christianity, maintain that the early inhabitants of these mountains were Armenians, who fled there for refuge from the Assyrian king Belos, and that the present Kurds are their descendants. Following this theory, it must be supposed that after receiving Christianity a large number of them became converted to the Shiïte sect of Islam—perhaps through the influx of Shiïte Turkish subjects fleeing from the persecutions of Selim I. at the commencement of the sixteenth century.

Certainly the curious tradition proclaiming the great Imam Bakir to have been born of the daughter of an Armenian priest appears to be one which a race not of Christian origin would hardly have maintained. Again, the practice of the religious rite resembling the Christian Communion, the identification of Ali with Christ and of the twelve Imams with the twelve Apostles, argues a very thorough intermingling of Christians and Mohammedans if in fact the two were separate races.

The fact of Dersim having long been peopled by the Armenian race is thoroughly established. The monastery of Surp Garabet with its dated inscription proves the presence of Armenians from at least the commencement of the Ottoman dynasty, and its situation in the very heart of Dersim is not one which would have been selected by any people not at the time the predominant one. A large number of villages throughout the country bear old Armenian names, some of which have been corrupted but are easily recognizable.

The fact that the Dersimli speak the language called Zaza, which is considered a Kurdish dialect, must be explained by supposing that a Mohammedan race, speaking this dialect, overran these mountains and imposed their language on the greater portion of its Armenian inhabitants, and that the interaction of their respective religions produced the existing

religion known as Kezelbash. Dersim would thus have been the cradle of the Kezelbash religious sect. But it must be noted that this sect are to be found outside Dersim, particularly in the neighbourhoods of Sivas and Kharput, and I believe also in parts so remote from Dersim as the Caucasus and Persia. There are many Kezelbash also among the Turks and Turcomans of Malatia, Egin, and Arabkir, though many of these, from fear of persecution by the Turks, conceal their religion and perform the "Namaz."

The Zaza dialect differs so widely from Kurmanji, the principal Kurdish language, that it is quite unintelligible to a Kurd speaking the latter tongue. It contains Persian, Arabic, and some Turkish words, and is considered a Kurdish dialect, though I am unaware whether this is on philological grounds or merely in accordance with the loose classification of the Turks.

When we consider that until very recent years the Dersimli have had no intercourse with the Turks, it is difficult to explain the fact that in addition to the name they give to their religion (Yol Oushaghi*) many of the names of their tribes are purely Turkish ones. Thus we find Bal Oushaghi, Arslan Oushaghi, Topouzli, Areli. Instances of tribes having Arabic or Persian names (often combined with the Turkish word Oushaghi) are Beit Oushaghi, Sham Oushaghi, Haiderli, Bahtiarli.

The tradition relating that Imam Bakir received this name on account of his having been placed in a copper cauldron also shows the influence of the Turkish language, since, as previously pointed out, Bakir is the Arabic name of one of the twelve Shiite Imams, and has no connection with the Turkish word "bakir," meaning copper.

The final Armenian emigration from the mountains appears to have taken place between the years 1880 and 1890, when, abandoning to the Kezelbash their lands, houses, churches, and monasteries, they established themselves in the various towns of Dersim under the protection of the Turkish governors. This emigration was caused, it is said, by a fierce Kezelbash persecution instigated by Sultan Abdul Hamid, who had become alarmed at the Armenian Patriarch's pretensions that Dersim formed a part of Armenia.

NOTE ON THE MAP OF DERSIM.

The sketch-map which accompanies this paper has been constructed from a prismatic compass traverse, checked by 7-inch sextant altitudes of Polaris observations for latitude, carried out by Captain L. Molyneux-Seel at the following places: Palumor, Kezel Kilise, Kemakh, Mazgird, S. Garabet monastery, Ziaret Springs, Chemishgezek, Khozat, and has been adjusted to the positions of Erzingan, Kharput, and Khozat taken from the map "Eastern Turkey in Asia," Scale 1: 2,000,000, published by the Royal Geographical Society.

* Yol = road, oushak = servant, and, though derived from the Arabic "Ashq," is a purely Turkish term.