

HISTORY SECTION

SYRIA

RECENTLY during the second World War the strip of Asia Minor known as Syria has come to the attention of the world, and was fought for.

A narrow strip of habitable land, with a total area of about 114,000 square miles, Syria extends along the western edge of the Arabian peninsula, as far north as the Taurus Mountains, with the Mediterranean on one side and the desert on the other. Syria forms a bridge between Africa and Asia; between two ancient homes of civilization, the valleys of the Nile and the Euphrates Rivers. So, too, it is a link between East and West, a great highway of civilization, a battleground between empires.

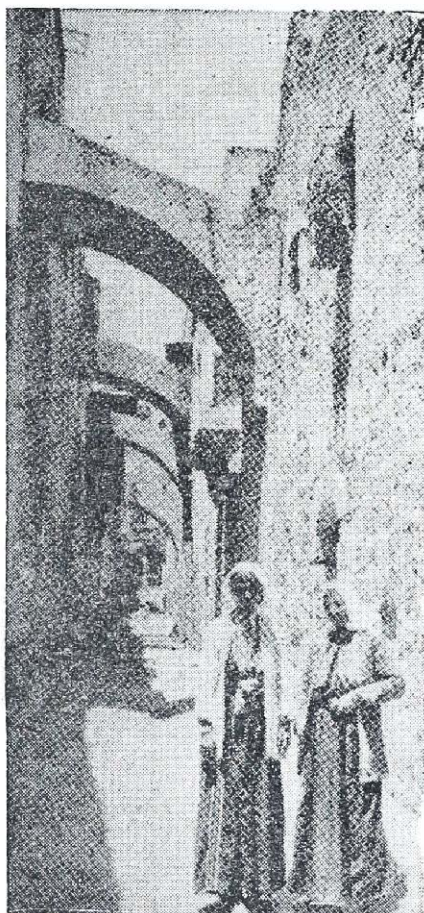
Syria is largely a fertile land which fringes the Arabian desert. There are many dry places, even in Syria, but to the Coanites and other tribes that drifted into it from the desert it was a garden land.

Within Syria are contained the rich valleys of the Lebanon Mountain region, where the Phoenicians made their home; the verdant plain of Esdraelon in Palestine, the land of the Israelites; and the fertile plain of Sharon to the southeast, which was the country of the ancient Philistines.

Northern Syria was the home of the Arameans, who were in very ancient times the merchants and traders of the Eastern world. Their widespread trade connections carried their language, the Aramaic, far and wide until it became a widely spoken language. In time it even displaced its sister tongue, the Hebrew of Palestine, and thus became the speech of Jesus and the Jewish people of his time in Palestine.

Except for the Hittites and the Philistines, who became merged with the other peoples, the tribes which made up the population of Syria in ancient times were Semites. And although Greeks, Romans, Turks, Kurds, and European crusaders have blended with the original stock, the Syrians of today are still mainly Semitic and the language of the country is Arabic, a Semitic language which is related to the ancient Hebrew.

In spite of this racial kinship, however, these various tribes have never united to form a strong nation. This is due, doubtless, in part to their natural character, and in part to the fact that Syria is broken up by desert and mountain into a number of petty provinces, but most of all to the fact that Syria has been subject first to



Street in a Syrian City



A Typical Syrian Village

one great empire and then to another.

After having passed through the hands of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Macedonians under Alexander the Great, and the Romans, Syria was conquered in the 7th century A.D. by the Arabs. In 1099 the Crusaders established the kingdom of Jerusalem and the principality of Antioch, but they were driven out in the latter part of the 12th century. In 1516 Syria was conquered by the Turks, who remained in possession until expelled during the first World War. Later the government was put under France, except Palestine. Only recently the British troops gained control of the country from France.

Syria is the home of many religions and sects. The Mohammedans are in the majority, although there are also great numbers of Christians and Jews.

Even with the primitive agricultural methods still practised, Syria produces considerable crops of grains, fruits, and tobacco. The horses are splendid creatures, but the cattle of the region are small.

Among the leading cities are Beirut, the seat of an American college; Aleppo, a great commercial center as it was in ancient times; Antioch, noted as one of the chief centers of early Christianity; and Damascus, said to be the oldest city in the world.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What part has Syria taken thus far in World War No. 2?
2. Where is Syria? (See the encyclopedia.)
4. Is Syria an ancient land?
3. How large is Syria?
5. What ancient peoples have occupied all or part of Syria?
6. What was the language of Jesus? Why?
7. Of what races are the Syrians of today?
8. What is their present language?
9. Who governed Syria after the first World War?
10. Who recently gained possession of Syria?