BOOK I

THE LAND AS A WHOLE

CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF SYRIA IN THE WORLD'S HISTORY
For this chapter consult Map II.
THE PLACE OF SYRIA IN THE WORLD'S HISTORY

Between the Arabian Desert and the eastern coast of the Levant there stretches—along almost the full extent of the latter, or for nearly 400 miles—a tract of fertile land varying from 70 to 100 miles in breadth. This is so broken up by mountain range and valley, that it has never all been brought under one native government; yet its well-defined boundaries—the sea on the west, Mount Taurus on the north, and the desert to east and south—give it a certain unity, and separate it from the rest of the world. It has rightly, therefore, been covered by one name, Syria. Like that of Palestine, the name is due to the Greeks, but by a reverse process. As 'Palestina,' which is really Philistina, was first the name of only a part of the coast, and thence spread inland to the desert,¹ so Syria, which is a shorter form of Assyria, was originally applied by the Greeks to the whole of the Assyrian Empire from the Caucasus to the Levant, then shrunk to this side of the Euphrates, and finally within the limits drawn above. The Arabs call the country Esh-Sham, or 'The Left,' for it is really the northern or north-western end of the great Arabian Peninsula, of

¹ See p. 4.
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which they call the southern side El Yemen, or 'The Right.'

The name Palaistiné, which Josephus himself uses only of Phyllaia, was employed by the Greeks to distinguish all Southern Syria, inclusive of Judæa, from Phœnicia and Cœle-Syria. They called it Syria Palaistiné, using the word as an adjective, and then Palaistiné, the noun alone. From this the Romans got their Palestina, which in the second century was a separate province, and later on divided into Palestina Prima, Secunda, Tertia. It still survives in the name of the Arab gund or canton—Fилистин.

These were foreign names: the much older and native name Canaan is of doubtful origin, perhaps racial, but

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1 Syria, as a modern geographical term, is to be distinguished from the Syria and Syrians of the English version of the Old Testament. The Hebrew of these terms is Aram, Arameans, a northern Semitic people who dwelt in Mesopotamia, Aram-Naharaim, and west of the Euphrates—as far west as the Phœnician coast, and south to Damascus. Some, however, hold that Aram-Naharaim was on this side the Euphrates. The Roman Province of Syria extended from the Euphrates to Egypt. Its eastern boundary was a line from the head of the Gulf of Suez past the south-eastern end of the Dead Sea, the east of Gilead and the Hauran and Palmyra, to the Euphrates. East of this line was Arabia (see chap. xcvii.).

2 The full history of the word is this:—Philistines, פֶּלֶסֲתִים, or פליסתים is rendered by the LXX. in the Hexateuch φόλαστίμα; cf. 1 Mac. iii. 24. Sirach xli. 18. From this Josephus has the adjective φολαστινός, i. Antt. vi. 2. But his usual form is פלוסטיאנוֹ. He also knows the noun Φολαστίνη, and uses itself him of Philistia, xiii. Antt. v. 10: 'Simeon traversed Judah καὶ τὴν Παλαιστίνη up to Askalon.' Cf. i. Antt. vi. 2: 'The country from Gaza to Egypt...the Greeks call part of that country Palestine.' But in Contra Apion, i. 22, he quotes Herodotus as using the name in the wider sense inclusive of Judea. Herodotus, who describes Syria as extending from Cilicia to Mount Carius, distinguishes the Phœnicians from the Σόφων οἱ ἐν τῇ Παλαιστίνῃ, or οἱ Παλαιστίνοι καλέμφεναι (ii. 104; iii. 5, 91; vii. 86), and defines it as τὴν Συρίαν τοῦτο τὸ χώρον καὶ τὸ μέρος Ἀγάθαν τῶν Παλαιστίνων καλεῖα. Arrian (Ἀπελέκατι, ii. 25) speaks of ἡ Σύρια Παλαιστίνη. Syria was divided into S. Palestina, S. Punica, and S. Cœla; Herod. i. 105. Palestine was made a separate province, 67 A.D.
more probably geographical and meaning ‘sunken’ or ‘low’ land. It seems to have at first belonged to the Phoenician coast as distinguished from the hills above. But thence it extended to other lowlands—Sharon, the Jordan valley, and so over the whole country, mountain as well as plain.¹

The historical geography of Syria, so far as her relations with the rest of the world are concerned, may be summed up in a paragraph. Syria is the northern and most fertile end of the great Semitic home—the peninsula of Arabia. But the Semitic home is distinguished by its central position in geography—between Asia and Africa, and between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which is Europe; and the rôle in history of the Semitic race has been also intermediary. The Semites have been the great middlemen of the world. Not second-rate in war, they have risen to the first rank in commerce and religion. They have been the carriers between East and West, they have stood between the great ancient civilisations and those which go to make up the modern world; while by a higher gift, for which their conditions neither in place nor in time fully account, they have been mediary between God and man, and proved the religious teachers of the world, through whom have come its three highest faiths, its only universal religions. Syria’s history is her

¹ Land of Canaan is applied in the Tell-el-Amarna Correspondence of the 14th cent. B.C. (Tab., Berlin, 92) to the Phoenician coast, and later by Egyptians to all W. Syria. Acc. to Jos. xi. 3, there were Canaanites east and west of the land; acc. to Jud. i. 9, all over, in the Mount, Negeb, and Shephelah and (ver. 10) in Hebron. It was the spread of the Canaanites that spread the name. In Isa. xix. 18, the tip of Canaan is the one language spoken in Palestine, of which Phoenician, Hebrew, Moabitic, etc., were only dialects. In Zech. xiv. 21, probably Canaanite = Phoenician = merchant.
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share in this great function of intermedium, which has endured from the earliest times to the present day.

To put it more particularly, Syria lies between two continents—Asia and Africa; between two primeval homes of men—the valleys of the Euphrates and the Nile; between two great centres of empire—Western Asia and Egypt; between all these, representing the Eastern and ancient world, and the Mediterranean, which is the gateway to the Western and modern world. Syria has been likened to a bridge between Asia and Africa—a bridge with the desert on one side and the sea upon the other; and, in truth, all the great invasions of Syria, with two exceptions, have been delivered across her northern and southern ends. But these two exceptions—the invasions of Israel and Islam—prove the insufficiency of the bridge simile, not only because they were but the highest waves of an almost constant tide of immigration which has flowed upon Syria from Arabia, but because they represent that gift of religion to her, which in its influence on her history far exceeds the influence of her central position. Syria is not only the bridge between Asia and Africa: she is the refuge of the drifting populations of Arabia. She has been not only the highroad of civilisations and the battle-field of empires, but the pasture and the school of innumerable little tribes. She has been not merely an open channel of war and commerce for nearly the whole world, but the vantage-ground and opportunity of the world’s highest religions. In this strange mingling of bridge and harbour, of highroad and field, of battle-ground and sanctuary, of seclusion and opportunity—rendered possible through the striking division of her surface into mountain and plain—lies all the secret of Syria’s
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history, under the religion which has lifted her fame to glory. As to her western boundary, no invasion, save of hope, ever came over that. Even when the nations of Europe sought Palestine, their armies did not enter by her harbours till the coast was already in their possession. But across this coast she felt from the first her future to lie; her expectation went over the sea to isles and mainlands far beyond her horizon; and it was into the West that her spiritual empire—almost the only empire Syria ever knew—advanced upon its most glorious course.

In all this there are four chief factors of which it will be well for us to have some simple outline before we go into details. These are—Syria's Relations to Arabia, from which she drew her population; her position as Debateable Ground between Asia and Africa, as well as between both of these and Europe; her Influence Westwards; her Religion. These outlines will be brief. They are meant merely to introduce the reader to the extent and the interest of the historical geography which he is beginning, as well as to indicate our chief authorities.

I. THE RELATION OF SYRIA TO ARABIA.

We have seen that Syria is the north end of the Arabian world, that great parallelogram which is bounded by the Levant with Mount Taurus, the Euphrates with the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea with the Isthmus of Suez. Within these limits there is a wonderful uniformity of nature: the mass of the territory is high, barren table-land, but dotted by oases of great fertility, and surrounded by a lower level, most of which is also
fertile. The population is all Semitic. It is very numerous for so bare a land, and hardy and reproductive. But it is broken up into small tribes, with no very definite territories. These tribes have gone forth united as a nation only at one period in their history, and that was the day of Islam, when their dominion extended from India to the Atlantic. At all other times they have advanced separately, either by single tribes or a few tribes together. Their outgoings were four—across the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb into Ethiopia, across the Isthmus of Suez into Egypt, across the Euphrates into Mesopotamia, across the Jordan into Western Syria. Of these, Syria became the most common receptacle of the Arabian drift. She lay, so to speak, broadside-on to the desert; part of her was spread east of the Jordan, rolling off undefended into the desert steppes; she was seldom protected by a strong government, like Egypt and Mesopotamia; and so in early times she received not only the direct tides of the desert, but the backwash from these harbours as well. Of this the Hebrews were an instance, who came over to her, first from Mesopotamia and then from Egypt. The loose humanity of the Semitic world has, therefore, been constantly beating upon Syria, and almost as constantly breaking into her. Of the tribes who crossed her border, some flowed in from the neighbourhood only for summer, and ebbed again with autumn, like the Midianites in Gideon's day, or the various clans of the 'Aneezeh in our own. But

1 The coast of the Indian Ocean open to the monsoons, with part of the coasts of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, Syria, the slopes of Taurus, and the Euphrates valley, are fertile. The rest of the Persian Gulf and Red Sea coasts, the Isthmus of Suez, and forty miles of the coast of the Levant, are desert.
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others came up out of the centre or from the south of Arabia—like the Beni Jafn, for instance, who migrated all the way from Yemen in the first Christian century, and, being made by the Romans wardens of the eastern marches of the Empire, founded in time a great dynasty—the Ghassanides. And others came because they had been crowded or driven out of the Nile or the Euphrates valley, like the Syrians, the Philistines, and the Children of Israel.

Thus Syria was peopled. Whenever history lights up her borders we see the same process at work: when Israel crosses the Jordan; when the Midianites follow and oppress her; when, the Jews being in exile, the Idumeans come up on their seats; when the Decapolis is formed as a Greek league to keep the Arabs out; when the Romans, with their wonderful policy, enrol some of the immigrants to hold the others in check; especially at the Moslem invasion; but also during the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, when various nomadic tribes roaming certain regions with their tents are assigned to the Crown or to different Orders of Chivalry; and even to-day, when parts of the Survey Map of Palestine are crossed by the names of the Beni Sab, the Beni Humâr, the ‘Arab-el-‘Amarîn, and so forth, just as the map of ancient Palestine is distributed among the B’ne Naphtali, the B’ne Joseph, the B’ne Jehudah, and other clans of Israel. All these, ancient and modern, have been members of the same Semitic race. Some of them have carried Syria by sudden war; others have ranged for a long time up and down the

1 Prutz, _Z.D.P.V._, x. 192, mentions so many ‘tents’ or ‘tribes’ as assigned to the Order of St. John, and argues that the rest belonged to the king.
Syrian border, or settled peacefully on the more neglected parts of the land, till gradually they were weaned from their pastoral habits, and drawn in among the agricultural population. To-day you do not see new tribes coming up from the centre or other end of Arabia to invade Syria; but you do see a powerful tribe like the Ruwalla, for instance, ranging every year between the Euphrates and the Jordan; or smaller clans like the Ta‘amirah of the Judean wilderness, or the ‘Adwân of Moab, after living for centuries by extorting blackmail from the jellâhin, gradually themselves take to agriculture, and submit to the settled government of the country.¹

From all this have ensued two consequences:—

First. The fact that by far the strongest immigration into Syria has been of a race composed of small independent tribes, both suits and exaggerates the tendencies of the land itself. Syria, as we shall see in the next chapter, is broken up into a number of petty provinces, as separated by desert and mountain as some of the Swiss cantons are by the Alps. These little clans, which swarmed out of Arabia, fitted the little shelves and corners of Syria, so that Syria was tribal both by her form and by the character of her population. It is partly this, and partly her position between great and hostile races, which have disabled her from political empire.

Second. The population of Syria has always been essentially Semitic. There are few lands into which so many divers races have come: as in ancient times Philistines and Hittites; then in very large numbers, Greeks; then with the Crusades a few hundred thousands of Franks; then till the present day more

¹ For the present successful policy of the Turks in this, see ch. xxiv.