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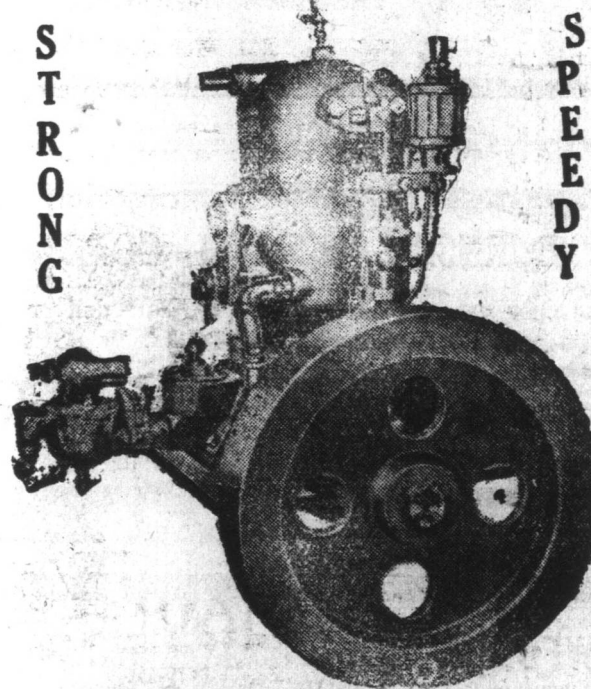
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Sixty-Six Years in the Service of
the Public—The Evening Telegram

What Happened in Damascus

(By a "Times" Correspondent).

Now that a calmer atmosphere reigns, it is possible to give some connected account of the recent trouble and its beginning. The events in the Jebel Druse undoubtedly played a contributory part in causing the Damascus trouble, just as they have been the root of outbreaks that occurred recently in other parts of the country. The reverses the French have suffered and the opposition they encountered in the Jebel combined to create a general atmosphere of excitement and restlessness throughout Syria. Incidentally, if at the time that the French were compelled to denude Damascus of troops the Druses had taken the opportunity offered thereby, they could have occupied the city and the whole country would have risen. As it was, they missed their chance, but what has since happened in the Jebel has, on the one hand, swelled the national movement, and, on the other hand, encouraged disrespect for authority and fomented a spirit of increasing lawlessness which has found expression in the incidents of brigandage reported lately, culminating in last week's trouble here.

Outside the city the brigands have been very active, and lately the French having received reinforcements, have been occupied in dealing with the villages suspected of harboring bandits. Although they have done much in this connection, the route from Beirut is still by no means safe, and on my journey here I had to obey official warnings that I would motor only as far as Rayak, whence I had to continue the journey by the Aleppo press. Even then, although the train was guarded, a brigand entered a compartment close to mine and robbed a woman.

About a fortnight ago the French burned several villages southeast of the city and brought a couple of dozen corpses of brigands to Damascus, where, after parading them on camel-back through the main streets, they exposed them in the Margh Square. The parade was a revolting spectacle, as the bodies rocked in rhythm with the camels' movements. It was intended as a warning to the turbulent element. It had, however, an entirely opposite effect, for it merely served to infuriate the populace and accentuated the feeling of irritation already abroad. What added to the indignation was that several of these corpses were those of Damascenes. Three days later in the morning the guard found outside the Bab el Shargi (Gate of the East) the corpses of twelve Circassians (the French are using them largely as irregulars). This was the reply, typical of the reply of those whom it was intended to intimidate.

On the night of Saturday, October 17, French soldiers were attacked and mutilated in one of the low quarters. Later the same night several were fired on while on patrol. The next morning there appeared in the Shaghour quarter a band of some three-score brigands, led by one Hassan al Kharrat, a former chief Ghaffr (night watchman) of the city, then whom, of course, no better persons for a looting expedition within its precincts could have been found. A little later another band coming from a Druse village to the south of the city which, however, had nothing to do with the Jebel Druse, appeared in the Meidan quarter. Both bands made for the bazaars and the centre of the city and started looting. Encouraged by this, bad characters from other quarters disarmed the police and took their rifles and also began to loot, shooting in the air all the time, and creating a panic.

One of the quarters to which the Druse band paid attention was the Armenian, the members of which were alleged to have helped to loot the villages recently burned and to have sold their trophies in the public market. In reality it was Circassian irregulars who had done the looting and openly sold what they obtained in the bazaars, ponies being offered for a couple of pounds; two of them while offering their hauls on the Merj (park or meadow) that morning had been killed and accidentally shot two innocent countrymen who were looking on—an incident which did not improve the situation. However, the Druses for some obscure reason thought the looters and sellers of the loot were Armenians, and that hapless folk, so often in this part of the Mediterranean the victim of faction fights or mob fury, had to suffer yet one more injustice.

By this time the city resounded from end to end with rifle-fire. No one knew what really was happening, but all were, not unnaturally, somewhat excited, and the uncertainty added to the general nervousness. The French appeared to believe, from the development which the situation had undergone overnight, that some important movement on the part of the populace was imminent and that larger forces were at work than was really the case. (Competent observers estimate that the total number of marauders roaming the city never exceeded five hundred.) At midnight on the eighteenth the French sent tanks through the city and these passed along the bazaars at a terrific speed, firing to the right and left without ceasing. The mob erected

barricades in the rear of the tanks, and when they were returning they were shot at from above, many of their crews being wounded.

At six o'clock that evening the French started to bombard the old city. The shelling was intermittent, and as far as is known only blank shells were used at that juncture, but this did not diminish the consternation of the populace and of a large number of Europeans whose quarters were in the narrow city, which was the object of the bombardment. The shelling continued during the night. The next morning, suddenly and without warning, all the troops were withdrawn from the old city, including the Christian quarters, and concentrated at Salhiyeh at which were the French contingents, whither all French families were removed. From ten o'clock for twenty-four hours the bombardment—live shells now being used—was continued by artillery outside the city, while airplanes flew overhead, dropping bombs and using machine guns. Only at noon on the twentieth did the firing cease, and a truce was called, the terms being those of the ultimatum of which the conditions have already been reported.

The forty-eight hours' shelling, combined with the activities of the marauders, as might be expected, left substantial traces. I made an extensive tour of the city, and was shocked at the havoc wrought in every direction. The whole area lying between the Hamidiyeh Bazaar and the Street Called Straight had been laid in ruins. The Hamidiyeh is greatly damaged, but far worse is the Street Called Straight, the corrugated roof of which had been blown off in the centre for quite a hundred yards, and a portion of it was hanging down into the street like a part of a collapsed balloon. In both bazaars, shop after shop was destroyed, either by tank machine-guns, which riddled the iron shutters as they dashed through, or by shell, or by fire.

As one walks through these bazaars, which but a few days ago were prosperous and full of activity, it is impossible to drive—one is depressed by the spectacle of destruction and ruin, and this feeling is accentuated by glimpses of even greater damage done up the little side-alleys leading off from the main thoroughfares. The bazaar which had been done so badly damaged, while the Suk el Kharrat (Turners' Market), the street runs across the south end of the Street Called Straight, has also suffered severely, house upon house and shop after shop having the appearance of being in process of demolition. But the holes are unmistakably made by shell, and smoke curling between the rafters and firemen working on the roofs tell the true tale.

Happily the Great Mosque escaped, in spite of its being near to the burned areas; but not so the beautiful green-and-blue-tiled Saniyeh Mosque, which has an enormous hole in the dome made by a shell, and some of its mosaic windows destroyed. The Imam and some worshippers invited us in to view what had happened. They scarcely spoke; their attitude eloquently expressed how deeply they felt. From the minaret a wonderful panorama is to be had of the whole city, and it was from there that I first realised the extent of the destruction which had been done. An irreparable loss is the Palace of Azm, belonging to the family of that name, which has given many prominent men to Damascus. It is one of the most beautiful and picturesque buildings in the city. It housed the Institut d'Art et d'Archeologie Musulmane. Its director is M. de Lorey, and it contained many rare objects, including all recent archaeological discoveries in Syria, and was renowned for its marble fittings and mosaic-work. Practically none of these treasures remain. Brigands either looted or deliberately smashed them—pieces on the ground reveal what the Vandal hands did,—while shell fire has barely left the walls standing of the handsome haremlik. The brigands also paid attention to the palace which General Sarraill recently selected as a place to which morning for Deraa, and by evening his apartments had been reduced to ruins by shells which rained on the palace as soon as it was known that the brigands had seized it.

The sweetest bazaar, El Bourieh, nearby, is seriously damaged, and a shop, the famous Dalale, is completely destroyed.

The houses of such well-known families as Ali Riza Pasha or Rifkabi, the Emir Abdullah's premier, and the Bakris, who joined Sultan Atash, and the Kawali, all have been completely destroyed. The house of Kawali was one of the show places and was, like the Azm Palace, a gem of Arabesque art. There are but some of the buildings of the damaged areas. Words fail to describe fittingly the spectacle which the ancient and sacred city now presents. A good deal of damage was done by fire either lit by marauders or caused by shells and bombs. In many places debris is still smouldering.

It is very difficult to estimate the material loss represented by this destruction of property. Various authorities place it at between one and two million gold Turkish pounds.

During the two days' bombardment, and indeed until yesterday morning, the city was panic-stricken. The European element particularly was al-

armed, for the complete withdrawal of troops from the Christian quarter left them exposed to the fanatical fury of the marauders, which the slightest incident might have aroused. The various consular officials had great difficulty in reaching their nationals, but by dint of much patience, and at no little personal risk, they succeeded in rescuing all. In regard to the British a serious case was the Presbyterian Mission school, where a shell entered a sitting-room, completely gutting it. The inmates of the house, two ladies, were fortunately in another part of the building, and were removed to safety. In another British institution, the Victoria Hospital, the matron and staff suddenly found themselves called upon to cope with some five hundred Armenian families, who, with their baggage, sought refuge from the marauders. The presence of such an element added to the dangers to which the hospital was exposed, but the staff pluckily stuck to their posts and admitted all who wanted to enter.

So far it is reported that only two persons—Tripolitans—were killed, and one British subject was wounded. That the European communities came off so lightly and escaped the attention of the riflemen was not due to the good management of the French authorities, but rather to the good offices of the Moslems. The latter behaved splendidly, and personally organized public order in the Christian quarter after the withdrawal of the troops, and actually defended it against attempts by the unruly elements to enter for loot. In one instance some Moslem policemen conducted Europeans to a place of safety.

All the Europeans I met were warmly grateful for this Moslem assistance. None who lived through those three terrible days—October 18-20—will ever forget the experience, particularly the two nights of incessant shelling, that with the added horrors of fires springing up on all sides, became veritable nights of terror.

But while the Europeans feel unable adequately to express their gratitude to the Moslems, there is at Beirut, as well as Damascus, considerable resentment that an open town like Damascus, including areas which are officially known as European, should have been bombed and all the troops withdrawn from the Christian quarter without in either case the

slightest warning. More especially is this resented since, throughout, the French authorities reiterated the assurance that Europeans would be safeguarded, and at the critical moment they were left to the tender mercies of the mob, while the French families were all withdrawn within the French lines. This bitter feeling that has been aroused will, I am afraid, take some time to die down.

The situation here appears to be in hand, but normal conditions are not yet in sight. Barbed-wire entanglements and stone barricades still adorn El Margh Square, the municipality, and the French hospital and other military buildings, and armed guards are all over the city, which is deserted after seven in the evening, none daring to venture out for fear of being shot.

By dint of force the French can maintain peace in Damascus, but the key to the whole situation in Syria is the Jebel Druse, and as long as that question is unsettled sporadic troubles in various parts of the country will continue to increase. Those qualified to know believe that it will take a much larger force than that now available to pacify the Jebel and maintain peace in the rest of the country, which now abounds in brigands. Yet the Druse difficulty could even now be overcome without repressive measures. It has been entirely due to failure to appreciate its psychological aspect and the persistent endeavor to ride roughshod over a tribe renowned for its pride and virility. Properly handled, the Druses could be converted, without any force, from a serious menace—the French have by no means established themselves in the Jebel—into allies, and automatically the problem of internal public security would be solved.

Economically, also, the settlement of the Druse question would be a relief. The cutting off of the Jebel from all intercourse with the outside world, as well as the failure of the Hauran crops, hits everyone very badly, for on the one hand it means that advances against the crops cannot be recovered, and on the other hand no trade is being done with the interior. Beirut is suffering particularly. Merchants are unable to take up goods ordered, the Customs are congested, and the banks are beginning to refuse to discount

trade bills. A continuation of the present condition will end, it is feared, in many failures.

The resumption of the bombardment which the French authorities threatened if the city did not pay one hundred thousand Turkish pounds (\$440,000) gold and deliver three thousand rifles before noon to-day has been averted. Late on Friday evening the delegate of the Commissioner issued a communique stating that responsible Damascenes having undertaken to comply with the conditions of the ultimatum, the bombardment would in principle not be carried out. I understand that an undertaking had been given by the notables, as was originally intended, but by the President of the State of Syria, by his Council and ministers, and by the Mayor of the city. Mukhtar had been busy all day rounding up rifles, but had difficulty in getting the required number. The people felt that the surrender of so large a number might be used as proof of their complicity in the rebellion.

On Friday the panic was intense. The consulates, which notified their nationals that they could receive facilities to leave if wanted, were besieged by applicants. The exodus was at its zenith when the night train left for Beirut, packed to overflowing, with people sitting on the floor and steps—anywhere, so long as they could travel. The shouts that went up as the train drew out testified to the intense satisfaction they felt on leaving a spot which to so many must during the previous week have been a hideous nightmare. The news of the acceptance of the ultimatum, which had not been known until Saturday, was received with patent relief, and people are beginning to resume work, though it will be some little time before normal conditions set in and confidence, which is at present much weakened, returns.

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