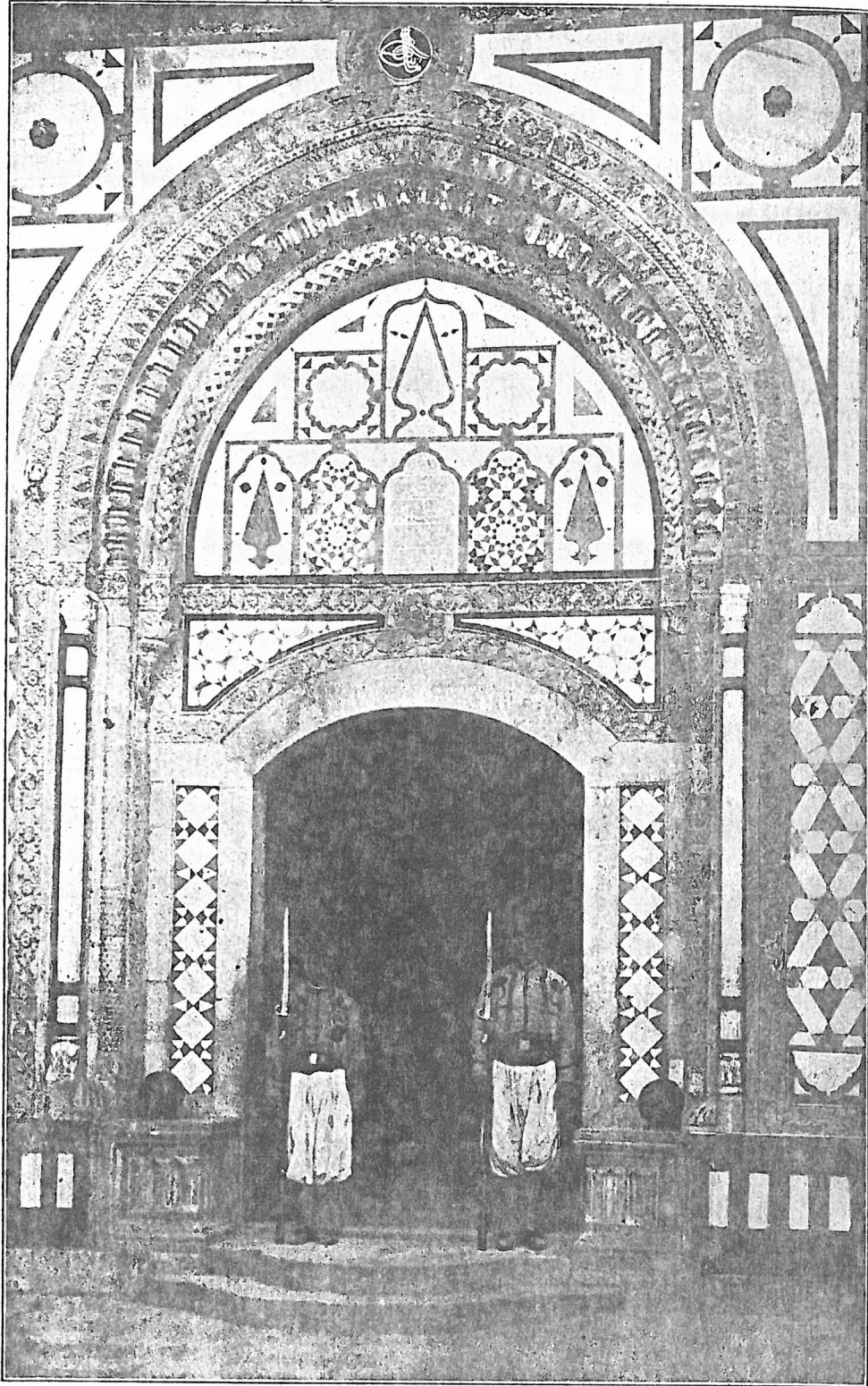


Houghton, Louise Seymour

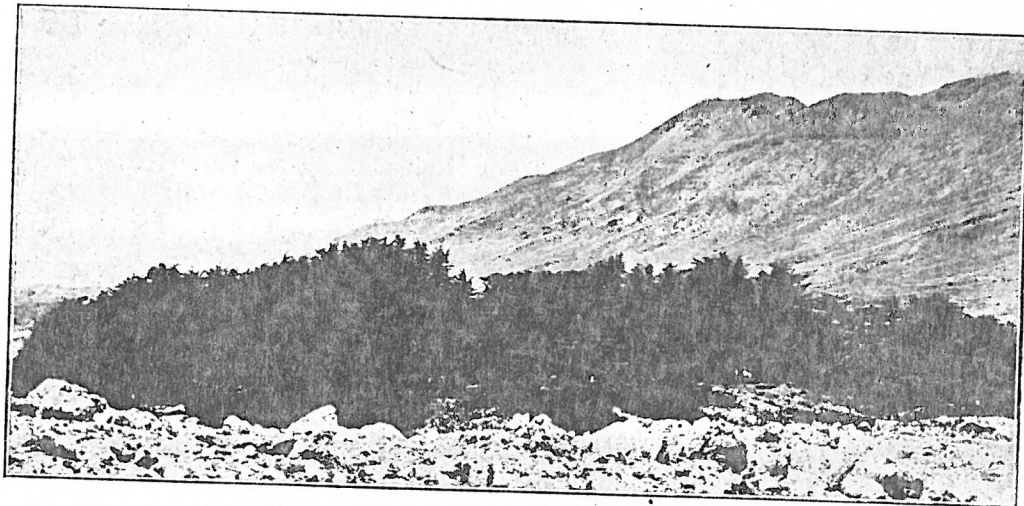


PALACE GATEWAY AT BET-EIDDEEN, MT. LEBANON.
Seat of Youssef Pasha, the Christian governor of Lebanon.

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"THE CEDARS OF THE LORD."

The Baruk Cedars, where American missionaries and others often camp in summer.

SYRIANS IN THE UNITED STATES¹

III

INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL STATUS

LOUISE SEYMOUR HOUGHTON

That Syrians in general possess a high degree of native intelligence is the well-nigh universal testimony. The statistics of the Immigration Department as to illiteracy, though doubtless correct, are certainly misleading. In these statistics (56.42 per cent illiterate, 43 per cent illiterates between the ages of fourteen and forty-five) Syrians stand lower than any other nationality except Lithuanians (65.19 per cent), Turkish subjects exclusive of Syrians but including the brilliant and more or less educated Armenians (69.03 per cent), and Portuguese (69.39 per cent),² being very nearly on a par with Ruthenians (56.32 per cent), and far below the group next above these, Slovenians (30.07 per cent).

¹This is the third of a series of articles on Syrians in the United States by Louise Seymour Houghton. Previous articles in the series were: Sources and Settlement, July 1; Business Activities, Aug. 5. Price for each issue, 25 cents.

²The eastern custom of neglecting to educate girls probably counts for much in this percentage of illiteracy. For Syrian parents to send a daughter away from home to school requires even yet a courage and resolution quite heroic on the part of both daughter and parents. A generation ago it was still more unusual. Therefore the proportion of illiterate middle-aged women to the men of their generation is necessary large.

Syrians, through the lack of school facilities, may be illiterate, but they are not uneducated; it may even be said that they are not uncultured. Through the age-long and everywhere prevalent custom of reciting poetry, prose masterpieces, and classic stories, all, whether or not they can read, are well acquainted with the best Arabic literature, than which there is none nobler. In every home of wealth, where children are carefully educated, though everyone reads, this custom is still maintained, and there is hardly a village without its professional reciter—often a blind man. Night after night, in all parts of Syria, men gather in cafés to hear the repetition of long poems or prose works, continued often for many evenings, precisely after the manner of the Arabian Nights. They have the oriental memory, which through generations of this sort of education is capable of prodigious feats, and it is safe to say that the majority of illiterate Syrian immigrants have a better acquaintance with their own literature than the majority of American college grad-

uates of the past twenty years have with their own national literature.

A caution may be in order here. American travellers in the Levant usually go thither by way of Egypt and Palestine, and before they reach Syria their notion of the peasantry of the Nearer East has been formed by what they have seen of the fellahin of the former countries. So far as Syria is concerned, nothing can be more erroneous. The Syrian peasant is a fellah neither in name nor in fact. Usually he owns his land, and though the victim of excessive and arbitrary taxation, he is subject to none of the ills which the Palestinean fellahin owe to absentee landlords, nor to the conditions which from time immemorial have weighed upon the Egyptian fellahin. Furthermore, the latter are almost invariably illiterate, which is not the case in Syria. The comity of missions gives Syria to the American Presbyterians, Palestine to the English and German established Churches. The policy of both these last has been to establish schools only in the large cities; and as the Turkish government maintains none,¹ except where self-preservation compels it to oppose a native Moslem to a foreign Christian school, the peasantry of Palestine have no educational opportunities whatever. The policy of the American mission is precisely the reverse: its village schools are scattered all over Lebanon, and though the large percentage of illiterate Syrian immigrants (56.42 per cent of those over fourteen years of age) shows that not all the Syrian peasants have enjoyed these opportunities, yet their superiority in this respect over the general average of Turkish immigrants (69.03 per cent), gives some idea of the superior advantages enjoyed by Syrians. It would indeed be difficult to find half a dozen illiterates in any one of the 107 villages where American schools exist.²

The intelligence of some illiterate Syrians is manifested in their business suc-

cess. A prominent business man in one of the lake cities, and another in a north-western city, may be instanced. They employ educated clerks, but can themselves neither read nor write.¹ As a general thing, however, such men learn to read and write English after coming to this country.

Syrian immigrants greatly covet education for their children, and make real sacrifices to keep them in school. The truant officer has no dealings with these children, although in many cases poverty compels parents to withdraw them from school at the earliest legal age, that they may go to work. In this case a large number attend night schools. A serious problem arises, however, in the case of children who are twelve or thirteen years old on arriving, and who by ignorance of English are disqualified from reaping much benefit from school before the legal age of going to work. The proportion of school children however, is small, most of the households being young. Thus in Chicago among 500 families there are 700 children of school age. In Buffalo, where there are 100 women (including unmarried girls), there were only thirty-seven children in 1908. Syrians do not marry until they are able in some way to support a family, for, notwithstanding the prominence of the peddler woman, it is considered that a man lowers himself who permits his wife to earn wages.

The children themselves appear to take a lively interest in education, and readily co-operate with those parents who can afford to let them enjoy advantages not offered by the public schools. In the lake cities especially parents spend considerable sums to secure to their children such advantages, chiefly in music. In sparsely settled districts and in the farming communities, where the public school has not as yet appeared, parents make great sacrifices to establish schools. A number of homesteaders have either sold or sublet their property, that they may move into the nearest town for the sake of the schools. A Syrian physician in New York founded,²

¹The policy has doubtless been changed since the revolution, but a change in practice requires time.

²Mention should also be made of the admirable British Syrian schools for girls founded immediately after the massacres of 1860 (see THE SURVEY for July 1) by an English lady who had lived in Syria, and since her death carried on by the generosity of a relative by marriage resident in Beirut.

¹Incidentally, one may here find a witness to the probity of Syrian clerks thus trusted.

²Dr. Amin Hadad, president of the Syrian Protestant Society of New York.

and with help from Americans for a number of years supported, a school where recently arrived children might learn English, the better to profit by the public schools. His object, which however he has been unable fully to realize, was "to provide an educational and industrial institution for natives of that race, founded on Christian principles, by which they shall be taught the English language and such branches of learning and industry as may assist them to support themselves, and to become intelligent American citizens." This man very strongly disapproves of peddling, and hoped by such an institution to hasten its extinction.



ROAD-MAKING IN SYRIA.
Men and women working side by side.

In Chicago well-to-do Syrians are planning to found a high-grade Arabic school, that the treasures of their national literature may not be lost to American-born children.

The children are reported by their teachers as unusually bright. One exception to this opinion was found in a New England village, where a number of Syrians are employed in textile mills,

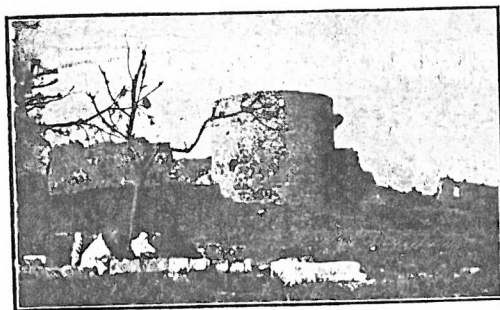
and where the very competent principal of the schools found their children exceptionally dull. The reason for this solitary exception was not ascertained.

The general testimony of Americans who have much to do with Syrians is that they learn English very rapidly; that of some charity organization, societies and other expert philanthropists is that they do not. The low opinion of Syrians, held sometimes by the latter, though even by them quite exceptionally,

is easily explained: they come in contact only with those who by reason of some special disability, industrial or moral, fail to succeed. A large correspondence brings to the question, "Do they easily learn English?" Such answers as, "Very easily," "Very rapid-

ly," "Better than other foreigners, especially in pronunciation." One answer no doubt touches an important point, "Live too much together," and explains why, in general, the women are behind the men and children in this respect. It also throws light on the opinion of the charity organization agents, noted above, since it is almost invariably with the women of a family that such people have

occup.



THE SYRIAN'S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.
Castle of St. Louis, Sidon. A relic of the
times of the French Crusaders.

to deal. That a large proportion of women do not speak English tends to show that the proportion of women peddlers is smaller than is usually supposed.

In Toledo, Minneapolis, Lawrence, and Indianapolis, however, all Syrian women, as well as the men and children, speak English, and the same is true of nearly all the women in New Haven, Albany, Troy, Buffalo, Cleveland, New Orleans, St. Louis, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Duluth, the exceptions being some of the older women, and the new arrivals. In the far west, where they live scattered, and often among other foreigners, many even of the men appear to acquire no more English than a business vocabulary. In California, on the other hand, all speak English, and few are illiterate.

In Albany notwithstanding the general low financial standing of the colony, the majority can read and write not only Arabic, but English, many having been taught in the celebrated school of English Friends, in Brumanna, Syria. Most of the Syrians in Troy were educated in mission schools in Syria. The Syrians of Pittsburgh are mostly self-taught, though quite a number were educated in American and English schools at home. A number of Syrian ladies in New York were educated in German schools in Haifa, Nablous, or Jerusalem, and spoke German and French when they arrived, but not English. These, except a few older women, have studied English since coming here, one of them, and perhaps more, in a convent school; and they speak it beautifully. Notwithstanding the reputed dulness of some

under what may be adverse circumstances, the general opinion that they are remarkable linguists appears to be well grounded.

The Syrian's thirst for knowledge has already been remarked. A considerable number of young men carry on courses of study while in business. A clerk in a New York restaurant has taken a year in the New York University, and contemplates pursuing a law course in Columbia, without abandoning his present calling. A recently-arrived graduate of one of the Syrian schools is endeavoring to work up a clientèle among high-class dressmakers, hoping thus to support himself through the course of electrical engineering in Columbia. A considerable number of graduates of the Syrian Protestant College have taken, or are taking, special university courses in various parts of the country, though established in some business which requires no such education. It seems probable that a larger proportion of Syrian than of American business men are college graduates. Other young business men attend night schools, and a good proportion of the small Protestant contingent affiliate themselves with the Young Men's Christian Association of the several cities, especially for the sake of the classes, and they are reported as doing exceptionally good work. With all their keenness after wealth, and the Syrian business instinct is very keen, that is no doubt true of all Syrians which was written by a newspaper reporter of the lowest Syrian colony in this country, that of Manhattan: "The people of these tenements respect knowledge rather than the dollar."

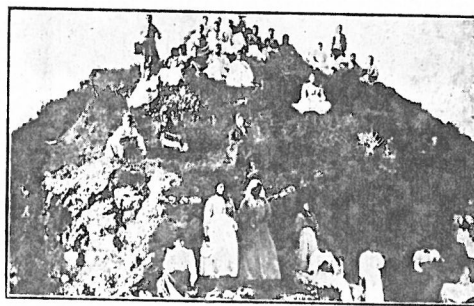
At the present writing more than forty Syrian young men and five girls in fourteen towns and cities are known to be pursuing a university education, but this list is certainly not exhaustive. Several boys in other towns (and probably girls) are preparing for it. When it is remembered that with two exceptions all these young people are self-supporting, the proportion of one in 1,800 of all ages and both sexes in this country pursuing the higher education is highly respec-

table. The favorite profession is medicine, in which there is obviously a better field than in the law, the church, or the teaching profession. However, two are studying theology, one is studying law, one mechanical and one electrical engineering, one pharmacy. The largest number, ten, are in Brown University. Others are attending or have this year (1908) been graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, Hobart College, McCormick Theological Seminary, and the Carnegie Institute of Technology. Two girls are studying medicine, one in Chicago University, the other in the Woman's Medical College, Philadelphia. A number of these young people were prepared in American high schools, but a considerable number had studied in the Syrian Protestant College of Beirut, an institution not connected with the American Mission, but chartered under the laws of New York, and conferring degrees of A.B., M.D., and B.S.

Syrian students mix easily with their fellows, although, with their intense enthusiasm for learning, it is not strange that they find, as one of them expresses it, "a kind of levity in certain classes of American youth"; or that, with their in-born social charm, they are impressed with "a stiff dulness of manner in a large number of them."

The career of one of these Syrian students is sufficiently representative to be described here. He did not begin with the advantage of having been graduated from the Syrian Protestant College, but was prepared for entrance there in one of the three excellent preparatory schools of the mission. On reaching America he had but five months in which to prepare for entering an American college and without graduating from the high school he was permitted by the college faculty¹ to enter without conditions, "just to see what a Syrian can do," and in the belief, afterward confessed, that a few weeks would complete his college career. At the first mid-year examination he took honor marks in every course. At the close of

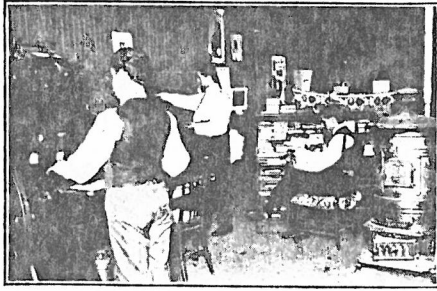
¹The college is one of the small but excellent colleges of Ohio.



YESTERDAY AND TODAY.
Sidon school-girls picnicking on the tombs of the Phœnician Kings. Discovered by Renan, 1860.

freshman year he carried off the first prize for English declamation and the college prize in mathematics. In the next year he won the first intercollegiate prize in English literature in a competition open to the students of six colleges, and in that and the following year he stood at the head of his class in scholarship. At the close of his junior year he took the highest prize in English, and half a year later, instead of the 120 hours necessary for a degree he passed 145 hours, with honors in every subject and distinguished honors in four. At commencement, having been in residence only three and a half years, he carried off the first rhetorical prize, made his Phi Beta Kappa, took honors in four courses, and was graduated *summa cum laude*. If this is an exceptional case, it is still not exceptional for Syrians to take prizes and graduate with honor.

The career of one of the girl students is equally interesting and promising. This girl had the advantage of being brought to this country at the age of thirteen, and of passing through the American public school system before entering a medical college. In her second year in that institution her anatomical work was considered worthy of a permanent place in the college museum, and she made of copper wire a brachial plexis which goes to the root of paralysis and for which her professor of anatomy has applied for a patent. In connection with her brother, a medical student in another institution, she carried on during the summer vacation a series of original experiments, making discoveries



OFFICE OF "AL WAFA," LAWRENCE, MASS.

which were embodied in a report afterward published in a first-rate medical journal under the title, *The True Cause and Sequence of the Heart Beat*. This study, submitted in the course of the present investigation to several prominent physicians, was pronounced by them a very unusual production, and a real contribution to the elucidation of the subject. Since her graduation she and her brother have continued their scientific investigations, some of the results of which, published in pamphlets or in medical journals, have attracted attention in England and Germany. The brother, who graduated in 1909, has already won distinct recognition in the city in which he was educated.

That so small a population as 70,000 Syrians can support ten Arabic newspapers and magazines is a significant witness to the general intelligence of these people. One of these newspapers, *Al-Wafa*, a weekly, is published in Lawrence, Mass., the others in New York, going thence all over the United States. The oldest of them, *Kawkab Amerika* (*Star of America*), already mentioned, was founded in 1890 and it has helped much to Americanize Syrian immigrants; *Murrat-Et-Gharb*, (*Mirror of the West*) is now perhaps the best. *Al Jamyat* (*the Sower*) especially encourages farming, and goes to five hundred towns and villages. *Al Kalamat* (*the Word*) is a religious semi-monthly, the organ of Bishop Hawaweeny of the Maronite Church. Others are *El-Mohajar* (*the Immigrant*), *Al Hoda* (*the Enlightener*), *Al Dalil* (*the Guide*), all weeklies; *El Mohet* (*the Ocean*) is a semi-weekly. The tenth, a monthly magazine, has late-

ly been discontinued. None of the newspapers can be called a leader of opinion, though nearly all are gaining in weight. They are mostly of the yellow order, but are improving in tone, and are on the whole pretty fair. All take more or less interest in politics, though their contents are still chiefly personals, moral essays, advertisements, and translations from the American press.

Some Arabic books have been published in this country, though not many. It is too early for this immigration to have reached its literary period. The English-Arabic Grammar and Primer by Dr. Arbeely have already been mentioned.¹ A long poem in high Arabic about the San Francisco earthquake has been published; a poet of high repute among his fellow-countrymen, a lawyer, who has taught Arabic in the universities of Berlin and Oxford, has published in the newspapers a number of poems which he proposes soon to collect in a volume, but with these few exceptions nothing that can be called literature has issued from the five Arabic presses of Lawrence and New York. Besides the newspapers they have printed a few pamphlets, but their chief output is letter-heads, handbills, and the like. A Syrian, who was introduced to the American public through a work by an American writer,² has published in English an interesting and in some respects original study of the Twenty-third Psalm.³

The well-nigh universal testimony of the organized charities and kindred institutions is that Syrians never apply for charity. In two cities there were applications on the books, but in most cases they were found to have been sent in by American well-wishers, who became interested in peddlers and assumed that they were in want; or who, more intelligently, sought the aid of the so-

¹Dr. Sallume of Toledo has written a highly learned Arabic-English Method, the manuscript of which in English and Arabic text is the most exquisite piece of modern calligraphy I ever saw, almost equaling ancient church manuscripts.

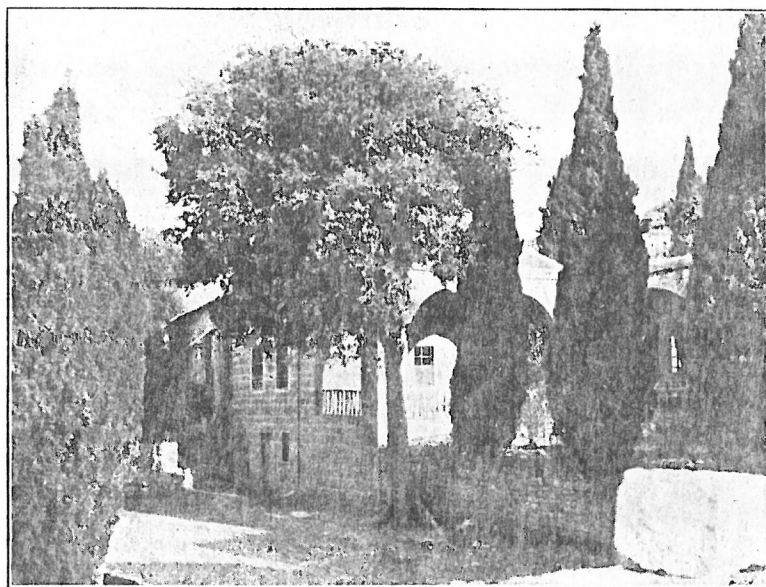
²William Allen Wright, *The Song of our Syrian Guest*.

³The Shepherd Psalm, by Rev. Faddoul Moghabghab, B.A. Fleming H. Revell Company. Dr. A. J. Arbeely has in preparation an extensive history of Syria in English and he is now seeking a publisher for an English romance of Arabic life.

ciety to induce them to adopt a more respected calling. One of the wisest and most experienced of all our professional philanthropists says that it is desperately hard to get at the truth of their condition, or to induce them to do anything but receive. She is amazed at the otherwise universal testimony that there are no Syrian beggars, since she finds Syrians the most difficult of all problems. However, she does not say that she herself has come in contact with beggars. The opinion of an expert of such standing must have weight, and yet, in view of very careful personal research, and of

even from a fellow-countryman. A somewhat wide inquiry has failed to find a single Syrian in a poor-house.

Two women, one of them a widow, were found to have applied to organized charities, not for money, but for advice as to a home or asylum for a child, that the mother might work, presumably (though not certainly) as a peddler. A number of assertions regarding applications by Syrians for public or private relief have been made, though careful inquiry has substantiated only these two, and Syrian children have not been found in any public institution. It



OLD BUILDING OF AMERICAN PREPARATORY SCHOOL, MOUNT LEBANON.

general testimony from a large number of cities, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that this opinion is in part due to unfamiliarity with the Arabic language and Syrian habits and point of view, and in part to the inability of the Syrians to consider themselves in the light of subjects of philanthropic effort. Syrians, like Jews, look after their own poor, and many Syrians are bitterly poor on their first arrival. Yet even these are not candidates for charity, and benevolently-disposed persons of their own race say that a poor Syrian will suffer deeply rather than accept help,

is certain that one of the disadvantages of the peddling industry, when carried on by married women, is that it leaves the children without the mother's care. The comparatively small number of children diminishes this disadvantage, and after all that has been said about married women helping their husbands in this way, the majority of women peddlers are unmarried, usually sisters who have come over hoping to make enough money to send for a brother, when the two might accumulate enough to send for parents and younger children. A movement was started by Syrians in a