CHAPTER III

PERIOD OF DECLINE 1900 – 1918
FROM PATRIARCH MAR RUWEL SHIMUN
UNTIL THE MURDER OF PATRIARCH
MAR BENYAMIN SHIMUN
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DECLINE AND MURDER OF THE PATRIARCH 1900 – 1918
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MURDER OF PATRIARCH MAR BENYAMIN SHIMUN

3.1 Introduction

The beginning of the 20th century was a dark and sad period in the history of the Assyrian Church of the East. The Patriarch Mar Ruvel Shimun was getting old. The Assyrians in Persia were interested in joining with the Russians. The Assyrians from the Turkish region were not satisfied with the help and protection given to them by the English missionaries. They feel that the great English nation was not doing all what they could do in protecting them at least as a minority community using the diplomatic channels.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the Assyrians were under the rule of Patriarch Mar Rouvel Shimun. The Kurds and Turks were persecuting his people. The Anglican missionaries were giving some small help to educate the Assyrians. The liturgical and secular books were being printed in the press of the Archbishop of Canterbury in Urmia.
The American Presbyterians were also doing their work in Persia among the Assyrians. The main difference in their approach was that the Presbyterians converted the Assyrians to their faith while the Anglicans were doing their best to help the Assyrians and not to start an Anglican Church. It was a mission of help. Its intentions were to help and strengthen the Assyrians by educating their clergy and the laity.

The Chaldeans were trying to gain an upper hand over the Assyrians. It is not easy to fix a date when the Assyrian Church became smaller than the Chaldean Church. The turn of the century was the probable period in which the Chaldean Church grew numerically bigger than the Assyrian Church. Ever since the split in 1552 AD at the time of John Sulaqa and his appointment as the Patriarch of the Chaldeans by the Pope, the Chaldeans or the Church of the East under the Pope did not gain majority. By the turn of the century as a result of the vigorous activities of the French Lazarist missions in the area and the Dominican missionaries in Mosul the Chaldean Church grew strong.

In India Mar Abdisho Thondanatt Metropolitan consecrated by Mar Ruvel Shimun Patriarch himself in 1862 AD at Kochanes expired on 16

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1 The American Presbyterians in Urmia area had started a male college called Urmia College with faculties of Medicine, Theology and Arts and Sciences, a female college named Fiske Seminary, two Hospitals one for men and one for women. Their mission Press installed in 1839 had printed, by 1900 AD, three million pages in both the old and modern Syriac.
November 1900. The Church in India based in Thrissur was vexed by the litigation in the wake of the civil suit filed by Bishop A.E. Medlycott. After he lost the civil suit he moved to England as an auxiliary Bishop in Westminster, London handing over the mantle of his Vicariate to Msgr. John Menachery in 1896. Let us turn our attention to the Middle East where the action was.

In the letter dated September 1902 F.N. Heazel\(^2\) writes to the Archbishop of Canterbury about Amadia. The town of Amadia is two days journey south of Tyari. One has to pass through Chail and cross the Zab river in order to reach Amadia. The people who met Rev. Heazel welcomed him, remembered Canon A.J. Maclean who was missionary during 1886 - 1891. The Assyrians complained to Rev. F.N. Heazell against the poor plight of Mar Shimun. He writes to the Archbishop of Canterbury.\(^3\)

My journey was interpreted as a sign of renewed interest from Quadshanis in their welfare. I was asked both here and in Alqosh represent to your Grace how much the Syrians hoped for an English priest to live and work amongst them. It was in Amadia that I met one of the few remaining Nestorian bishops, Mar Ishu of Duri, who pleaded

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\(^2\) Rev. F. N. Heazell, a missionary of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Assyrian Mission, later in 1913 edited the reports and letters of the members of his mission and co-edited, along with Mrs Margoliouth the book *Kurds & Christians* often quoted in this dissertation.

earnestly for support both from our Mission and also from Mar Shimun. He said that unless some further help were forthcoming they could not stand against the persistent efforts of the Dominican missionaries from Musul.

After leaving Amadia I went to Alqosh and Mosul. The road lay through many Syrian villages, which at one time owed allegiance to Mar Shimun; but now they have all, save a small number, joined the Latin Obedience and are known as Uniat Chaldeans. In Alqosh I saw signs of a great educational work being done by Dominicans; the Syrians there seemed more prosperous and better cared for, though I heard not a few complaints from priests who were dissatisfied with their new ecclesiastical rulers, and much more so with the Liturgy which had been imposed on them.

The same missionary mentions the meeting he had with the Jacobite Mafraim Mar Dinoysius. The missionary writes that "Mosul had long since passed out of the hands of Mar Shimun's predecessors". He concludes his comments by expressing his wish, "One felt what a blessing it would be if a great Syrian Church could rise out of the ruins of Nestorianism and Monophysitism".

Around 1902 W.H. Browne writes about the discipline in the Assyrian Church. The missionary claims that credit for the return of the spiritual discipline should go to the Archbishop's Assyrian Mission. People began
to demand a council be called and canon law be enforced. The following words from Rev. Browne's letter give glimpses of the situation way back to the beginning of the 20th century in the Assyrian Church.4

Disputes as to property have been decided according to Canon Law, and offenders are sometimes punished as it directs, and last year a most important and surprising sentence was pronounced upon reference to the book of the Canons. But lately two bigamists, who had been emboldened to commit their crime by the impunity of former offenders, were tried by a court of three archdeacons, two priests, the Rabban David, Benyamin, Mar Shimun's nephew and probable successor, and some of Mar Shimun's cousins, who had at first protected one of the criminals, but now are professing eager churchmanship. It was found that both the men and women and any should harbour them must be cast out of the Church; and Mar Shimun confirmed the finding, as well as another sentence of fasting and subsequent restoration by public absolution, which passed on another offender against marriage law.

The above report of W.H. Browne deals with another important issue of a boy bishop who was 13 years old in a hereditary system, which is no longer practised.5

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5 Ibid., p.157.
Called in his innocence to the high office of bishop, he might by grace have lived up to his vocation; but one fears lest he may rather act as was "naturally to be expected". It seems as if the pressure of poverty and the necessity of providing for his household led him to acquire money in ways that were on a level much below the aspirations he professed last year. Persons who are not old bachelors like me, will say that this is not wonderful and is nothing to make a talk about. Well, but it is something to pray about. It is a great thing for a boy in power to have lofty ideals, and intentions of clinging to what is right in spite of evil influence and bad example. It is a great thing if a young bishop - and he could not have become a bishop in his youth, if God had not permitted others to make him one - be preserved in his integrity and unspotted by the world. A really good bishop, and one who trusted to God to build his house up, if He pleased, and who was far from covetousness and from crooked ways, would be priceless treasure here.

This boy bishop of Jelu namely Zaia Sargis who died in 1951 was in Qudshanis in the winter of 1902 to visit Patriarch Mar Ruvel Shimun. Browne narrates what Petros, Mar Shimun's trusty retainer, who was "a sort of nursery governess to the younger members of Patriarchal household" started lecturing on St. Matthew. 6

On the "right eye" the commentary was "That is you, little Father, You are one of the eyes of the people—the right eye of us mountaineers; and if

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6 Ibid., p.158.
you do not become learned, and also virtuous, and an upholder of the faith and laws of Christ, we shall pluck you out and cast you from us. It is better to go into the kingdom of heaven without you than to go to hell with you."

On another occasion: "The ox is you, Bishop" "What! You do not call me a bull?" "Yes I do—you are Christ's bull. Nay, you are Christ's buffalo—much better than a corn, that He may gather in the good grain; and He Himself will tend you and take care of you, and feed you, and bathe you, and cherish you in the stable of Paradise".

3.2 The Patriarch's Death in 1903

Mar Ruvel Shimun Patriarch died on 29 March 1903. Rev. W.H. Browne wrote the following appreciation of that Patriarch in his report to the Archbishop of Canterbury.¹

But too much had been made of Mar Shimun's indecision, want of vigour, and changes of mind. Perhaps hardly anyone who has not had actual experience of it can realise what it is to be blocked in on every side and to see fresh dangers threaten at every step taken. One course of action is impossible on account of the opposition of the Government, another will rouse the Kurds to fury, a third will alienate the Syrians and make them uncontrollable, while a forth will provoke the members of the household; yet no one course is so obviously the right one that it ought to be followed at all costs. On the other hand, to sit still and do nothing has the

¹ Ibid., pp.164-165.
fallacious comfort that it precipitates nothing and may delay the impending disaster, or give time for "something to turn up".

There were occasions on which the late prelate acted with quick decision and preserving vigour to the dismay of governors and others, whose dismissal he obtained by representations made to the Sultan or the Vali, and of his own chieftains, & c., whom he summarily deprived of their ill-used dignities. He remained some nine months in Julamerk – he who could not bear to be away from home – to secure the release of Tyari men, who had been falsely convicted. He lived in a poor room amid much discomfort of body and mind, and preserved in spite of the dismissal of officials who were friendly to him. Afraid to leave the seat of local government, he celebrated his Communions on a rock on the hillside at Eastertide and other great festivals. Guns were discharged outside his residence at night and alarms of thieves were made, in the hope of frightening him away from his post. Commissioners, sent to examine into the conviction, sent in false reports, and Mar Shimun obtained new commissioners from the Sultan until the innocent were released.

If it be impossible to live in this country without criticising some of the officials who represent, or misrepresent, the Government, Mar Shimun was honestly loyal to the Sultan; and this loyalty and his sound common-sense preserved him from yielding to tempting schemes, which promised greatness and freedom, e.g. when Sheikh Obeidullah of Neri invited his co-operation in rebellion. It is understood that it was to mark his appreciation of his Beatitude's behaviour and services that the Sultan decorated him with the order of Osmanieh, in addition to that of the
Mejidieh, which he had received a couple of years after his consecration. The deceased prelate was a warm admirer of Queen Victoria and of The English nation, kept alive the memory of our procuring the exile of Bedr Khan Beg and the Mira (Emir) of Hakkari, and of our recovering so many of the Syrian children who had been carried captives to distant regions.

March 15th, 1903—Patriarch Mar Rouvel Shimun consecrated his nephew Benyamin Bishop and Metropolitan, thus indicating him as his successor. March 29th—Patriarch Mar Rouvel Shimun died. April 10th—Mar Isaac Khananishu, Metropolitan, arrived at Qudshanis from Shamsdin. April 12th—Mar Isaac Khananishu consecrated Mar Benyamin Shimun Catholicos Patriarch

3.3 Mar Benyamin Shimun As The New Patriarch

The letter dated April 3rd 1903 from Qudshanis, Julamerk, Vilayat of Van, Turkey in Asia was sent by the English Mission to the Archbishop of Canterbury by Constantinople and Van telling about the death of Mar Ruwel Shimun, Patriarch and the effects of the consecration of his nephew Benyamin, aged about 16, as the new Catholicos Patriarch.

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8 Mar Benyamin Shimun was born in 1886. The exact date is not known. When he was consecrated on 12 April 1903, he must have completed 16 years and going to be 17.

Beniamin, son of Ishai (Jesse), should succeed to the patriarchate, and title of Mar Shimun. He has of late been the natir Kursi custos sedis. Sometime ago the successor was Mar Auraham, consecrated in 1884, cousin of the late Patriarch.

Mar Shimun is a Papa-re', bishop of the nation, and temporal ruler of six “ashiret valleys”, still independent of the Turkish yoke. The late Mar Shimun was very loyal to the Assyrian Mission. Certainly on one occasion great promises were held out to him by the Dominicans, if he would join the Roman Catholic Church. Gifts were sent by the American Mission to induce him to allow them a footing in Kurdistan. The inducements were held out by a gentleman at Oxford for him to form a Nestorian church in England. But Mar Shimun was firm.

His family was unhappily split in half. The opposition faction was headed by Nimrod, who endeavoured to promote the aims of the Mosul Dominicans. Nimrod endeavoured to get the local Turkish government on his side against Mar Shimun and the Turks gladly promote discussion among the Christians in order to conquer the ashirets.

In 1899 it was reported to the Pope that the Nestorian nation had “joined the Catholic Church”. As a fact nothing at all happened. But no doubt there was intrigue.

When an Oriental ruler dies, strange things may happen - or may not. If the new ruler takes the line of the last, intrigue and faction can do little harm, especially as the absence of proselytism, and absence of gain on -
advantage to the Mission have made a deep impression on the Syrian bishops and the nation?

The Russians have declined to go to Turkey; the Americans would not be received by the Syrians there. The important portion of the ashiret mountaineers, the Tyarii, would be very unlikely to join Rome. It is not easy to see what great changes could take place, even with a change of policy on part of the Patriarch. But there is no reason to anticipate a change of policy.

When a letter arrives announcing the death, it would be in accordance with Eastern ideas for your grace to send a formal letter written in classical Syriac, "fair hand".

It might now be an opportunity to consider certain points: -(proposed at former committees)

(1) Some 6000 Syrians joined the Russian Church for political help. Should not the rest avow orthodoxy for the sake of retaining our help?

(2) Ought pressure to be put on Mar Shimun to induce the abrogation of hereditary bishops?

(3) Ought Mar Shimun to be asked to restrain the bishops of ordaining unworthy candidates by a written and sealed undertaking.

(4) Ought not the spiritual character of the Mission to be impressed on Mar Shimun, and the fact that we can never give political help?
In short, ought not the Mission to supply more directly the clergy for the Assyrian Church?

(5) The very difficult question of removal in part or whole to Van.

I doubt whether any of the Mission, except Mr. Browne, could fully explain the factions at Qudshanis, and give the names of those on each side, and state their aims. But to the questions proposed I could say

(1) Effect of death - none. If any, a Rome ward movement, partial.

(2) Steps to be taken - only assuming that A: A: M: will continue its former policy.

I am,

Your Grace's obedient servant,

A: H: Lang:

In 1905 some Assyrians left the Russian Church to join United Lutheran Church of America. John Joseph states.10

A Swedish-American Augustana Synode employed a Nestorian priest who conducted two-day schools. The Evangelican Association for the Advancement of the Nestorian Church, founded at Berlin in 1906, employed a Nestorian priest who had Lutheran training in Germany. For

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about ten years a German Orient Mission maintained an orphanage outside Urmiyah for Nestorian refugees from the mountains. The English Plymouth Brethren employed a few priests in a mission of their own. Other smaller missions were connected with the American Dunkards, the Holy Methodists, the American Southern Baptists and Northern Baptists, and the English Congregationalists. There was perhaps no missionary field in the world where there were so many rival "Christian" forces at work as were found in Urmiyah at the beginning of this century, all struggling to get predominance among these few people. Some of the results of this unseemly struggle were demoralization, arrogance on the part of the Persian Christians, the transformation of religion into a sport and trade.

The report of the missions shows how ably the young Patriarch was discharging his duties.

Soon after the 16-year-old Patriarch assumed his duties in April 1903 he asked his long time friend Awimelk (Abimalek, son of Rev. Eshai of Mar Bishu) to become a deacon. Abimalek, 25 years old, was the best student in the Assyrian school. He had been learning English from W.H. Browne along with Benyamin and his elder sister Surma.
Abimalek was not even a deacon. The young Patriarch succeeded in persuading him to be a deacon in 1903 then a priest and Archdeacon in 1904. The young Archdeacon Abimalek served as the special representative of the Patriarch until December 1907.

In May 1905 the young Patriarch replied to the petition of the Church in India which was seeking a Metropolitan to be sent by the Patriarch. This Syriac letter was written in the handwriting of Archdeacon Awimalek dated 23 Ieyar (May) 1905. The Syriac letter, the original is preserved in the Metropolitan Palace, Trichur built by Mar Abimalek Timotheus Metropolitan in 1928. An English translation is preserved in the Lambeth Palace Library. The lengthy letter begins as follows.\(^\text{11}\)

To the honourable Mar Augustine bishop, and his beloved sons, priests, decons & principal men of Malabar

In December 1907 Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun consecrated Archdeacon Abimalek Bishop and Metropolitan for Malabar and India at Mar Shallitha Church in Qudshanis and sent him to India where the 29 and half year old Metropolitan took charge on 27th February 1908.

\(^{11}\) Letter of Arch Deacon Awimalek, dated 23, Ieyar (May), 1905.
The Patriarch managed the affairs of the Church well. In March 1908, he visited the village of Toni. Qasha Sahda, the priest of that village was an "almost absolutely unlearned man, and a cripple". Some purists objected to this priest doing priestly duties, as a maimed man should not be a priest.

The Patriarch wanted to know how he became a cripple. His supporters explained that a Kurd shot in his arm when he was protecting his daughter from a Kurd. The Patriarch gave his verdict that "a man does not annul his Qashaship if he confesses in persecution and is crippled by the tormentors", and he adds that "this seems to be a case like that. Let Qasha Sahda celebrate without fears".12

Four hours distance from Van there was a village called Khino. At the end of the century the Roman Catholics "scattered therein much money, for they had four Qashas there". All except four of the 35 houses became Catholics. The Assyrian Church was 250 years old and was "near to ruin, and rain and snow from heaven fell into the sanctuary". The Roman Catholics built another Church in the village, and "were sucking up all the people from it".

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12 F.N.Heazell., in Kurds And Christians, op.cit., p.178.
In 1909, the Assyrians rebuilt this Church with their labour. The only cash that changed hands was 6 pounds, 14 shillings and 4 pence, which was entirely paid to the Armenian carpenter-mason. The people of Khino requested the Patriarch to send a bishop to consecrate this Church. The Patriarch sent Mar Yabalaha, the young bishop of Berwar, who was a student in Van school at that time. On the last Sunday of September 1909 (Festival of Cross was on September 26 according to old calendar) Mar Yabalaha, consecrated the altar with sacred olive oil and placed the vessel containing Melka (holy leaven) in the Church.

The Patriarch’s negotiations with the authorities were successful. In 1909, a new vali (governor) was appointed for the province. It was the custom for the vali to make the personal acquaintance of the leaders in his province. Since Qudshanis was too far and difficult to travel, the vali asked Mar Shimun to meet him at Bashkala. Unfortunately, they missed each other there. So the patriarch went to Van and met the vali. About this meeting, we read in Kurds & Christians. 13

His business with the Vali, of course, was political only, and was concerned for the most part with the Tyari-Berwar question, and with the question of the subjection of Christians to the conscription, to which they are liable under the constitution. As regards the first matter, Mar

13 Ibid., p.184.
Shimun was at least able to put the Christian side of the question fully before a governor who gave him a fair hearing, though he may not have the power to do all that we should desire.

The fact is that the government is not anxious to rouse "the Kurdish question" until they have satisfied other points of more European importance. On the second point, it is of course too much to expect that Christians should welcome the liability to military service, which is the most tangible thing that the new regime has brought them as yet, beneficial through the discipline is likely to be the whole melet in the long run. Many had begged their Patriarch to try to secure them their old exemption; but this is, of course, quite beyond his power, even if it was his wish. All that he hopes or even desires is that Christians shall be enrolled in separate companies (not battalions), in order that facilities may be given them for the observance of their religion duties; this much, there is good hope that may obtain.

In any case the making of the personal acquaintance of the Vali by Mar Shimun is a good and useful thing; each seems to have personally liked the other.

As we do not have an official version of the affairs of the Church after the consecration of Mar Benyamin Shimun Patriarch on 12th April 1903, we have to depend on the letters of the Anglican missionaries who were close to the Patriarch in that period.
The Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission abandoned the work in Oormiah because the Russian Orthodox Church had taken most of the Assyrians under their fold.

3.4 Van City

Thus, the headquarters of the Anglican mission was established in Van. Main buildings were put on a six-acre land, at the cost of 230 pounds. In this land there were a fine orchard with good old fruit trees, a large vineyard, and enough land to cultivate wheat, potatoes, etc.

Rev. O.H. Parry has written a beautiful description of the city of Van, the land and about the mission working there. 14

Van lies some 1,500 feet higher than Urmi and 5,600 ft. above the sea: the summer is therefore shorter and cooler than at Urmi, and we enjoyed the loveliness of innumerable orchards and building elms and poplar trees. The tulip and narcissus abound a glorious mixture of snow and blood, no unsuitable symbol of the country of mountain and massacre. The houses are most absurdly unsuitable to the climate, the windows almost exceeding the remaining wall space; but we were surprised by the contrast with Urmi, where all the streets are faced by dead mud walls. Scarcely any burnt bricks are used, as the earth used for building is of usually durable consistency for building.

Of the various religious agencies, the Armenians claim the first place in interest, with their history of the thousand five hundred years, and their unrivalled energy and national patriotism.

After his consecration the young patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun could not make much re-building. The financial poverty was there. Kurdish attacks were not usual. Political protection was available to some extent, by the help of Anglican missionaries. Schools were there, but not adequate, as demands were higher than the limited resources that the missionaries could provide. W.S.Bowdon reports on this aspect in his letter dated 13, May 1907 about the villages around Van area.15

We have five schools amongst these villages; those that I saw seemed to have been working satisfactorily this winter, though in one large village, Serai, containing nearly one hundred Syrian houses, the school ought to be much larger. The difficulty in this case, as in many others, is to find a suitable room and large enough to hold the children. Some of the churches were sadly in need of repairs; the villagers do what they can, but all are so poor that they cannot afford to buy the necessary timber to make their walls secure and the roofs watertight. We have been able gradually to supply all these churches with what is requisite for the Holy

15 W.S.Bowden., in Ibid., p.168.
Van lies at a distance of about 100 miles from Qudashanis the headquarters of the Patriarch. It is 3 hours of railway journey. It took 60 hours for the missionaries and the Assyrian boys to go to the Patriarchate. An interesting trip of 2 missionaries, 5 teachers, 31 boys and 12 or 14 porters from the van school to the Patriarch at Qudashanis in 1907 is informative for us today to have an appreciation of the unfortunate Assyrians in the early part of the 20th century.\textsuperscript{16}

I was filled with amazement at the powers of endurance displayed by the boys, for it was the time of the Great Fast, and so no animal food could be eaten, not even milk, butter or cheese and their only food consisted of bread and raisins. Imagine what an English boy would say to doing such a journey under such conditions! I am sure the temper of even the smartest member of a Cadet Corps or Lads' Brigade would have disappeared by the end of the first day, and what a grumbling there would be! But except once, when the small bishop-designate of Gawar was entering on a fight with a boy three times his size, there were no signs of ill humour or grousing.

Report from Van in Oct. 1908 informs that Patriarch Benyamin's brothers Hormizd (aged 17), Zaia and Paulus (the one who became Patriarch ten

\textsuperscript{16} F.J.Blamire Brown., in Ibid., p.169.
years later\textsuperscript{17} joined the school. Along with these V.I.P. students their cousin Daniel,\textsuperscript{18} son of Malik Ismail of Tyari (grand father of the present Zia d Malik Yacob d Malik Ismael who is a member of the Syrian Parliament for many years) as well as Bishop of Berwar Mar Yawallaha joined the school. This young bishop had to flee from his diocese to Qudshanis to save his life from Kurd, Mira Reshid. Although young for a bishop, he had grown a beard, has studied for four years before Patriarch could consent to consecrate him. Rev. W.A. Wigram thinks that it was to be counted as credit to his young bishop to return to school to study when it become difficult for him to work in his diocese. Wigram remarks.\textsuperscript{19}

In doing this he has faced that which a Syrian fears more than anything else in the world, the fear of tongues. There have been plenty of people to tell him that for a Bishop to go to school again is \textit{iba} (shame), and to face the fear of \textit{iba} is really much for a Syrian to do.

Wigram's further remarks about the boys of his school give us a glimpse into the Assyrian church of his time. These remarks are quoted here not to be little the boys but to let us have a peep into them.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} Zaia and Poulouse were 15 years of age. They were twins.
\textsuperscript{18} Daniel's brother Shimon married Romie, the sister of the then Patriarch, Mar Benjamin Shimun.
\textsuperscript{19} W.A.Wigram., in Ibid., p.172.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp.172 -173.
Two Qashas of Ashitha, who have previously been full of suspicion of us and all our works, have now asked to be allowed to send their sons, and they have been received. It is a gratifying thing to see old prejudices thus melting away.

Among other boys whom we have had before, but who have come back to us again, we will mention the names of Jonathan, the sharp and very bellicose Natir Kursi of Gawar (his quarrelsome habits have earned him the nickname of "Mar Barsoma"), and also Saypu of Lizan, who has won a reputation as a warrior also, but in sterner fields.

When the Kurds came down to his village, in the burning of the valley of Lizan, he virtuously hid all his books in hole in the rocks, and then formed one of the band who, by their defence of the bridge that crosses the Zab at that point, saved the whole of Upper Tyari from the fate that had befallen the side valley. Saypu went into the fight with a borrowed flintlock. He came out of it with a breech-loader of his own, captured from its late owner. This lad will never make a teacher, or a priest, but we could do with more of his stamp in this nation.

We left Van in April, very glad to get our boys out of a city where revolutionary outbreak had been rather grimly repressed, and where we lived in continual anxiety that our boys might get into trouble, not from any complicity with the revolutionaries, but from their ineradicable longing to live on the roof and see the fun.

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21 It is possible that every time the enemy attacked the Assyrians must have had their valuable books hidden underground. This many manuscripts and letters are hidden in Turkey even today.
3.5 Before The First World War

Wigram writes the happy outcome of the peaceful revolution. He comments "Here in Hakkiari, a remote place, no change can come speedily". His further remarks touch upon a very relevant point. The Anglicans do not want to convert the Assyrians. They want to strengthen the Church by giving help in educating the Assyrian youngsters. Intercommunion is the final goal and not any sort of merger uniatism.22

Probably the changes will have another effect: with less need for foreign protection, many who embraced the faith of foreigners will return to their old faith, and the national Churches will gain great strength; and of this there are signs already among the Armenians at Van.

The opportunity for our Mission, which has always set its face against proselytism, is great. We may come to a practical discussion of the terms of inter-communion, which, as material aims are less to the fore, may be based on a truer and deeper foundation. God grant this may be so.

Not only the Patriarch, but all members of the Patriarchal family were honoured. When Hormizd, 19 year old brother of Mar Benyamin Shimun who was studying in Van school, visited the Assyrians they paid great

respects although he is a layman. The Anglican missionary thinks such welcome to Hormizd as "quaint and pathetic".

Now we shall prosper, now our crops will be good, and our flocks and herds will increase, for the brother of Mar Shimun has come to bring us a blessing", was the greeting given him in one village, that of Ermanis... In Zel, which is hidden away in the recesses of the Chokh range of mountains, Had you not come, Kesi, we should have turned Chaldean, or perhaps Protestant; we have been left alone by our Patriarch for so long, and we thought that he had quite forgotten us. Now we know that Mar Shimun cares.

Mar Isaac Khananishu Metropolitan was a well-respected Metropolitan who is next to the Patriarch. Wigram writes in Kurds and Christians.

The Matran himself is certainly the best read of the Bishops of his Church who are now to be found in Kurdistan, though Mar Timotheus of Malabar is most likely his equal. None, too, can doubt his deep personal piety and love for his Church. His cast of mind, however, is very conservative, and he has a deep reverence which is not always intelligent for all that our Fathers have written, or are even supposed to have written. He is, moreover, a weak and timid man, and long oppression at the hands of the Sheikh (who he calls "that great one") has knocked out of

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23 If Hormizd were not killed in 1915, he would have been the Patriarch in 1918 when Mar Benyamin Shimun was assassinated instead of his younger brother Poulose.
24 W. A. Wigram, op. cit., p.176.
25 Kesi is the way by which the Assyrians address their bishops and even the Patriarch.
26 W. A. Wigram, op. cit., pp.187 -188.
him what little spring there may ever have been in his character. Fear of
rousing the suspicions of this master of his keeps him from doing much
that he might do with safety for the Church that he loves. He has never
visited Mar Shimun, or allowed the Patriarch to visit him, since the
occasion of his consecration in 1903, and he will not even go about his
own Diocese lest the Sheikh should fear that some dire plot is afoot. He is
much better off, in worldly sense, than most of his brethren. Some,
indeed, say that he has too much to lose, and would do his work better in
comparative poverty; this, however, is an accusation that we have heard
levelled against even English bishops, and we must own that Mar
Khananishu makes good use of his property.

The above quoted letter written in 1908 gives us a glimpse of Mar Issac
Khananishu Metropolitan. His successor Mar Yosip Khananishu was
acting Patriarch from 1973 till the consecration of the present Patriarch
on 17 October 1976. This well respected prelate died on 3rd July 1977 in
Bagdad.27 About the qualities of this youth W.A.Wigram wrote.28

His Natir Kursi, a youth of seventeen, whose manners are singularly
attractive, lives with him, and this youth (whose name is Yosip) has been
already prematurely admitted to priest's orders. We made an effort to
persuade his Grace to send this lad, if not to Van, at least to the
Patriarch" house at Qudshanis, that he might learn that there is a part of
the world outside the shadow of the Sheikh; but though he promised to

27 Unfortunately the date of the death of Mar Yosip Khananisho Metropolitan is often stated as 6th
July, 1977. The fact is that he died on 3rd July and he was buried on 6th July.
28 W.A. Wigram, op. cit., p.188.
consider this, I fear that his nerves will not allow him to act on the
suggestion.

The question of inter communion, which is relevant even today was
discussed in the above letter. This should show some light in today's
discussion of inter communion with the Roman Catholics or Orthodox. 29

Of his own accord, the Matran brought forward, in conversation, the
question of terms of inter communion. It was his idea, as it is that of
many of the nation, that the unofficial visit of the bishop of Gibraltar30 a
year ago was to settle this vexed question with Mar Shimun, and it is
probably significant that this erroneous idea was welcomed by practically
all the nation.

We assured the Matran, of course, that visit of the Bishop had been
personal and unofficial only, though, of course, we added that his
Lordship had freely discussed with Mar Shimun terms of possible inter
communion, and we informed him of what those suggested terms had
been. They were, as a matter of fact, essentially the same as those
embodied in resolutions 63 and 64 of the Lambeth Conference, though we
were, unfortunately not aware of this at the time of our visit (August
12th). The Matran declared that he saw no difficulty in the mutual

29 Ibid., pp.188 -189.
30 William Collins, Bishop of Gilbralter, visited Mar Benyamin Shimun Patriarch in November 1907. He met Archdeacon Abimalek (who was consecrated Metropolitan of India in December 1907), Rabban Deacon David (who was consecrated by name Bishop Mar Aprem in 1908). Bishop of Gilbralter writes about this Deacon that he strongly resembles the Dean of Eli (Dr. Kirkpatrick) in
acceptance of such terms, and added, *proprio moto*, a statement which surprised as much as it delighted us, viz., that he had come to the conclusion that all personal anathemas ought to be dropped, as things in themselves "unworthy". Such a statement as this from the most conservative of all Assyrian bishops, the man whom even the stiff-necked of Ashitha hold in honour, shows that the old narrow pride in their position which once distinguished Assyrians is breaking down.

The question of dropping the anathemas against Cyril of Alexandria which has been a part of the concern in the ecumenical discussions initiated by Pro-Oriente, Vienna in recent years was indeed a concern of Mar Isaac Khnanishu Metropolitan who died in 1918 A D. The above report of W.A. Wigram comments.31

It is specially significant when we remember that it was this very Mar Khnanishu who insisted on the special anathema on St. Cyril being read at Qudshanis, on the last occasion (now some fifteen years ago), when that section of a certain special service containing anathemas was not omitted, as is usually the case at that Church. One point was brought forward by our host, which is worth mentioning, as showing what unexpected obstacles may occur in this land of the unforeseen. "You have the succession of Bishops", he said. "but have you the succession of the leaven"?

31 W. A. Wigram, op. cit., p.189.
Wigram comforts himself that this point of succession was not pressed by the Metropolitan or by anyone else. He concludes his comments on this point on an optimistic note.32

When such a line is taken by the most conservative and timorous of Assyrians, may we not hope and pray that GOD in His providence will open the way to closer relations with the Church, particularly when, by His goodness, recent changes in Turkey have taken away most of the danger that the political suspicions of the Government might be roused by over-friendliness between its subjects and the undesired Foreigner?

On 30th January 1908 Sulte, the sister of Patriarch Mar Rewil Shimun passed away. She was a powerful figure being the "First Lady" of the Patriarchal Household. About her we read from the letter of W.H. Browne dated 4th April 1908.33

The old lady had for forty years ruled her brothers and lately her nephew's household; for her mother died when she was quite a child and her elder sister only lived to her twentieth year. Hers was a life of rigid austerity and much labour, mental and physical; but, until broken by the death of her two brothers, seemed younger than her years; and her anxieties on account of the fortunes of her house, her people and her

32 Ibid., pp.189 -190.
Church, and the continual grief caused by the ingratitude of her cousins for all her father's and her own generosity, hardly, until recently, seemed to effect her strong constitution and cheerful disposition.

Sulte was some three or four years old when the Kurds of Butan and Hakkiare began, in 1842, the massacre of the Assyrians in the Zab valley; and she was found by Kurdish riflers of the corpses half buried under a heap of slain. More fortunate than her elder brother Jesse, she was not killed, but restored in exchange for a silk sash to mother Surma, who was nursing her baby Reuel, the future Catholicos. She was thus one of the little party for whom a faithful Syrian of a neighbouring village and a merciful Kurd made a way of escape from the Kurdish Mira's camp behind Julamerk over the Persian frontier to Urmi; and was able to return some five years later to Qudshanis, when the Turkish Government had banished the Kurdish Miras.

When her sister Shamle died Sulte took her place to be later in 1908 to be occupied by Surma, the last "First Lady" of the Patriarchal household.

About the situation of the Church in 1909, we get some idea from a letter published in the Assyrian Mission Quarterly Paper, dated January 1910. This report written by W.A. Wigram refers to the change in attitude of the Assyrians in Persia. Although Wigram witnesses no change as a result of
"reform and revolution" among the Assyrians, he notes that the stir caused in men's minds had naturally had its effect in the "Church Sphere". He elaborates this point.34

The story went round that there were five hundred camels in the bazaar at Tabriz, loaded with "Reform" consigned to Urmi, and that everybody was to have a share. Well, as a matter of fact, everybody has had a share of the reform spirit that was going, and it comes out, largely, in the feeling "Let us manage our church for ourselves". Unfortunately, this desire to manage the Church does not imply the desire to pay for the Church; there is the same readiness as of old to accept European help, there is less of the old readiness to follow European counsel.

Thus we find in Urmi a very real revived "Nestorian" body, with real attachment to the old Church, and desire to be counted among its sons, an attachment that is not real, in them, because leadership; in a movement "back to the old Church" means that they will be "leaders of a dasta (party)", though that prospect, so dear to the Syrian heart, probably moves them more than they are themselves aware.

The "inclination to return to the old Church, on the part of the 'Syrian Evangelical Church', which was formed on an independent basis under the influence of the American Presbyterian mission, about forty years ago. With this aim, the American missionaries in conjunction with the

34 Ibid., January 1910, p.1003.
Anglican mission attempted to sketch out the lines of a concordat. It is interesting to know how ecumenical were these missionaries in the last century before the present ecumenical conversations began. They have relevance to the current ecumenical concerns of the Church. In the same report of Wigram we read: 35

The Evangelicals to enter the "Old Church" and to accept -
A. The use of the Church Services, provided that where a congregation desires it, the new Syriac, or vernacular, may be substituted for the classical language.

B. Episcopacy to be recognized as the form of Church government. Here, of course, the evangelicals do not disguise their preference for married Bishops, a feeling with which it is difficult for an Anglican to find fault. There may be difficulties with the Syrians, though it is worth observing that there is nothing in the Syrian Sunhadus against married bishops; a fifth century council passed a rule, expressly declaring that any clerk, even the Patriarch, might marry, and this rule has never been repealed, though centuries have passed since it was acted on, when the Sunhados was compiled. A further proviso of the Americans, that Bishop ought to act as far as possible in Synod, is again of an eminently primitive character in itself, and so far most desirable.

C. Presbyterian ministers to be re-ordained episcopally, those who cannot submit to this, to be content with the role of preachers.

D. The Church's round of feast and fast to be observed, provided that care be taken against certain superstitious uses.

In return, they ask:

1. That the evangelical aim, i.e., the infusion of spiritual life and power into the Church, be admitted.

2. That the Protestant right to latitude of personal faith, and the right to work constitutionally within the Church for certain reforms that they deem desirable, be recognized.

3. That the returning body be received in a spirit of cordiality, and not of suspicion.

On September 26, 1910 (Festival of the Holy Cross according to Julian calendar) W.H. Browne who was missionary to the Assyrians for nearly quarter of a century (June 1886 – Sept. 1910) died of an accident and was buried among the Assyrians to whom he dedicated his life. His services in serving Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun (1903 – 1918), Patriarch Mar Poulouse Shimun (1918 – 1920), Lady Surma, Mar Abimalek Timotheus Metropolitan of India (until his consecration in December 1907) cannot be underestimated. It is essential to place on record an

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36 Now the festival of the finding of the Holy Cross by Queen Helena is on 13 September every year, as there is a difference of 13 days between the Julian reckoning and the Gregorian reckoning. It is a fixed festival.

37 He took an overdose of the homeopathic medicine by mistake.
estimate of this missionary written by one of his colleagues David Jenks at the time of his tragic death.\textsuperscript{38}

But it would be a great mistake to suppose that the epithets "Venerable" and "picturesque" adequately describe Browne. He was an active man, interpreting to the Syrians by his life the message of the Western Church, and exemplifying its conception of Christianity. Nor do I think that his life would be fitly portrayed by a thrilling picture of his isolation and its restrictions, his native food, his endurance of interruptions and purposeless visits. The word which seems to me most fitly to describe his life is devotion. He gave himself entirely to the people, and like anyone who gives himself in complete forgetfulness of self, he had much reward even in this life.

Rabbi Browne, as this bearded English priest was called, had done great things in fostering friendship between the Anglican Church and the Assyrian Church during his tenure of his service until his last breath in September 1910. He had cultivated great friendship with Deacon Ishai,\textsuperscript{39} half brother of the Patriarch Mar Rewil Shimun (d.1903). W.H. Browne enjoyed greater confidence with Mar Benyamin Shimun (Deacon Ishai's son who ruled the Church since 1903) had earned his great respect among the Assyrians.

\textsuperscript{38} David Jenks., in \textit{Kurds \& Christians}, op.cit., p.203.

\textsuperscript{39} Deacon Ishai, father of two future Patriarchs, Mar Benyamin (1903-1918) and Mar Poulouse (1918-1920), died in Urmī in Feb. 1895 AD.
Rabbi Browne was very courteous to Patriarch Mar Benyamin's mother Asiat, who was unhappily an invalid and who died on 19 Nov., 1910 and Sulti, Mar Benyamin's aunt who was the first lady of the Patriarchal household, whose duties were later taken over by Surma after Sulte's death in 1908.

If more like William Henry Browne were among the missionaries of the Archbishop the relationship between these two Churches would have been closer than what it is at present. It is a historical fact that after the death of W.H. Browne in 1910, the relationship between these two Churches gradually deteriorated and the First World War (1914 – 1918) caused the closure of the Assyrian mission of the Archbishop of Canterbury. At present, the relationship is minimal.

The testimony of the Assyrian Metropolitan about this English missionary should be reproduced here. Only a brief portion of the letter written by Mar Timotheus on November 22, 1910 from Trichur is quoted below.40

The late Dr. Browne was beloved of all the nation without doubt; and this I say, not for the sake of saying it, but because I know nearly all our small nation. And who but will say that this came from his love? He truly loved those that loved him, and they returned his love with a true love; that is

they knew and understood each other; and the cause of this will be clearly seen by all that wish to do so from his long stay in the Mission. And by this account I do not understand why his Grace the Archbishop and the Church of England who love the Syrians, do not make it more easy for his people to stay longer among us; that they may learn more about us and love us more, as did our dear friend.

The penultimate paragraph of the letter is worth quoting, because there are still many people not only in England or in Egypt (the land of Cyril of Alexandria) but also in other parts who look down upon the Assyrians as heretics. Mar Timotheus appreciates the contribution of Mr. Browne in this aspect.41

Dr. Browne in his quiet work did two great things; the greatest and most necessary, though not yet finished altogether, was the removal of that great black stone of offence in the minds of the English in regard to our Church, that it is heretical, which God forbid! for he had courage to declare that this was not true. And, as far as I know, I can say that he did all that lay in his power for us: and so he is worthy to be loved, and we must never forget him. Need not that I throw doubt on the distressfulness of our condition, so can I say that I rejoice that he died in our midst, in especial that he thought well of the faith of our Church. I doubt not that the Church of England can easily fill his place with

41 Ibid., pp.1073 - 1074.
another person and another name, but alas! How difficult for another
leader to fill his place in the heart of the Syrians.

In 1910 Surma, sister of Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun, writes about
his younger brother; "Hormizd has gone to Constantinople to read more
Turkish by way of Tiflis with Mar Ephrem, we have no news of him for
more than two months. We are very anxious about him".42

The same letter talks about the death of Patriarch’s mother Asiat.43

We had another unexpected loss of our dear mother, who had been unwell
for these two years but we thought she was getting on well this winter
until November 19th; I went to her room in the morning and she told me
she had not slept well through the night; yet she was talking of Mar
Shimun’s arrival the same day from his journey of Jilu and Baz, but at
half past two we were called, from our duties to see her passing away
peacefully to her Lord, without any pain. Mar Shimun arrived half an
hour later. We know that she has entered into the joy of her Lord: she
had been preparing these two years to meet her Lord.

Russia re-entered Tabriz in the spring of 1909. According to the Anglo-
Russian Convention of 1907, Persia was a part of the influence of Russia.

By 1910, eight battalions of infantry and a division Cossacks were

42 Ibid., p.1071.
43 Ibid.
stationed at Tabriz, Urmiyah, Khoi, and Dilman. About the influence of the Russians, John Joseph observes:44

In Urmiyah, the Russian consul was the supreme authority in most affairs and did not hesitate on occasion to exercise authority without mediation of the Persian officials. "A hint from him is more effectual than an order from the Persian Government", wrote Shedd, "and the former is often the cause of the latter". With the strengthening of Russia's position, the Russian Church mission gained in prestige. Referring to the head of that mission, the American missionary wrote, "the impression here is that there is no one who does not stand in awe of the Archimandrite".

The Protestants suffered much, as the Russians were Orthodox.45

The "Evangelical Nestorians", who had withstood proselytizing, were particularly victimized. When pleading and preaching failed to change them, their rivals resorted to persecution. In villages where the Protestants formed a minority, they were not allowed water to irrigate their fields, their pasturage was given to the village's herds, and the landlords were encouraged to tax them heavily.

44 John Joseph., op. cit., p.128.
Around 1911 there were “Syrian Catholics” in Mosul. These are the Jacobites who joined the Catholic Church. This group was not placed under the Chaldean Patriarch Mar Emmanuel. Although Rev. Wigram calls it “a strange anamoly”, he clarifies,\textsuperscript{46}

Practically, there are very good reasons for the system and the rule; Nestorian and Jacobite have been enemies too long for them to forget that enmity in the mere fact of submission to the Pope, and the mere suggestion that the “Syrian Catholics” ought to submit to Mar Emmanuel would probably send many of them, if not all, back to the Church of their fathers once more. So they are recognised, at all events for the time being, as separate Churches and separate melets, and form practically separate communions; there can, it seems, be two “Catholic” Bishops in one place, both recognised as such, and neither of them subordinate to the other, yet neither of them in schism.

The Anglican clergyman observes that this arrangement is “full of practical wisdom”. He rightly remarks, “Rome knows when to relax a rule, as well as when to enforce it”.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 1075. The Patriarch of the Syrian Catholics now is Mar Moussa Davoud. In 1930 the equivalent of “Syrian Catholics” came into existence in India. It is known as Syro-Malankara Church. The head of the Church is Archbishop Cyril Mar Baselius of Trivandrum.
On May 3rd, 1911, Rev. W.A. Wigram of the Archbishop’s Assyrian Mission wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury from Amadia, Turkey in Asia (Vilayat of Mosul). 48

My dear Lord Archbishop,

I send you a letter to inform you that Mar Immanuel, “Chaldean” (i.e. Romanised Nestorian) Patriarch, is now leaving Mosul for Europe and England, and that it is his ambition to be received by King George, as was the Jacobite Patriarch by King Edward in 1909.

He desires this honour, because it would add greatly to his local prestige and power, particularly if used as he knows how to use it. For the same reason I don’t regard it as most desirable that he should receive it, and if your grace can put any hindrance in the way by representation of the facts of his career, I venture to hope that you will do so.

The British Consul in Mosul fully agrees with me in this matter.

Mar Immanuel has been the constant opponent of all British Mission work, and indeed of British interests generally, in Mosul and its district, and he has particularly opposed the CMS and your Grace’s Mission.

As regards the Nestorians, whom the English Missions specially attempt to assist, the hostility, which a Roman Catholic Prelate naturally feels to an independent Church, has led him into action of the most unscrupulous character. E.g.

1. Rashid, the Kurdish Chief, who recently destroyed seven Christian villages in Tiari, received a regular subsidy from his Mission funds.

2. In the case of “Chaldeans”, who wish to return to their ancient Nestorian Church, and be registered as members of it, (their legal right) he has openly

A. Offered bribes to the men themselves, to prevent this action.

B. Bribes Mussalman officials to refuse this right to men who persisted.

C. Employed terrorism for the same purpose.
   E.g. His agents have falsified registers, and sworn to false information, to secure that such “returnees” should be enrolled as soldiers, when long past the legal age.

D. It will be in the recollection of some officials at the Foreign Office, that in the month of January 1910, a mob attacked the house of the Dragoman of the British Consulate in Mosul, and threatened the life of a Nestorian Bishop there. It was known that this mob was stirred up by the agents of the Patriarch, and that he endorsed its action. Subsequently, he openly threatened the two English ladies, who assisted in sheltering his intended victim.

3. Mar Immanuel is the open ally of the most re-actionary and corrupt clique in Mosul.

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49 Reference is to Bishop Mar Elia of Alkosh who came under Patriarch Mar Emmanuel a decade later and died Chaldean around 1954.
Of course, these facts suggest a prelate of the XVI th, rather than of the XX th century, and that is in fact the atmosphere in which we live here. I think that they are enough to prove that Mar Immanuel is not the sort of person to whom King George would wish to show special honour.

I have just heard, to my deep grief, of the departure of the Bp. of Gibraltar.

I remain your Grace,

your most obedient servant,

W.A.Wigram

His Grace, the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury

At the time of the beginning of the First World War (1914 – 18) there was comparative calm among the Assyrians. The Russians encouraged divisions among the various Christian groups. They were very much against the "Evangelical Nestorians" who refused to come to the Russian Orthodox fold.

By the summer of 1912, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission began to realise that they could not satisfy the expectations of the Assyrians in supplying them their material needs. They expected money to pay the
priests, to repair the Churches, to give them protection from the Kurds, to pressurise the Turkish government to do its duty to them etc. The head of the Archbishop's Mission, Rev. MacGillivray wrote of his conversation he had with the Assyrian Archdeacon to whom the Mission gives a small present.  

"I replied that we had never made any such promises, that Mar Shimun had asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to send a mission to teach his people. There upon the Archdeacon, who, by the way, could not write his own name, and, although he could read the services, was entirely ignorant of Old Syriac, and therefore had no idea of the meaning of what he read, exclaimed, "Teaching! What teaching do we need? There were plenty of learned men in our nation before you English came. It is not teaching what we want, but money and protection from the Kurds".

The general condition of the Evangelical Church was good. The evangelicals had good education through Urmia College and Fiske Seminary. They had a mission hospital. They had about 3,000 communicant members and an equal number of adherents.

### 3.6 The First World War

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 A.D. most Assyrians were living in a large area between Mosul (Nineveh) in Iraq, Urmia in Iran and

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Van in Turkey including lake Van. This triangular area has 200 miles in each of these directions. Hakkari was an independent province in Turkey. The Turkish Government had kept the Assyrians in Hakkari as an Ashiret\(^51\) (tribal) and kept it under the rule of the Maliks (Chiefs).

The Russians being Christians had an eye on the Assyrians. In 1907 the Russians got Azerbaijan province. In 1908 the Turkish Revolution under Kamal Ataturk promised help to the minorities. But the Turks enforced Turkish into the Assyrian districts in Hakkari. In April 30, 1909 the Russians entered Azerbaijan.

Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun met the Russian officials in Iran in 1910 expecting help from them. On August 3, 1914 the Patriarch was asked to meet Tahsin Pasha, the vali (governor) of Van. The Turks wanted the Assyrians to protect the eastern and southern borders of Turkey.

On Oct. 30, 1914 Russia declared war on Turkey. The Assyrians helped the Russians in two battles on November 1 - December 3, 1914 and on December 4, 1914 – January 18, 1915. The Muslims of Bashkala butchered 50 Assyrians of Gawar. Similar crimes were committed against the Assyrians in Nodez, Albaq, Iyel, and Mar Bisho.

\(^{51}\) The word Ashiret comes from the Arabic word Ashra that means ten.
On December 30, 1914 orders were given to the Russian army to withdraw from Urmia. Immediately the Assyrian villages were attacked. On the night of January 2 and 3, 1915, more than 25,000 Assyrians fled with the Russian army. The following days witnessed many atrocities against the Assyrians.

In mid-December 1914, Russians made an ill-fated offensive at Sarikanish. By the end of December, Russian troops were forced to withdraw from the area.

On 2nd January 1915 the Russians began to move out and two days later the Turks entered the town. After the Russian retreat the Kurds appeared around Lake Urumiyah, the chief of them was Ismail Agha Simkho, a former Russian ally.  

About the pathetic situation of the time, John Joseph describes.

Panic-stricken, about ten thousand Nestorians fled northward that winter in the wake of the retreating Russian army. The remainder left their villages behind and took refuge at the various missions. About 3,000 were in the French Catholic Mission and not less than 17,000 found shelter in the premises of the American Mission; a few others found

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52 Simk o Agha was the Kurd who killed Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun in March 1918.
refuge in homes of Muslim friends and neighbours. But it was the score of the American missionaries here who performed one of the most heroic achievements of the war. They proved to be real saviors of the Christian Persians and during the long war years fed thousands of starving Kurds and Persian Muslims from their meager stores. These missionaries had always stood for beneficent service but it was during that war that they won the affection and respect of all and among the Nestorians this feeling became deep and lasting.

Dr. William A Shedd born in Urmiah was the son of an American missionary. This medical doctor did great service to the refugees. About his service John Joseph writes:54

He was aided by his co-workers, while the American Consuls at Tabriz and Tiflis, the Ambassador at Constantinople, and the Department of State in Washington did all they could help. President Wilson, who did not declare war on Turkey partly because of his friendship with the missionaries there, send a special demand to the Turkish government that American interests in Urmiyah not be endangered. at the same time the missionaries depended a great deal on the good will and protection of the leading Urmiyah Muslims and a few Kurdish chiefs whom they had befriended by medical and relief services among them.

On January 24, 1915 the Turkish governor of Julamerk province (Hakkari mountains) and the Turkish Consul Rajib Beg, arrived in Urmia with

54 Ibid., p.133
1500 Kurds accompanied by two German spies Naiman and Homel. Their arrival initiated new chapter of massacres against the Assyrians in Urmia.

At the beginning of the First World War Russia was all over Azerbaijan, Tabriz etc. The Caucasian front was a secondary theatre of war to Russia. But to the Turks it was area of major interest.

On Feb. 24, 1915, Paul Shimun writes from Tiflis to Rev. F.N. Heazell, which tells the sad saga of the Assyrians to the posterity.55

For the past two years or more the whole population of the Urmí Plain, both Christian and Moslem, has enjoyed a period of unusual prosperity. The Russian soldiers have guarded the roads, so that travelling became easy, and have in a large measure restrained the Kurds from raiding Syrian villages. The Russians have kept a body of some 5,000 troops in Persia, and have repeatedly given assurance to the people there that they would not be withdrawn from the country. Recently a message had reached Urmí from the Tsar saying that the Christians of Urmí were to be protected at all costs. Rifles were served out to the men of Syrian villages where the people had volunteered to defend themselves against sudden attacks of the Kurds until the Russian troops could come to their aid. Telephone communication had been established between all outlying

districts and Urmi, so that the Russian commander could be kept in touch with the movements of the enemy. During the month of December we got many scares, for some Russians removed their families from Urmi, and we began to wonder if it would be safe to stay. Later on, to establish confidence, orders were given that no one was to leave the country. From this time our troubles began.

Before their first victory over the Turks in the Caucasus, the Russians, fearing that their communications in Azerbaijan might be cut, ordered a general withdrawal of troops from Northwest Persia, which meant that Urmi, Khoi, Salmas and Tabriz were to be left unprotected. Of this withdrawal, the Syrians were kept in ignorance until almost the last hour, on the ground that the light of a number of people would impede the troops.

Two-thirds of the people of Urmi knew nothing of the Russian withdrawal until they actually saw the troops on the road; by that time, the Turks and Kurds were rapidly approaching the city and held all the roads. The villages round Urmi were full of refugees from the Turkish frontier, and when they saw the Russians leaving Urmi, they fled precipitately to Tiflis. It was a sad sight. Men, women, and children to the number of 15,000 set out on foot without even bread for their journey. The sufferings of these people on the road to Tiflis were pitiable in the extreme, for they had a seven days' journey to make.
This long letter which tells the pathetic story of the affairs of the Assyrians after the beginning of the First World War (1914 – 18) tells us what had happened in Gugtapeh, five miles from Urmi in Persia.56

On January 2nd the Kurds began to invest the large village of Gugtapeh, situated some five miles from Urmi, to this village many had fled for refuge, as it was thought it could be defended by its well-armed inhabitants. As the Kurds came on, they burnt villages in all directions, one of the first to be destroyed being Dizateka. Gugtapeh was surrounded, and the fighting continued for two days. The Kurds attacked the village in front, and the Muslims from Urmi came to their help in the rear. The villagers then had to give up the fight, and the Kurds entered and burnt house, Churches, as well as fuel and hay crops of last year. The young men were killed and the women carried as captives. The two villages of Gulpashan and Charagushi were spared on condition that they would pay a large sum of money and receive a Kurd as their village master.

Ten days ago a small body of men arrived here (Tuflis) from Urmi. They told us what had happened at Abdilikendi.57 This village, which close to Lake Urmi, was entered by the Kurds, who carried off all the inhabitants to the neighbouring Moslem village of Marangalovi. Here they were taken to the Mosque and told they must become Moslems. The Syrian priest, Kasha Mushi, refused to enter the Mosque, saying at his time of life he would not change his religion. The Kurds threatened to kill him if

56 Ibid., pp.1328 - 1329.
57 The Church in Abdilkendi is still there with its tragic memories of the First World War. The present writer visited that Church in March 1998.
he would not comply. He asked for a few minutes to say his last prayers, and while praying was shot with two bullets and stabbed twelve times. His body remained in the street for three days. His wife, who was inside the mosque and knew what had taken place, dared not leave to bury her husband. Four days later these people were allowed to return to their village. They found nearly everything had been destroyed. The whole number escaped that night to Kashkisarai, a village 15 miles from Marand, where the Russian troops had halted. Here they were again forced to become Moslems. They were taken to the bath and "purified"; their Christian names were changed to Musa, Esa, Hasan, and the like; after they were kept 15 days and were made to receive lessons in their new religion. The women had their locks cut shot, and all were taught Moslem prayers. (The men were not circumcised as the weather was too cold). Two of the party escaped to the Russian commander and were sent by him to Julfa.

These few facts show the grim reality of the situation.

The above letter explains that there were 800 Turks and 2500 Kurds in Urmı. The rumour at that time was that 15,000 Turks were awaiting Russian advance in Salmas. Paul Shimun says that the Russian army was again in Tabriz. But their return to Salmas and Urmı was not certain. Thus the plain of the Urmı whom the writer calls a veritable Paradise was ruined by the efforts of Turks, Kurds and Persian Moslems. The Assyrian refugees from Urmı telegraphed to the Archbishop of
Canterbury to appeal to the English nation to help them. The letter concludes,\textsuperscript{58}

Let the English nation Judge whether there is any people under the sun, not excepting the brave Belgians, who have suffered the same amount of horrors and cruelty as these people have suffered. The Syrian women have suffered outrage and torture; the homes of all have reduced to ashes; the fields and vineyards destroyed; the Churches that have not been burnt have been disgracefully polluted. The outlook for the next few years is the gloomiest we have ever known since the invasion of Tamerlane the Tartar. God grant that we may never again return to the rule of a Moslem Power.

We appeal to the civilized world, we, who have never lived under a Christian Government, to help this remnant of an ancient race, to see to it that our homes be restored to us, and that we be allowed to practice our religion without interference on the part of the unspeakable Turk or of his barbarous and wicked ally, the Kaiser. Give liberty to us, who, as a nation, have lived for centuries under the fearful scourge of Moslem misrule.

Bishop Mar Dinkha\textsuperscript{59} was shot dead in March 1915 in the village of Gulpashan\textsuperscript{60} along with 60 men. The Assyrians of Urmia would have been

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid., p.1330.]
\item Mar Dinkha was a bishop of Nochea and was transferred by the Patriarch Mar Banyamin Shimun to Soldoz in 1914. He was captured with others and was shot dead in 1915.
\item It is said that he was shot in the village of Charbash on the mountain of the Jews behind the Church of Mar Quriakos. He was the 18th bishop of Mar Dinkha family.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
annihilated if the Assyrian tribesmen from Hakkari had not arrived there in time.

In May 1915 an important tragic event took place among the Assyrians. Nimrod, cousin of Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun (1903-1918) was murdered along with his two sons, Shallitha and Yuav and his brother Absalom's two sons, Dinha and Daryawesh. Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun has been often blamed for the massacre of his father's brother Ishaq Shimun's son, Nimrod. Malek Yakob Ishmael (d.1974) states in his book on the Assyrian history about the sad episode.61

On 10th August 1915 Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun held a council of his "notables" to decide the strategy for defence against the Kurds. At that time Haider Beg, the vali of Mosul, sent a letter to the Patriarch. He stated: 62 "Hormizd, your brother, is in my hands, if you do not order your people to lay down their arms, your brother will be put to death."

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61 On August 15, 1957 Malik Yacob Ishmael met Qasha Elias de Baz who was one of those who plundered the sheep of the Kurds. Nimrod along with his sons Shalitha and Yuav as well as Dinha and Daryavesh (Sons of Awsalom) were killed. Others killed were Henado and Darmo from Kochanes and Yonathan and Shamuel from Mar Bisho. There were killed by Assyrian tribes, without informing anybody in May 1915 in Kochanes. Qasha Elias answered to Malik Yacob, "I was not a leader. They asked my opinion. We were in Deesan. We (150 men) were asked to plunder the sheep of Kurds, one-day distance from Kochanes. When we came back victoriously after the plunder this episode of killing of Nimrod and others took place. We went back to Deesan. I was a deacon for Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun. As I approached and saw the door where Patriarch was staying I heard Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun (d.1918) telling in anger blaming Pithyon Gulazar de Baz: "Why did you shed the blood of the righteous? I just told you to bring them here to make reconciliation." Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun was innocent from all the blame that is put on the Patriarch. Qasha Elias de Baz said that he had heard it from the mouth of the Patriarch himself.

The answer of the Patriarch was as follows:63 "My people are my sons, and they are many, Hormizd my brother is but one. Let him therefore give his life for the nation."

In 1915 the Patriarch’s house in Kochanes was burnt together with many other houses including the English Mission House. Turkish artillery was brought against these Assyrians. Tiari and Tkhuma districts were destroyed. In August 1915 about 35,000 mountaineers fled to Salmas, Persia. The Patriarch’s youngest brother Ishaya died of fever.64 The Patriarch had to rush through the burial service and flee just before the enemies reached the place.

By the end of 1915, Kurdistan became a deserted place, as the Assyrians had to flee for their lives. But Kurds in Bashqala began to persecute the Assyrian Christians. We read in John Joseph’s book cited above.65

The Turkish government tried to secure the Patriarch’s loyalty, just it had solicited the help of the Armenians, but in vain. Members of Mar Shimun’s family who urged a more conciliatory policy toward the Turks were killed in cold blood. Under the leadership of their Patriarch the tribes fled under very difficult circumstances to seek refuge within the

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63 Ibid., pp.72 - 73.
64 Ishaya was the youngest brother of Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun. He was about 20 years old in 1915, being born in 1895.
Russian lines in Salmas and Urmiyah. In the following few months about a third of them perished from mere lack of food, clothing, and shelter.

In the beginning of 1916, Turkey was no longer strong enough to protect their boundaries. The Russian army in Caucasus was strengthened, and Russia used it to fulfil their age-old dream of wresting the control of Constantinople.

In the spring of 1916 the allied government decided on their territorial acquisitions in Asiatic Turkey. On the result of the negotiations in London and Petrograd we read further.66

According to the agreement Russia would obtain the provinces of Erzerum, Trabizond, Van, Bitlis, as well as territory in the southern part of Kurdistan, along the line of Mush-Sert-Jaazirat Ibn Umar-Amadiyah-Persian frontier. The Azerbayjan, contingent was strengthened and a new expeditionary force was sent under General Baratoff for the protection of Persia against a Turko-German invasion. The Russians helped the Nestorian refugees from Hakkari and urged them to join up with them. Under the leadership of one of their own leaders, Agha Patrus, they rendered invaluable service as advance guards and scouts to the Russians.

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66 Ibid., p.135.
In the winter of 1916 the Russians had initial success. Erzerum fell into Russians. They advanced to capture Trabiznd, the only Turkish seaport in eastern Anatolia and Caucasus. About this victory of the Russians we read.67

With these victories the whole of the Van region came into Russian hands and the Turks were cut off from their forces across the frontier and south of lake Urmiyah. Baratoff's forces in Persia were able to take the towns of Hamadan and Sultanabad and by the end of February reached Kermanshah. While the northern forces captured Trabizond, Baratoff reached the Iraqi border at Khanaqin. For a while there had been a possibility of a Russian advance on Bagdad through Rawanduz, which the Russian forces had occupied in May 1916.

But the Russian advances were stopped by the counter attacks of Ihsan Pasha. Moreover, the people had hated Russians for the terrible atrocities they had committed on the Muslim people in and around Rowanduz. Only 20% of the Kurdish population survived.

In the winter of 1917, the Russian forces were re-organising for further advance. But in March 1917 the Russian revolution broke out. We read:68

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67 Ibid., p. 136.
68 Ibid., p. 137.
That summer the Kerensky government ordered Baratoff to withdraw all Russian forces from Persian soil. By the end of October there was military anarchy throughout Caucasus army. In December the Turks and Russians entered into negotiations, which resulted in the agreement of Brest-Litovsk. The agreement stipulated that starting from the principle of the freedom, independence, and territorial inviolability of the neutral Persian Empire, the Turkish and Russian High Commands were both prepared to withdraw their troops from Persia.

By January 1918, Dr. William Shedd became U.S. Vice Consul in Urmiyah. We read about the sad situation in the above book.69

In the summer of 1917 the troops, angered by the inevitable depreciation of the ruble, which reduced purchasing power of their pay to one-fourth of its former value, burned the bazaars of the town of Urmiyah, thereby inflicting an incalculable loss on the already much-afflicted city. "The most troublesome source of trouble", wrote Shedd, "is the Russian army. They are a menace to the community". Under these circumstances, the heads of the various missions, together with the leaders of the Christian community, tried to work out plans to secure order. Again the leader during these difficult days was Shedd. In January 1918 he was officially appointed Honorary United Vice Consul in Urmiyah, a post that he reluctantly accepted in the hope that official status might strengthen his

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69 Ibid., p. 139.
position in his efforts to save the Christian community from utter
destruction.

When the Russian army retreated, they left behind huge lots of arms and
ammunition. Christians got these arms freely.

The allied forces were worried whether the Assyrians would use these
arms and ammunitions, without proper control. Hence, the allied forces
sent officers including English and French to Tiflis to instruct and perhaps
restrict the Assyrian troops. Captain Gracey, a staff Intelligence Officer
attached to the British Military Mission in Caucasus, went in aeroplane
and promised help to the Assyrians, after the war was over, if they would
help the British.

On February 22, 1918, the Persians attacked the Christian quarter in
Urmiyah. In March 1918, Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun along with
48 of his escorts was shot dead by Simko Agha. About the situation that
follows John Joseph writes:

"The region was in a state of anarchy once more. Simko, who had orders
from the Governor of Tabriz to do away with Mar Shamun, had invited

Ibid., pp.140 - 141."
the latter for a friendly conference. He received him cordially, and kissed him when leaving; then the Patriarch and his men were pierced with bullets, custom common in the treacherous annals of the East. The Hakkaris took their revenge on the Muslim population of Dilman and most of the village of Salmas. Simko and his men had escaped to Khoi where they took part in the massacre of the Christians there. During this period Christian brigands terrorized Christians as well as Muslims but especially the latter. A missionary described this period as a region of terror for Muslims hard to imagine. Men of good will on both sides tried earnestly and constantly, but to very little purpose, to check lawlessness, made worse by famine conditions.

Soon after the assassination of Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun the Assyrians came to take revenge on Simko Agha. Anticipating retaliation, Simko had escaped. The fall of the Van city took place soon after. About 20,000 Armenians became refugees in Salmas. The Armenian refugees were pursued by the Turkish forces under Nuri Pasha who was on his way to Caucasus.

In Urmiyah by May 1918 L.C. Dunstemlle, the British Officer began to occupy northern Persia. On 8th July he sent message to the Assyrians by plane asking the Assyrian and Armenian forces to join British troops within a fortnight at Sayyin Qalah.
Unfortunately when the British forces reached Sayyin Qalah the Assyrians had not reached there. Hence the British troops retired to Bijah. About what followed John Joseph summarises the situation in the following words.\textsuperscript{71}

The Nestorians delayed by preparations and fighting on the way, followed the British and received the long-awaited help. But Agha Patrus, who commanded this expedition, had taken the main portion of his fighting force with him; when he and his men delayed on their return, wild rumors were spread in Urmiyah that they were all slaughtered. The small force that remained in Urmiyah could not hold back the enemy. Thus the whole population, with their cattle and belongings, poured southward in appalling confusion to join the British, with the Turks and Kurds on their heels, the former infuriated by their delay in Persia.

Thousands of the Assyrians suffered. They were transported to Iraq owing to the famine in Persia. Some would describe this tragedy of the Assyrians as the British betrayal. Others would ascribe it to some of the internal intrigues of the Assyrians such as whether David d Mar Shimun, brother of the Patriarch, or Agha Petros de Baz should be the real commander of the Assyrian forces.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 144.
Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun had consecrated four bishops in his period of 15 years.

Mar Yelda Yawalaha of Dure, Berwar in 1907
Mar Abimalek Timotheus Metropolitan for India on 15th Dec 1907
Mar Aprim (Shamasha David of Tkhuma) in 1908
Mar Elia episcopa of Alkosh, a Chaldean priest in 1909

Mar Benyamin could not consecrate more bishops. In 1914 during his Patriarchate Yosip Khananeesho was consecrated episcopa. But that consecration was done by Mar Isaaq Khananisho Metropolitan who was the consecrator of the Patriarch himself. But five years later when Mar Yosip Khananeeho was raised as the Metropolitan upon the death of his uncle, the consecration was done by Mar Poulose Shimun Patriarch. That was the only episcopal consecration performed by that younger brother of Mar Benyamin Patriarch during his patriarchate of two years.

3.7 The Chaldean Catholics

Patriarch Joseph Audo's controversial administration was followed by a stable one by Mar Elias XII Abool Yonan (1878 – 1894). During this time, Hudra (the Chaldean Breviary) was published edited by Paul Bedjan, without mentioning his name. Assyrians were drawn to Chaldean
Church. Elia Johanan Mellus Metropolitan of India during 1874 – 82 returned to Mesapotamia and worked in obedience to this Patriarch.

Patriarch Mar Elias XII Abol Yonan died in 1894 and was succeeded by Abdishu V. Khayyat who died 5 years later.

In 1900, an able Patriarch was elected. This Patriarch Mar Yousif Emmanuel II ruled for 47 years until his death in 1947. Pope Leo III made him Legate to the Nestorians (Delegatus ad Nestorians). In 1904, two Assyrian bishops (Berwar and Hakkari) and the whole of their congregations adopted the Catholic faith. The same writer observes.72

Under this authority the Churches flourished greatly in number and quality and many of the learned bishops of the Church produced excellent works which contributed to the understanding of the previous centuries of the Church's age. Men like Adhai Scher, Bishop of Seert, Thomas Audo, Bishop of Urmia, Eugene Manna, Bishop of Basra, Bedjan the Lazarist and many others have left a rich collection of works in Syriac and other languages which have contributed a lot to the revival of Syriac literature.

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