The pits are from six to twelve feet in diameter, into which the workmen descend by a rope and wheel ; and in hewing out the bitumen they leave columns of that substance at different intervals, as a support to the earth above. There are upwards of twenty-five of these pits, most of which have been abandoned, and are overgrown with shrubs. It is only in the summer months that they are worked, on account of the emir, who monopolizes the produce, and sends it to the merchants of Damascus, Beirout, and Aleppo. The wild animals found here are the wild boar, the wolf, the ounce, and some say the lion, on the banks of the upper Jordan. Hares are seen in abundance.

The number of Christian sectaries which exist in this rude country is not more remarkable than their virulence against each other. Greeks, Catholics, Maronites, Syrians, Chal­deans, and Jacobites, have all their respective parishes and churches. They are furious against each other ; and each sect has the folly to believe that its church would flourish on the ruins of its heretic brethren. The principal hatred subsists between the Catholics and the Greeks. Of the lat­ter many thousands have been converted to the Catholic faith ; all Catholics, the Maronites excepted, having for\* merly been of the Greek church in Aleppo, Damascus, and in all the intermediate country. Communities of the ori­ginal Latin Christians are only found around Jerusalem and Nablous. The Catholic bishop resides at Zahle ; and his diocese comprises the whole Christian community in the Bekaa, or valley between the two great Libanus chains, and the adjoining villages of the mountain.

Towards the north the mountains of Syria approach nearer the sea, and leave scarcely any intervening plain. The city of Antioch, on the Orontes, is surrounded by mountains of great height, the different ranges from the interior ter­minating in this quarter, and leaving open before it a val­ley from ten to fifteen miles wide, presenting the appear­ance of an elevated plain, which is said to continue east­ward all the way to Aleppo. The southern boundary of this valley is the mountain range of Jebel Okrah, the steep sides of which seem to rise abruptly from the sea, and con­tinue their ascent until they terminate in its gray and bare peak at the height of perhaps 5000 feet from its base, lts northern boundary is the mountain range called Jebel Moosa, the western extremity of which slopes down into a cape, at the distance of about six miles north of the discharge of the river Orontes into the sea, and its even summit runs along eastward from the coast until it loses itself among irregular ranges of hills. The inner and eastern points of these different ranges gradually approach each other till they seem to meet, leaving a triangular valley or plain between them, its base-line being the sea-line, and its whole length from eight to ten miles. It is nearly in the centre of this valley that the Orontes takes its course ; and its northern bank is occupied by corn-fields, mulberry grounds, gardens of fig-trees, and detached cottages all excellently built, and mostly of two stories, with sloping and tiled roofs. The upper valley, through which this river flows, is also thickly wooded and highly cultivated, the stream distributing fer­tility along its winding way. Buckingham celebrates the beauty of the country on the banks of the Orontes, and in the vicinity of the town of Homs. “ Our ride,” he says, “ was through one continued park of indescribable beauty ; and although chiefly over a level ground, yet, by the pro­fusion of its wood, and here and there some gentle emi­nences, the landscape varied at every point of view. The state of agriculture here, too, was more perfect and more flourishing than we had hitherto seen it elsewhere. The fields were free from weeds and stones, and many of them were enclosed with light fences of twig-work. Some of the barley was nearly ripe for the perennial harvest ; and other grounds were tilling by four ploughs in succession, each followed by a sower distributing the grain from a basket for the autumnal one. Fine fat cattle were seen in numerous herds, with some few buffaloes among them, and all wore an appearance of wealth, activity, and abundance."@@1 To­wards the north of Syria, on the coast, there is a great change from the mountain districts, in the appearance, dress, and manners of the inhabitants. “ All," says Buckingham, “ was now decidedly Turkish. The peasants were of a different physiognomy as well as dress ; and one marked peculiarity of contrast was their wearing long boots reaching to the knees, of black leather, and shaped like European ones, with­out drawers ; while the Arabs of Syria all wear long full drawers, and either red shoes, or, as often happens, go bare­footed.”@@- The language also is Turkish instead of Arabic. The country thence eastward, as far as Aleppo, is moun­tainous, with intervening valleys. Southward, the mountain range of Libanus recedes from the coast, leaving champaign country, diversified with lower hills. From Aleppo, as far south as Damascus, the hilly region prevails, being the east­ern declivity of the Libanus mountains.

The immediate neighbourhood of Damascus is known under the name of El Ghautta, which comprehends a dis­trict of about thirty square miles ; it contains upwards of eighty villages, and is one of the most fertile districts in Syria. In the south is a rocky district called the Ledja, which is from two to three days’ journey in length by one in breadth, and is inhabited by several tribes of Arabs, who breed a vast number of goats, which easily find pasturage among the rocks. A few of them also keep sheep and cows, and cultivate the soil in some parts of the Ledja, where they sow wheat and barley. This district is divided between the inner and the outer Ledja. The inner consists of a labyrinth of rocks, through which the Arabs alone have a due ; some of them are twenty feet high, and the country is full of hills. Trees are numerous among the rocks. The most common are the oak, and the bitter almond tree, from the fruit of which is extracted an oil which is in great re­quest among the inhabitants. There are no springs in any part of this stony district ; but water collects in great quanti­ties in the hollows and in the cisterns, where it is kept through the summer. Millstones are cut horizontally out of the rocks, and are carried to be finished at Ezra, and the other towns in this district. The camel is commonly met with in the Ledja, and walks with a firm step over the rocky surface. In summer he feeds on the flowers or dry grass of the pas­turing places. This district, like all the rest of the country, is frill of ruined towns and cities, containing the remains of large edifices and innumerable inscriptions, with columns, pillars, and all the finest remains of ancient architecture.

To the south-west of this barren and rocky territory lies the extensive district of tne Haouran, which is bounded on the south-west by the mountain chain which is prolonged southward, and here spreads out into a mass of mountains, which extend still farther southward into Palestine. On the south-east, where the farthest inhabited villages are Bosra and El Remtha, the Haouran borders on the desert. It lies between different ranges of lofty mountains, and is a plain diversified with gentle elevations, the same levels being no­where of long continuation, though still not so much above or below each other as to destroy the general character of an irregular and undulating plain, in which there is nothing that deserves to be called a hill on its whole surface. The eminences that occasionally break the continuity of the sur­face, are mostly small veins of rock projecting above the surface ; and these appear in all cases to have been selected for the sites of towns, for the sake of securing a command-

@@@, Buckingham’s Travels in Syria, p. 507.

@@@, Buckingham’s Travels among the Arab Tribes, chap, xxvi. p. 541.