ing position, a freer air, and a drier soil. This plain is fertile in corn, and is considered as the granary of Syria. But it is liable to severe droughts, under one of which calami­ties it was suffering when it was visited by Buckingham in 1824. In the eastern hills among the Druses, and in the mountains of Jordan, both rain and snow had fallen ; and thither many distressed families had taken refuge from the prevailing distress. Buckingham, when he was in this country, had a view of this extensive district from the hills to the west; and he could perceive, that though lower than the elevated country of Belkah, it was a table-land on a high level, measuring from the surface of the lake of Tibe­rias, as the tops of the lofty hills which form the eastern boundary of that lake appeared but on a level with the sur­face of this plain, so that the lake must have been much lower. To the east a range of hills, inhabited by the Druses, bounds the plain. These hills are of an unbroken outline, and not much elevated from the plain, although their sum­mits penetrate the line of perpetual snow. To the north­east the land gradually rises, and is lost in an even horizon of high plains. To the north the view is bounded by another range of snow-clad mountains, called also the Mountains of the Druses. On the north-west there is a still higher range, called Jebel-el-Tely, covered with snow, and extending north-east and south-west ; and in this last direction the northern points of the Asswete and the Adjeloon ranges show patches of snow amidst thick forests of evergreen wood. Beyond these, again, is another great plain or table­land, on a higher level, to the eastward, and said to be in all respects equal to the Haouran in the fertility of the soil and the abundant remains of a numerous population.

Buckingham laments that so fine a country should be in the possession of such barbarous inhabitants, and abandon­ed, from their negligence and tyranny, to sterility and deso­lation. “ On the mountains and plains,” he adds, “ of these districts of Belkah, Adjeloon, and Haouran, extending from the Dead Sea to the sources of the Jordan nortli, and from the banks of that river to the extreme limits of the culti­vable land on the east, there would be room for a million of human beings to form a new colony, who would enrich every country that was on their borders, and would form a centre from which industry, arts, science, and morals, might extend their influence, and irradiate regions, now the prey of ignorance, rapine, and devastation.”@@1 Among the hills, horses, mules, and asses, are bred as beasts of burden ; but in the plain of Haouran numerous herds of camels are to be seen.

To the west of the Haouran the country becomes moun­tainous, but is still extremely fertile, and interspersed with numerous valleys. To the east of the river Jordan, from the lake of Tiberias to the Dead Sea, and from Oom Kais to Heshbon, its fertility is great. In the mountain districts of Belkah and Adjeloon, the woody scenery can scarcely be surpassed in beauty. The valleys abound with corn-fields and olive-grounds; the upland slopes of the hills are planted with vines, and the summits of the mountains are clothed with trees of the coldest regions. “ The climate,” says Buck­ingham, “ is really delightful ; a clear, deep, blue sky, a pure air, a warm summer in the valleys and plains, a snowy win­ter on the mountain tops, with all the finest shades of gra­dation between these two extremes, furnish every variety of temperature and atmosphere that can be desired by man. indeed this portion of the country, included in the dis­tricts of Belkah and Adjeloon, on the east of the Jordan, is as superior to the promised land on the west of that stream, as the most romantic and beautiful parts of Devon­shire are to the bleak hills and barren heaths of the adjoin­ing county of Cornwall."@@2

Syria is inhabited by a mixture of various races, with their peculiar manners and modes of faith. The coast and the seaport towns, more especially towards the north, and Aleppo and Damascus, exhibit a population chiefly Turkish, with Turkish manners, costume, and language. But the mountain regions, the countries on the Libanus and the Anti-Libanus range, the intervening valleys, the eastern declivity towards Aleppo and Damascus, and to the south the districts of Ledja, the Haouran, and the countries to the west of the Jordan, are inhabited by Turks, Druses, Christians, and Arabs, some wanderers and robbers, and others following the pastoral life, or enacting alternately the shepherd and the robber as opportunity offers. Civil order or law is but very imperfectly maintained in those unset­tled countries. Some districts purchase an exemption from Arab robbery, by paying a contribution, on the same prin­ciple as the Scotish Lowlanders formerly paid the contribu­tion of black mail to the mountain robbers of their country. Under the former dominion of the Turkish pachas no re­gular police was established : there was no security to the traveller, either for life or property ; and in the mountain districts, and to the eastward of them, traders, in journeying to Aleppo or Damascus, were forced to associate in large caravans in order to repel the herds of robbers with which the roads were infested. Since the country has come un­der the dominion of the pacha of Egypt, it has been the scene of rebellion, owing to his oppressions ; and the dis­orders which have ensued cannot fail to encourage the trade of robbery and violence. It is not possible that the condition of the country can be improved when civil war continues to rage within its borders.

The Druses, who are spread over all Syria, more espe­cially in its mountain tracts, are a very peculiar race ; and little has yet been discovered of their religion and its oc­cult rites. Their priests maintain an impenetrable silence on these subjects ; and when strangers question any of the lay-members of this curious sect, they relate numberless fables, which find their way into books of travels, and thus errors are propagated. A very curious remnant of Egyp­tian superstition is said to prevail in Mount Libanus, among those Druses who assume the name of okkals, namely, di­vine honour paid to a calf; and the worship of Venus by the most licentious rites is reported to be practised among them. They are indifferent to all the outward forms of re­ligion, and admit into their temples as objects of adoration whatsoever has been venerated by heathens, Jews, Chris­tians, or Mahommedans. They are reported to worship all the prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as Christ and Mahommed ; and at set times the okkals, who cultivate mysteries, elevate within their places of worship a molten idol made of gold, silver, or brass, which has the form of a calf. According to the report, prostrations are made before this idol, and these are followed by a promis­cuous intercourse of the different sexes. That they are not so indifferent as has been reported to different systems of reli­gion, appears from their hatred and contempt of Mahomme­danism, while they behave with great benevolence and friend­ship to Christians, whose faith they respect. The okkals or akauls, the priests of the Druse religion, are distinguish­ed by a white turban, and the peculiarity of the folds in which they wear it. They are subjected to self-denial ; tliey are not permitted to smoke tobacco ; they never swear, and are reserved in their manners and conversation. They pray in their chapels, but not at stated periods. These are built in some sequestered spot, and none but Druses are allowed to enter them. They affect to follow the doctrines of Mahommed ; few, however, pray according to the Turk­ish forms. They fast during Ramadan in the presence of

@@@, Buckingham’s Travels in Syria, p. 228.

@@@3 Buckingham's Travels among the Arab Tribes, chap. viii. p. 141.