THE CULT OF THE PEACOCK ANGEL

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE YEZÎDÎ TRIBES OF KURDISTÂN

BY

R. H. W. EMPSON

WITH A COMMENTARY BY

SIR RICHARD CARNAC TEMPLE, BART.,

C.B., F.B.A., F.S.A., HON. VICE-PRES. R.A.S.

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

LONDON

H. F. & G. WITHERBY

326 HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.

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IMAGE OF THE PEACOCK

(Frontispiece)

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Printed for Messrs. H. F. & G. Witherby by
Northumberland Press Ltd., Newcastle-upon-Tyne

PREFACE

THE few pages contained in this volume are the outcome of curiosity aroused in myself as to the ancient faith of the little known Yezîdî tribes, based on a visit to their strongholds and amplified by a little research amongst the existing literature on the subject. A certain amount of local gossip has been included and a few deductions drawn from the little information available as to the origin of these remarkable people and their rites, their lives being so far removed from the march of civilization. From a study of the Yezîdîs it will be appreciated that the followers themselves of Melak Tâ'ûs, the Peacock Angel, are unable (perhaps unwilling) to throw much light on their ancient history, and that it has been left to Christians and Muhammadans to crystallize certain nebulous theories in connection therewith. It must, therefore, suffice for us to know that the religion has survived the vicissitudes of at least a

thousand years; and, although the numbers of the Yezîdîs have lately been much reduced, their faith in the worship of the Devil remains serenely unchanged by the conflict of the claims of three of the great world religions which surround them.

The manuscript of this book was virtually completed at Baghdâd, and it was not until my arrival in London that I came across a most interesting book by Dr. Isya Joseph on the same subject. I have, therefore, to some extent altered the chapter dealing with the origin of these tribes in view of this American writer's careful analysis of the theories already advanced in this respect. His own contention is evidently the result of much research, and is, so far as I am aware, entirely an original one.

The photograph shown as a frontispiece represents a steel figure (originally in three pieces) of a peacock, standing on a plinth, partly inlaid with antimony on the body and the tail expanded and ornamented with human and animal figures in the lobed border (human busts and deer alternately), and the head gilt with turquoises. The image, which is $35\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, is said to have been used by the Yezîdî tribes of the district of Hâlitîya, and to have come in 1882 from their

Temple at Dahadîa near Diarbekr in North Kurdistân. It is of Persian origin, and was presented to the British Museum by Mr. Imre Schwaiger of Calcutta in 1912. It is reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

An illustration of a peacock resembling the one shown appears facing page 39 of *Anthropos*, Volume VI (1911), accompanying an article by Père Anastase Marie, entitled, "La decouverte recente des deux livres sacrés des Yezídis." This peacock, which is of iron, is one of four stolen by Reshîd Pâshâ in 1837. It found its way into an antique shop in Baghdâd, kept by a Mussulman named 'Alî, who sold it a few years later to a rich Christian called Futhu'llah Abbud. The base only of this peacock is of slightly different design.

I have heard of only two other symbols, outside a Yezîdî shrine. One is now in the possession of Mr. J. W. Dowden of Edinburgh, and the other is in the State Museum of Jeypore (Jaipur) in India.

I have to thank Mr. Kenneth MacKenzie, Mr. T. Spencer James and Mr. E. N. Fallaize for their suggestions; and Squadron Leader G. S. Trewin and Captain A. I. Sargon for their help

and interest in the expedition to the Holy Temple at Sheikh 'Adî. I am also indebted to Squadron Leader V. R. Scriven and to Mr. A. Riley for the reproduction of certain photographs, to the late Miss Gertrude Bell for additional facts concerning the Temple, and to certain past writers on the subject of Devil Worship.

On my return to England I visited the Oriental Department and the Department of Ceramics and Ethnography at the British Museum, whose officials I wish to thank for their courtesy, particularly Mr. H. J. Braunholtz. Further, after my return, I asked Sir Richard Temple to comment on my remarks, and as he did so at considerable length, with the object of adding as much as he could to the general knowledge of the Yezîdîs, I have appended his observations to mine as a Commentary on my own researches.

This Commentary has raised the question of the spelling of Muslim names and words. Sir Richard Temple remarked to me that Arabic is differently pronounced by both Asiatic and European nations using the language and its proper names, and accordingly the Arabic characters are so differently transliterated by European scholars, that each writer has practically

to adopt his own spelling. Thus, the name of the founder of Islam has been variously represented in Roman characters as Muhammad, Mahommed, Mahomet, Mehemet, Mammet—all more or less accurately representing a formal pronunciation of the name, spelt in Arabic, m-ḥ-m-d. So also Shefket and Shauqat both fairly represent the pronunciation of the same Arabic characters, sh-w-q-t; so do Evliya and Auliâ represent Aw-l-yâ. In these circumstances he has adopted in his Commentary the spelling used for half a century in his own journal, the *Indian Antiquary*, and by the Government of India. In order, too, that the reader shall not be unduly puzzled, I have adopted the same spelling wherever possible. Pedantry has, however, been avoided, and certain well-known names are spelt as they are usually known, e.g., Yezîdî, Diarbekr, Reshîd Pâshâ, Jebel, Sheikh, Medina, Mecca, Zemzem and so on. In the spelling of Melak Tâ'ûs, Melak Îsâ and the like, I have adopted Melak as I heard the name pronounced to mean "angel" and thus distinguished it from Malik, "lord or master," though in Arabic script there is no difference in the characters used, m-l-k. Also in the name Wetnhiyûn, I have left the name as I found it in

the work I quoted, though Sir Richard Temple has pointed out that it must represent Watn Haiyûn or Watnu'l-Haiyûn, the Land of the Serpents.

Sir Richard Temple has not always adopted my own or my authorities' explanations, but I do not look on this as a misfortune, as the object before us is to get at the truth, which is often accomplished by noting and eventually reconciling differences of views on matters still but imperfectly known. For this reason he has not interfered with any opinions expressed by myself.

A few further remarks are necessary as to the title of this book—the Peacock Angel, representing Melak Tâ'ûs. In the word *melak*, translated "angel" by me, we find ourselves in one of the worst of the many enigmas that Arabic presents as a language, and I cannot do better than quote the following observations Sir Richard Temple has made to me on this point: "The word spelt m-l-k in Arabic is variously pronounced as *malk*, *melk*, *milk* and *mulk*, and then means fundamentally 'property.' These characters m-l-k are also pronounced as *malik*, *melik* and then mean 'the possessor of property, lord, master, king.' They are further pronounced *malak*, *melek*, *melak* and then mean 'angel.' Malaku'l-Maut is the Angel

of Death, i.e. 'Azrâ'îl. Then again mâ-l-k, pronounced *mâlik*, *mâlak*, plural *amlâk*, and also *malak*, means 'lord, king.' Maliki-Mâliku'l-Mulk means 'King of Kings of the Kingdom,' i.e., God. There are further intricacies of the forms and senses of this terrible word which need not be gone into here." In view of the above remarks, Sir Richard thinks I am justified in my title, "Melak (or Melâk) Tâ'ûs, the Peacock Angel," especially as any Arabic used by the Yezîdîs would be a local dialect.

It is in the hope that these pages may be of some small use to students of strange peoples and strange customs, that, apart from any purely theological interest, I must excuse my temerity in endeavouring to justify their inclusion on a bookshelf.

R. H. W. E.

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CHAPTER I

DEVIL WORSHIP

ACCORDING to Christian missionaries, a worship of the Devil is world-wide; but probably nowhere outside the territories south of the present Asiatic Turkey, known as Kurdistân and the Sinjar, does it amount to anything more than a cult which, in the absence of a better term, might be termed a limited Atheism. A true Atheist, however, according to modern European standards, has no God, no belief in the transmigration of souls, and no creed. If he has thought about the matter at all, he probably regards the study of religion by others as the result of a fear of the unknown on the part of its believers. A refusal to believe in another existence does not therefore encourage toleration of any kind of religion, and in this respect the true Atheist is sincere.

What is loosely known as Devil Worship may be nothing more than a kind of Atheism. Missionaries and others have returned with stories of the reverence paid to witch-doctors, medicine men and

similar beings by semi-barbaric tribes in Africa, and in many other primitive parts there is evidence of a form of Devil Worship.[1] It may, therefore, be taken that warding off the Evil Eye is uppermost in their minds, due to innate distrust and fear of the unknown, and nothing more.

Of all the little peoples in Western Asia who have steadfastly maintained their religious and social independence of the adherents of the great world religions, namely, Muslim, Jewish and Christian, none offer a more interesting study than

[1] By way of examples, the Santâls of Bihâr in India propitiate the malignant Bongâs, and the Tehuelche Indians of South Patagonia used to fear and worship Gualichu, an evil spirit, rather than the good spirit Manitu. The Kazâks and Kârâ Kirghiz also venerate the Devil, but recognize the Khudâ (God).

The people of Sikhim and the Ge-lug-pa, a Lamaist sect of Tibet, are also thorough-going demon worshippers living in mountainous districts, also the Lushais of Assam amongst others worship demons (*huai*), but Satan is not, however, identified as one.

In Japan, stone foxes bearing hungry and malign expressions are sometimes placed in out-of-the-way spots, and prayers are offered up in the form of propitiation.

" The ancient Egyptians, even when at the height of their culture, were, in fact, in the language of the missionaries, engaged like many uncultured African peoples, in ' devil worship.' It was not until the relatively late times of the twenty-second or twenty-fifth Dynasty that theological influence succeeded in weaning them from the primitive cult." —*The Mothers*, 1887, Vol. II, 755, by Briffault.

the Yezîdîs, or Devil Worshippers of Kurdistân. Yet the popular appellation of "Devil Worshippers" is rather a misnomer, however, as they are not, in fact, so much worshippers of the Evil One, as his propitiators.

Pagan these tribes undoubtedly are, and it might naturally be thought that they would offer an ideal opportunity to the converter, but actually the district is an unpromising field for missionary enterprise. In spite of efforts by Muslim tribes in the past to exterminate the Yezîdîs by raids these people remain steadfast in their traditional faith, which has survived for at least a thousand years. This faith has become so instinctive and so ingrained in them, though traditional rather by word of mouth than by any definite writing and teaching, and has so played on their primitive and therefore superstitious minds that Devil Worship will, as in South India, despite the gradual introduction of more modern ideas, probably exist in some form or other and will be practised for a long time to come.[1]

[1] It is not inappropriate to remark here that texts and sometimes traditions preserved by "word of mouth" may be even more trustworthy than those preserved by the "written word." See Grierson and Barnett's "Lâlavâkhyânî," and Temple's "Word of Lâlâ the Prophetess."

As long as the Turks retained their suzerainty over the Yezîdî districts in Asia Minor, no attempt was made to bring them into touch with the outside world, and it was not until the recent overthrow of the Turk in the southern portion of that region that they have in any measure been brought into contact with Western influences.

The Yezîdîs are probably Kurdish in race and they speak a curious dialect of the Kurmânjî language. The Sinjar tribes also speak some Arabic. Most of the tribes can be grouped into two main classes: those of an Indo-European type, having a nearly white skin, a round skull, blue eyes and light hair, and those with an Arab strain, who have a darker skin, eyes widely set apart, thick lips and dark hair. The poverty of written doctrine is doubtless explained by the fact that the few who can write are unfamiliar with Kurdish characters, and resort to those in use by the Arabs. It will therefore be seen how laborious the compilation of Yezîdî books would be, as a Kurdish one would be nearly useless. A few common words of the Yezîdî are sometimes scribbled in Arabic on walls, boulders, etc., but no pure Kurdish is seen, which seems to show that the written word in their language would be to them undecipherable.

Despite the primitive conditions under which the Yezîdîs live—and they are mostly agriculturists —it must not be thought that they are entirely unintellectual. Most of the Sheikhs appear to be able to carry on lengthy conversations on local politics and other subjects of interest to them; and their agricultural activities, though handicapped by lack of knowledge of modern research, are thorough, and the produce is sufficient for their own use.

The propitiation of the Devil is almost continually in the minds of the Yezîdîs. Even the most commonplace incidents of their daily life are bound up in a marked degree with observance of their faith. Their demeanour and conversation is tranquil, and even dignified, and a lost temper and cursing are against the tenets of their religion. Away from their own people, they may invoke the power of the Evil One upon the heads of infidels, but never amongst themselves.

Generally speaking, worship of idols and inanimate things is on a par with Devil Worship, as far as fanaticism is concerned. It is well known that primitive conditions of living undoubtedly make for the rejection of new schools of thought, due to the inherent distrust of the unknown. The

great world religions of to-day are based on certain teachings which have been gradually built up on a plinth of belief in the sincerity of their founders, and similarly Devil Worship is primarily based on the sincere belief that propitiation of the Power of Evil is most calculated to make for happiness in this world and everlasting life in the celestial one.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE YEZÎDÎ TRIBES

UNTIL the beginning of the present century little or nothing was known concerning the origin of the collection of Devil-worshipping tribes known as the Yezîdîs. Within the last few years, however, those interested in primitive religions have been at pains to advance theories which, however fantastic, are nevertheless full of historical possibilities. Many of these are purely conjectural, and it is difficult to definitely narrow down the Yezîdîs' source of origin to one tolerably certain.[1]

Some Muslims have ascribed the name Yezîdî to the followers of the 'Umayid Caliph (Khalifa) Yezîd I, who followed his father, Mu'âwiya I, *ibn* Abû Sufiân, as Caliph.[2] He was second of the

[1] According to one writer, before being known by their present name, the Yezîdîs in Asia Minor were called Wetnhiyûn, or those practising a form of dualism, but later changed their name as the worship of the Good Spirit waned.

[2] Not to be confused with Yezîd *ibn* Abû Sufiân, brother of Mu'âwiya, who died in A.D. 639.

fourteen 'Umayid Caliphs.[1] Yezîd I was contemporary with, and a disciple of, Muhammad, but there is no evidence that Yezîd, as has been credited by some, during his three and a half years' reign (A.D. 680-3), founded either the elements of a new religion, or by any means carried out the teachings of Muhammad. He is indeed credited with the murder of Husain, son of 'Alî and Fâtima, and grandson of the Prophet, on 10th October, A.D. 680; also with the sack of Medîna in the following year, when he was responsible for the death of eighty companions of Muhammad and seven hundred Readers of the Qur'ân. In addition, during the last year of his reign, he attacked the Ka'ba, the sacred temple at Mecca. A section of Muslims, namely the Shî'as, who are professedly followers of 'Alî, has therefore sought to lay these crimes at the heels of this Caliph's descendants, who, they aver, must expiate their founder's misdeeds. Certainly the chief persecutors of the Yezîdîs for the last thousand years have been the Muslims. Although nothing is known of Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya allying himself

[1] 'Alî was the last Caliph of the first or Orthodox Caliphate (A.D. 632-661), which was followed by the 'Umayid (A.D. 661-749), and 'Abbâsid Caliphates (A.D. 749-1258).

with those embracing a heterodox Muhammadan religion, the following fantastic story of his father appears in the *Mashaf Râs*, one of the Holy Books of the Yezîdîs: Muhammad had a servant named Mu'âwiya, and when God saw that Muhammad was not upright before him, he afflicted him with a headache. The Prophet then asked his servant to shave his head, and as a result Mu'âwiya cut his head in the process, drawing blood. Fearing that the blood might drop to the ground, the servant licked it up with his tongue. On perceiving this, Muhammad said in effect, "You have sinned; you shall oppose my sect." Mu'âwiya replied, "Then I shall not enter the next world; I shall not marry." God afterwards sent scorpions upon Mu'âwiya, which bit him, causing his face to break out. Doctors urged him to marry lest he die, and hearing this, he consented. They brought him an old woman, eighty years of age, in order that no child should be born. Mu'âwiya knew his wife, and in the morning she, by the power of God, appeared as a woman of twenty-five. She afterwards conceived and bore the Yezîdîs' god, who is called Yezîd.

In connection with Yezîd, it is alleged that one of the "seven gods" made the *sanâjiq* (Turkish, meaning standards) used by the Yezîdîs; this god

is also credited with giving them to Solomon, who bequeathed them to the first king. When the god Yezîd[1] was born he received these symbols with great reverence and bestowed them upon the tribe. The image of Yezîd is thus thought to be perpetuated in the form of their standard, which is a peacock. The story is, of course, mythical, but is nevertheless interesting.

As a matter of fact, most European writers, so far from giving Yezîd, son of Mu'âwiya and a Bedouin woman, credit for devout practices, say that he was merely an eager and skilful huntsman, a gallant lover, fond of wine, music and sport, and that religion entered very little into his life, and the story mentioned must be, therefore, regarded as pure legend. It is, however, true that the Yezîdîs themselves believe they are descendants of the Caliph, but this may be dismissed as due to ignorance and in order to escape the persecution of the Sunnîs, who do not regard Husain in the same light as the Shî'as, and to a desire to trace descent from some noble personage.

An unknown writer has said that the Arabs who

[1] It is generally believed by Europeans that this god is a later creation, invented to account for a title otherwise inexplicable.

accepted Muhammad called those who did not al-jâhilîn (ignoramuses), and that among the unbelievers was Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya. Many of the al-jâhilîn (a tribe of pagan Arabs) rallied round him and became the nucleus of the sect of Yezîdîs. He also says that the Yezîdîs possess a genealogical tree by means of which they trace him back from their present Mîr. No mention is elsewhere made of this document, and whilst there is nothing to prove that such a document does not exist, the Yezîdîs are so anxious to trace their origin to a titled personage that evidence of this nature should be sceptically received.

Some of the Yezîdîs themselves assert that their sect did not originally bear the name Yezîdî. They say that after corruption entered their religion, a Caliph named Yezîd, son of Mu'âwiya *ibn* Abû Sufiân and a Christian female, hearing of one Sheikh 'Adî, went to him, absorbed the latter's religion and taught it to his followers.

Regarding the Mu'âwiya theory by itself, Sir J. G. Frazer is more likely to be correct in saying that the name Yezîdî was given to the tribes by the Muslims as a sign of reproach (owing to Husain's murder by the Caliph Yezîd), than Badger, who thought that they adopted this name "to conciliate

the bigotry and intolerance of their Muhammadan rulers."[1] Certainly no toleration has been shown by the Sunnî Muslims of Shêkhân (the principal Yezîdî district in Kurdistân) whether they believe the origin of the Devil Worshippers is due to Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya or no.

The Muhammadan dogmatics assert that the Yezîdîs are what is known as *murtaddûn*, or apostates, renegades, infidels, according to their theology, in that they (the Yezîdîs) once accepted the Islamic religion, and afterwards renounced it. They cannot, however, explain the origin of the word "Yezîdî."

Some of the visitors to the Yezîdîs' principal shrine are of the opinion that certain parts of the Temple which have escaped destruction bear traces of early Christian architecture, and this has led them to believe that the Yezîdîs were originally Christians, whose progressive ignorance brought them into their present condition. It is conceivable that the Temple may have originally been built by Christians before the Yezîdîs, in one of their raids on Christians (in retaliation for their persecution), seized the existing building and adapted it to their

[1] *Nestorians and their Rituals*, Vol. I, p. 129, by G. P. Badger, 1852.

own use. In this connection the Eastern Christians say that the shrine was originally a Nestorian monastery, but that the monks were tempted by the Devil (who appeared to them as God) and left the building. The Saint who lived in the district may have himself appeared as the apparition. At any rate, he prophesied to his followers that the monks would leave the place, and they having done so, he himself entered. He instructed his followers to pull down the altar in the Church and on his death to bury him there, which was done. In support of this theory of the origin of the buildings, the Yezîdîs say that they have hidden away a Syrian inscription they found on entering.

Then again, the tribe is said to take its name from the Persian word Yazdân,[1] which means God or the good spirit as against Ahrimân, the evil one. If this is so, it is well known that what may be God in one religion (as Yazdân in Persian), meaning good spirit, supreme being or Lord of Heaven, may be exactly the opposite in another, such as may be the case with the Yezîdîs. Therefore, the evil spirit whom they worship would thus be their

[1] A Kurdish slave is mentioned in Edition Pognon (pp. 221-222) as changing his name from Battai to Yazdânî, that is, "on a par with the Gods." Mingana in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1916, Vol. II.

"god" and be given the same appellation; as an example, the Persian Parsees also worship Yezîd Farfar, whom they recognize as an Evil Spirit, the Destroying God.

An old Yezîdî priest, on being questioned, said that the word Yezîdî is supposed to have been derived from their ancient Kurdish name for God, namely 'Azed. He thought that as the counterpart of 'Azed is the Devil, who is colloquially known in Kurdish as Yazed, this had something to do with the name of the tribe. This is, of course, possible, bearing in mind that probably in its earliest form their religion was indistinguishable from pure Dualism.

The most popular belief that has hitherto obtained regarding the name Yezîdî was that the religion was founded by Sheikh 'Adî *ibn* Musâfir, who died about 1162, and to whom most of the present religious practices are ascribed, but it is undoubtedly a fact that tribes of this name were existing long before his appearance. Although what may be called the Sheikh 'Adî theory is championed by a certain group, Dr. Joseph, an American writer, is correct in saying that though an Arab named Kâsî Ahmad *ibn* Khallikân and others tell us details of Sheikh 'Adî's religious life,

it does not follow that the Sheikh founded the Yezîdî sect. Also, owing to their innate prejudice and perhaps egoism, the Yezîdîs have raised Sheikh 'Adî to a deity, instead of properly regarding him merely as a saint. Dr. Joseph, indeed, a few years ago put forward a new and interesting theory. In effect, he says that the Yezîdîs are the followers of Yezîd *ibn* 'Unaissa, who was friendly with the first Muhakkamah[1] before the Azarîka.[2] Nothing much is known of this Yezîd, and it is doubtful if any further information could be gleaned concerning his works. Dr. Joseph bases his theory on a statement made by Muhammad as-Sahrastânî[3] (A.D. 1074-1133), and incidentally contemporary with Sheikh 'Adî (A.D. 1072-1162), who is considered of the highest authority among Arab scholars on questions dealing with philosophical and religious sects, and who adds that it is evident Yezîd was one of the al-Hawârij. The story goes

[1] The first Muhakkamah is the name given to a schismatic Muslim sect known as al-Hawârij, who disallowed the judgment of the Hakaham, saying that judgment should be God's. They say that every sin, small or great, is idolatry.

[2] The al-Azarîka were also a Muslim sect (heretical) who declared that Muhammad's companions were infidel.

[3] Professor Mingana does not share Dr. Joseph's confidence that this statement *ipso facto* includes the modern Yezîdîs, and against as-Sahrastânî he sets the writings of Theodore Bâr-Kewânî.

that Yezîd *ibn* 'Unaissa believed that God would send an apostle from Persia and would reveal to him a book already written, and as a result he, Yezîd, would leave the religion of Muhammad, the Chosen One, and follow the religion of the Sabæans mentioned in the Qur'ân.[1] But Yezîd associates himself with the people in the book, who recognized the Chosen One as a prophet, even though they did not accept his (Muhammad's) teaching. Yezîd said that the followers of the ordinances in the book were among those who agreed with him, but that the others (known in Arabic as Mushrik, those who give companions to God) were hiding in truth, and that every sin, small or great, is idolatry. This Arab mentions the first century of Islâm as being the period in question. Part of this story is borne out by another authority, *ibn* Hazm, who lived a hundred years earlier, but this scholar gives the name as Zaid *ibn* 'Ubaissa. In order to correlate this, Dr. Joseph says that the word 'Ubaissa should be read as 'Unaissa, as it is evident that *ibn* Hazm is at pains to distinguish the author of this unorthodox religion from the well-known traditionist of the name of Tabarî *ibn* 'Unaissa.

[1] It is not clear which sect of Sabæans is intended, but it is immaterial.

To clinch the matter, Joseph tells us as-Sahrastânî definitely quotes that they (the Yezîdîs) are the followers (*aṣḥâb*) of Yezîd *ibn* 'Unaissa.

It is possible, but by no means conclusive, that the Yezîd referred to may have become identified with the tribes now known as Yezîdîs, and there is nothing to show that this particular theory should have precedence over any other hitherto expounded by those seeking to sift the wheat from the chaff. Who is the Persian apostle referred to by Yezîd *ibn* 'Unaissa? It is not Sheikh 'Adî, for the supposed prediction was made over a century from his time and moreover the Saint is regarded as a Syrian. The Yezîdîs themselves are still waiting for the prophet to come and believe him to be a Persian. If any credence can be placed on as-Sahrastânî's statement it is just likely that the apostle may be a Persian, and in connection with this supposition, the following historical evidence may be worth recording.

About six centuries or more B.C. Zoroaster[1] was a teacher and instructor in Persia of the Magian religion, from which he borrowed some of their practices. Many Syrian Magi subsequently

[1] Professor Jackson gives the date of Zoroaster's birth as 660 B.C., and his death 583 B.C. Mr. Springett gives the district of Adarbaijân, west of Media, as his birthplace.

travelled to Persia and looked upon Zoroaster as a prophet. He believed that at the beginning of things there existed two spirits, Ahura Mazda (Ormazd) and Angra Mainyu (Ahrimân), respectively Good and Evil, who were continually at war. The existence of evil in the world he thus pre-supposed from all eternity. Both spirits possessed creative power which manifested itself in the one positively and in the other negatively. Ormazd is light and life and all that is true and good, and in the ethical world law, order and truth, and his antithesis is darkness, filth, death and all that is evil, and in the world, lawlessness and lies. Each had their minor spirits.[1] He further believed that man, being a free agent, will bring about the ultimate triumph of right. When the two were spoken of as a pair he did not mean twins, though later sects sought to rise from this Dualism to a higher eternity (thus the Zarvanites represented Ormazd and Ahrimân as twin sons proceeding from the fundamental principle of Zarvana Akarana, or Limitless Time). Incidentally the Parsees in and around Bombay hold by Zoroaster as their prophet, but their doctrine has reached the stage of a pure monotheism.

[1] Ormazd was the chief of seven.

The followers of Zoroaster have continued their practice of Dualism in Persia to this day, principally in the provinces of Yezd and Seistân. In the capital of Yezd, bearing the same name, there are 1,300 Zoroastrians, and a few miles to the west there live in twenty-two villages 5,000, but in 1879 the Zoroastrian community in this province numbered 6,483 and in 1892 there were 6,908. Thus, as a result of emigration to Western Syria and Northern Kurdistân, the natural increase of the population in Persia has been thereby discounted.

Some aspects of their religion are similar to that practised by the present-day Yezîdî, namely the worship of fire. For instance, there are four fire temples in the city of Yezd, and the Zoroastrians, like the Yezîdîs, are exempted from military service. Mr. H. C. Luke, at one time Assistant Governor of Jerusalem, who has travelled in this district, is of the opinion that the principles of Good and Evil are derived from the Persian Dualists; also that the Yezîdîs may have drawn their cult of the Sun from Persia, as Uramîah, the birthplace of Zoroaster, is very near the Yezîdî territory. This emigration to Kurdistân has been going on through persecution and oppression by

heavy taxation, and owing to the fact that it is very difficult for them to exact a living from the soil because of the barrenness of the district. It is a fact that the inhabitants of the province of Seistân are only able to grow sufficient wheat for three months' supply each year and that the remainder has to be bought at inflated prices from more favoured districts. In this province moreover there are a number of Devil Worshippers, who worship mulberry trees which are supposed to be inhabited by the spirit of Satan. Indeed, nature worship was practised by followers of Zoroaster in Persia until comparatively recent times and in this respect they shared common beliefs with the Yezîdîs.

Doubtless in their wanderings to the north-west, the emigrant element (to some extent recruited from Syria) lost some of their deep convictions as to the power of the Prince of Light due to the fact that he, despite their invocations, did not supply them with good harvests and they therefore relied more and more on the propitiation of the Prince of Darkness for their well-being. It is possible that they knew very little of their founder and their origin, and that after they emigrated from Yezd and other districts,

they eventually became the founders of the cult known as Worshippers of the Evil One.

In past times when the autocracy prevailing in Persia was even greater than at present, larger numbers probably left their country and settled in territory where they could escape from what they considered injustice, and what amounted to little more than slavery. Their hiding-places were naturally in the then almost inaccessible mountainous districts between Môsul, Aleppo and Lake Van, the Sinjar Range[1] and the Caucasus Range bordering the Black Sea.

A modern writer combats this theory by stating that only in some phases does the Yezîdî religion resemble that of the Persians. This may be true so far as modern Yezîdî practices are concerned, but it is obvious that other elements have been since added, and that probably in its most elementary form nature worship formed the greater part of their tenets. This writer goes further and asks for an explanation of these traces of other religions. There is nothing to disprove that these traces were not added at the time Sheikh 'Adî identified himself with the sect, but, generally

[1] The Sinjar was not occupied by the Yezîdîs prior to the fifteenth century.

speaking, primitive people are prone to add and take away certain doctrines of other religions which they consider subsidiary to their main belief.

What is known as the Persian theory,[1] so far as the present writer is concerned, to some extent revolves around the word Yezd, denoting a province and town of the same name. Although Dr. Joseph admits many Yezîdîs are of Persian stock, he does not consider this of material importance in tracing their origin, as he is of the opinion that many races have contributed their quota to the religion under review. It is, however, true to say that the Yezîdîs of Kurdistân are regarded as the most numerous and most influential, and they speak a dialect which is in common use in Persia north of Latitude 36. I do not think, however, that the language question is a vital one, as it is constantly being influenced by nomads. What I do consider of greater import is the fact that Persian Kurds, including those of the Yezîdî faith, form the majority of the border and other tribes all along as far as the present

[1] A German writer regards them as descendants of the Mardî, an old Persian sect who worshipped the principle of evil.

Turkish frontier. The numbers of Syrians and Bedouins embracing Yezîdism are practically negligible, and this fact does strengthen the theory that this religion was in existence before the coming of Sheikh 'Adî from the West, as it is unlikely that he converted the Persian Muslims to Yezîdism.

Professor A. V. W. Jackson of Columbia University, an eminent authority on Iranian religions, declares that Dualism originally formed the basis of certain resemblances between the old Persian and the Yezîdî religions.[1] As to how Yezîdism became identified with the Persians, whether in their own country or in Kurdistân, it is in accordance with human nature to believe that the "Persian Prophet" prediction made an impression among them, and that they consequently looked at Yezîdism as a native cult. Such views may have led many Persian pagan fire and devil worshippers and Zoroastrians to embrace the new religion and subsequently to regard it as peculiarly their own. Badger, moreover, says that the religious systems of Yezîdism and the old Magi took their rise from Zoroastrianism, and the later history of the Yezîdîs was influenced by their

[1] Mr. Springett says that the Lebanon Yezîdîs bear distinct traces of Persian origin.

coming into contact with Christians and their partial subjection to Muslim rule, which accounts for any variation from the religion originally professed. Whether further research will tend to corroborate this theory or whether one of the other possibilities will be found more correct, history alone will tell.

In order to arrive at a logical conclusion of the origin of the sect as a whole, a careful study of the racial characteristics should be made, as this is generally a surer guide to race origin in Asia Minor than the history of their language and religion. The Yezîdîs, who, in point of fact, know very little about themselves, have a tradition that they originally came from Basra and that they emigrated to Syria and subsequently principally to the Jebel Sinjar (meaning Bird), and to the hills they now inhabit, but their method of reasoning or deduction is non-existent.

Some writers assert that bearing in mind the peculiar nature of their tenets, they have a Sabæan or Chaldean origin, but they admit that many articles of the Yezîdî doctrine are decidedly borrowed from other sects. As a matter of fact Chaldean Christians and Sabæans still exist in 'Irâq; the latter particularly along the banks of the

Euphrates, and although innocent of Devil Worship they have certain characteristics in common with the Yezîdîs, notably in the ceremony of baptism.

One writer has also endeavoured to connect the Yezîdîs, who are certainly hairy, with the old Assyrians, who on their monuments are usually depicted with beards.

As far as the Yezîdîs themselves are concerned, owing to the lack of documents and the ignorance prevailing amongst them, they are unable to come to any probable conclusion as to their origin. The priests claim that they are descendants of Noah through Na'umi, supposed to be known as the Malik Mîrân, or the King of the Mîrs, but it may be that they refer to his sons, Ham or Japheth. They add that Shem, another son of Noah, who, according to the Yezîdî tradition, reviled his father, was himself the Father of all other nations, thus exalting themselves and placing all others in a lower category.[1]

So far as legend and mythology is concerned, the following story of these remarkable people, however fantastic, is of interest. It is believed by

[1] Joseph mentions Seth as one of Noah's sons. This is probably a typographical error and should be "one of Adam's sons."

some of their tribes that there were seventy-two Adams, who each lived ten thousand years. Between the lifetime of each Adam, another ten thousand years elapsed, during which time there were no inhabitants on earth. Each Adam was more perfect than the last, and the Yezîdîs claim that they are descendants of the last of the seventy-two. The world is, therefore, according to them, nearly one and a half million years old. The last Adam married Eve, who was barren, so a heavenly damsel named Hûriya came from Paradise with a cavalier named Jinnîs, to be his second wife. Eve was washing clothes in the river when these two appeared, and although Jinnîs was rather abashed, he explained his mission and introduced the maiden to Eve. Eve, naturally, averse from being supplanted, cunningly suggested that she herself should go on ahead to the house and warn her husband, and to prepare the place for the damsel's reception. It is recounted that she hurried home, told Adam of the meeting and made him swear that he would not so much as look at Hûriya. The latter, therefore, lived with Adam and Eve, but was a bride in name only. Naturally after a time there was tension in the household, and Eve, during a quarrel with Adam, declared that she alone had the

power of reproduction, adding that Adam had nothing to do with it. The angel Jabrâ'îl thereupon placed blood from the forehead of Eve and Adam into four jars, two for Eve and two for Adam. These jars were sealed, marked and placed in camel dung and after nine months opened. Eve's jars were barren, but Adam's contained a boy called Shahîd Jayar—son of the jar, and a girl, who were suckled by Adam and from whom sprang the race of the Yezîdîs. Legend does not say what became of Hûriya, but apparently Eve with Shem's help bore Cain and Abel, whom the Yezîdîs disown.

Pure fantasy is shown in two further examples of Yezîdî belief. Some think that the original Yezîdî was born when Adam first spat. The spittle was supposed immediately to become a child. Another story some of the tribes retail is in connection with their sacred symbol, Melak Tâ'ûs. In some way they identify the god Yezîd with Melak Tâ'ûs, as half angel and half man. He is supposed to have remained a bachelor until after Adam's marriage. Being half a divinity and unable to marry a mortal, he induced Melak Tâ'ûs to introduce him to a *hûrî*, from whom their race sprang.

From the maze of conflicting information some things are certain; Yezîdism is a survival of the

ancient pagans;[1] this sect at one time concealed their religion as much as possible by the use of Holy Names in order to escape persecution; and in particular they have always avoided the Persian and Mesopotamian Muslims, who execrate them for what they consider the infamous acts of their alleged founder, Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya.

[1] The religion of the Qizilbâsh of the Angora district in Asia Minor is probably another survival. They now "worship a large black dog, in which they see the image of the Divinity."

CHAPTER III

SOME TRIBAL CUSTOMS AND HABITS

ALTHOUGH the Yezîdîs will not receive converts to their faith, they are to some extent willing to talk of their religious and secular life, and within the last twenty years observers of their customs have thrown a certain amount of light on their unwritten laws. It would, however, require a long residence among the various tribes to be fully cognizant of all their idiosyncrasies.

The waters which flow through the Temple of Sheikh 'Adî are alone used to perform the rite of baptism. Children born close to the shrine are taken as soon as possible after seven days to the sacred stream, placed on a plate shaped like a cock, and there immersed three times. After the second immersion the priest conducting the baptism declares the child to be a follower of Yezîd, and hopes that the infant may in future make himself or herself a martyr for its faith. Those born in the

Sinjar and other distant places are visited by a Qauwâl (priest) and baptized from a skin filled with the Holy Water. In addition all new clothes are baptized, and particularly devout Yezîdîs also immerse their knives and razors in Sheikh 'Adî water before use.

No one can enter the valley of Sheikh 'Adî whether on feast days or not, without having first by means of water purified his body and clothes, and arrangements for this exist a mile or so from the Temple. These washings are not thought to have emanated from the sacrament of Holy Baptism, but are purely devotional acts.

One of the peculiarities regarding baptism is that the Christian name of Gurgîs (George) is never given to a boy, as for some reason it is objectionable.

All adults theoretically fast for forty days in the Spring, but actually this is not observed, and one person in a family can fast for the remainder.[1] In any case the fast is not so stringent as that practised by pious Shî'as during Ramazân. Some believe that God commanded them to fast, saying

[1] The Yezîdîs in this respect follow the precepts of Zoroaster, who condemned fasting as a criminal rejection of the best gifts of Providence.

in Kurdish "Se rosh," meaning "three days," and that the Muslims, not understanding the language, thought He said "Si rosh" meaning "thirty days." A variant of this belief is that God said "thirty days," but Yezîd, who was rather deaf, understood the period to be three days. The general opinion, however, is that the three days' fast observed in December is in commemoration of Yezîd's death. The Chief Sheikh fasts for a month in the year, during which time he eats but once each twenty-four hours, and then after sunset.

One of the principal duties (mentioned elsewhere) of the Qauwâls on tour is the collection of offerings. These moneys are allocated as follows: one half for the support of the tomb of Sheikh 'Adî; a quarter to the Mîr and the remaining quarter is shared by the Qauwâls responsible for its collection. In practice there does not appear to be any difficulty about this, as the honesty of the collectors is unquestionable. In addition to this there are contributions from tribes visiting Sheikh 'Adî during festivals.

Although opinions differ on the subject, in the absence of any written instructions to the contrary, it is not considered unlawful for Yezîdîs to read

and write. As a matter of fact, however, it will at once be realized that such accomplishments are virtually unnecessary owing to the primitive conditions prevailing in the villages, and the priests are the only class who show any interest in the matter and then only in connection with the chanting and singing on festival days. In Layard's time there were only one or two who could read and write, and even those learnt the art only in order that they might preserve the sacred books and refer to them when necessary.

Until recent times there was no recognized currency, and even to-day barter is to a great extent indulged in. Turkish and Indian coinage is, however, occasionally used.

The Yezîdîs, in fashion of the Balûch tribes of Sind in India, generally let their hair fall in ringlets over their ears, and wear a straggling beard. Their disposition is frank and confident, and they (especially the Persian element) usually have short legs and a swarthy complexion. The dress of the men resembles that of the Persian Turkomân.

The offerings to Melak Tâ'ûs evince themselves in strange ways, a notable case being at Dair Asî in the Sinjar, where in a secret cleft in

the rocks the Yezîdîs have from time immemorial thrown their tokens of propitiation. In this cleft also those afflicted with the influence of the "Evil Eye" deposit their gifts in order to alleviate their misfortune.

The only sacrificial offering the Yezîdîs make is, strangely enough, not to Melak Tâ'ûs but to the Sun. Every year, during the July festival, a white ox, dedicated to this God, whose name is Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn, the Sun of the Faith, is slain at Sheikh 'Adî and the flesh distributed to poor pilgrims. The chosen animal has previously been led round the base of the fluted spire of the shrine erected near the Holy Temple. The offerings in kind to the shrine chiefly consist of lamps and wood; the latter is stacked at the south-east corner of the Temple, and is only used for roasting the ox mentioned above.

During festivals, a noticeable custom consists of men and women passing their right hands through the flame of the lamps held by the Faqîrs (priests), and, after rubbing the right eyebrow with the part which has thus been purified, they devoutly carry it to their lips. It was at one time thought that this was part of the festival ritual, but there is no special significance in it beyond the

fact that the flame is lit from Sheikh 'Adî olive oil and is thus reverenced.

Circumcision is not universally carried out, and it is believed the Yezîdîs originally instituted the practice in order, to some extent, to conciliate the followers of Muhammad. Males are circumcised within twenty days of being baptized, after which the child's father entertains all present for a week. Later gifts are made to the two officiating priests.

The *qibla* (orientation) of the Yezîdîs differs from that of other religions and is the Pole Star,[1] whereas, of course, the Jews face Jerusalem and Muslims the Ka'ba at Mecca during prayer.

White linen spotlessly clean and cared for means much to the average Yezîdî, and at festivals he will see that he is not outshone in this respect.

The Yezîdî New Year, called the *Sarisâl*, is the first Wednesday in April, when the womenkind gather nosegays of red flowers and after three days hang them on their doors as a sign of baptism. The Qauwâls play timbrels on this day, but no instruments of joy are allowed, as God is supposed

[1] One writer, however, states that it is " the East," another that it is towards the sun.

to be sitting on his throne arranging decrees for the coming year.

Wednesday is their weekly holiday, and this day and Friday are Holy Days, but they are not forbidden to work on these days if necessary.

Some tribes have special customs peculiar to themselves. For instance the Hâlitîya tribes at Diarbekr observe Eucharist in a crude manner, and those at Redwân do not practise circumcision. The Haidî tribe when at the height of their power used to go through the following ceremony at festivals at Sheikh 'Adî. All of the tribe having arrived, they ascended the escarpment on either side of the Temple, and those having firearms placed small oak twigs in the muzzles and discharged them into the air for about half an hour. They then congregated in the outer court and again fired their weapons. After entering the inner court they went through a martial dance. This ended, a bull was led from the Temple. Some members of the tribe rushed upon the animal with shouts, and seizing it, led it in triumph to their Sheikh, from whom they received a present, usually a sheep. The women of the tribe meanwhile made *tahlîl* (a shrill chant) without ceasing until the end of the proceedings. This tribe was

formerly most powerful, but its members have been so greatly reduced by wars and oppression that the practice has now ceased.

Oaths are administered by drawing a circle on the ground round the person about to be sworn, and he is told " All within this circle is the property of Melak Tâ'ûs, answer falsely if you dare." Needless to say, the barest mention of this deity suffices to draw out the truth.

One of their prized privileges is exemption from military service. In 1872 the Turks wanted them to serve in their army, but fourteen reasons were advanced by them for not so doing and for paying a tax instead. The petition was signed by the then Mîr, Husain; Sheikh Nâsir, Pîr Sulaimân and other chiefs of many villages in the Sheikhân district including Mûsikân, Hatâra, Baibân, Dahkân, Huzrân, Bâ-qasra, Ba Sheikhâ, Hosâba, Karâ Pahû, Kabbâra, 'Ain Sifnî, Hairo and Kibartû. The chief reason was as follows; every Muslim twelve times a day is accustomed to say, " Take refuge with Allah from *Shaitân ar-rashîm* " (Satan the Stoned), and a Yezîdî who hears this from one of his erstwhile comrades is supposed to either kill him or commit suicide. It is, therefore, for the good of all concerned that

the Yezîdî need not serve and thus be out of earshot.

When the marriage engagement of a young couple is imminent a day is mutually agreed on for the man to present a ring to the girl, and the remainder of the day is spent in rejoicings in the village. Three days before the marriage all the male friends and relations of the groom assemble at his father's house and there indulge in festivities. 'Arak, the national alcoholic drink, is partaken of freely, to the accompaniment of singing and music. Afterwards the women in pairs ride together on horseback and likewise also the men. When they reach the bride's house, the men discharge their guns; hearing the sound the girl's father comes out and asks them what they want. They reply in unison, "Your daughter." The girl's mother then puts a red veil over her daughter and together her parents lead her out. The village boys assembled outside the house then enter, each taking a spoon from the living-room and putting it in his turban.

The bridegroom now claims the girl, and on her way to his father's house she must make obeisance at the shrine of every idol she may happen to pass, even though it be a Christian

Church.[1] On arriving at the bridegroom's house he must hit her with a small stone as a sign of his authority. Moreover, a loaf of bread is broken over her head as a sign that she must love the poor and needy. There are the customary dances in the village, and afterwards the bride is covered from head to foot by a thick veil and is placed behind a curtain in the corner of a darkened room. Here she remains for three days, seeing nobody except a female servant, while the guests feast. On the afternoon of the third day the prospective bridegroom is led in triumph by his friends from house to house, receiving at each a trifling present. He is then placed within a circle of dancers, and the guests and bystanders, wetting small coins, stick them on his forehead. These are then collected as they fall in an open handkerchief held by his companions under his chin.

On the evening of the third day the priest, usually a Qauwâl—but when there is not one available, the leading man of the village—solemnizes the marriage, takes the bridegroom to the bride, and, joining their hands, asks them whether they wish to marry. On receiving an affirmative answer

[1] In Kurdistân any Christian shrine, believed to be endowed with healing properties, is visited by all races indiscriminately.

he marks their shoulders and foreheads with red ink, and hands them a stick, which they break. A loaf of bread taken from a Kûchak's house is equally divided into two and given to the contracting parties to eat, but should they so desire, they may swallow in its stead some dust from Sheikh 'Adî's shrine or tomb as a blessing. The bridegroom then gives a silk handkerchief as a present to his bride. The bride is not usually veiled during the ceremony.

The priest then locks them in a room. The bridegroom knocks at the door three times, and the priest, hearing this, fires a gun, the bystanders following his example. The Qauwâl now sends them home, and as they cross the threshold of the house in which they intend to live a sheep is slain in their honour. For seven days they do no work.

No Yezîdî may cohabit with his wife on Tuesday and Thursday nights, which are holy. Should a Yezîdî abduct the wife of another he must pay the full price of the woman or give his sister, daughter or mother instead.

Although concubines are not actually forbidden, they are rarely heard of; and this is not surprising, as a man, with the consent of his Sheikh, may have a wife every year up to a limit of six if he so desires.

If the husband is absent from his wife for a year he cannot on his return claim her, as his marriage is automatically annulled. Moreover he cannot marry another woman without her parents' consent, as they would become infidel.

Nowadays a discarded wife (*aza*) cannot marry again, and when the Yezîdîs made their own temporal laws, the wife was punished with death for infidelity. Married women at least for a year or two after their marriage wear white clothes, and they also wear a fine white handkerchief close up under their chins. Marriage is forbidden during the month of April, except for Qauwâls.

Marriage was formerly a luxury, especially in the Sinjar, owing to the insistence of the girl's father that her dowry (*alam*) provided by her future husband or his parents should be ample, as is the custom in India. If he eloped with her, her people could claim a double dowry. If an elopement was intended, the prospective husband hired the strong men of his village, who protected them during the flight. Usually the girl's father and his relations pursued them, and if they were caught bloodshed sometimes ensued. On the other hand, if they succeeded in escaping, they returned after a time and were forgiven, as according to an old

Kurdish proverb, "Everything is forgiven the brave."

Ideas as to dowry, of course, vary according to the social position of the contracting parties, but there is no doubt that these were formerly much too high.[1] Hâmo Shêro, the paramount Sheikh of the Sinjar, is of the opinion that one thousand five hundred rupees in kind or money is sufficient for the highest born. Daughters may not inherit the father's wealth. In former days a girl could be sold like an acre of land, and if she refused she had to redeem herself by paying her father a sum of money, usually earned by her service.

Finally a layman cannot marry a Sheikh's or Pîr's daughter, nor can a Sheikh's or Pîr's son marry a layman's daughter. Death is the only punishment for a layman if he violates the law in this respect. The Qauwâl and Kûchak classes are, however, regarded as common people.

The funeral ceremonies for departed Yezîdîs are quaint. They vary according to age and rank of the dead man, and to some extent in different

[1] The reason for high dowries may have been that in India: to prevent desertion of the wife. During cohabitation the dowry is not demanded, but on divorce it becomes enforceable, and is then ruinous to the husband.

tribes. The following account is that of a man of fairly prosperous family living in the Sheikhân district. A Yezîdî after death is washed by his Pîr in pure water, preferably running, or if not obtainable, boiling, and laid on a *kifrî* (white sheet). Cakes of Sheikh 'Adî clay are placed in his mouth, under his arms and on other portions of his body, and the sheet is folded over and sewn up at the side and ends. A strip of linen, four fingers in breadth, is then wound twice round the sheet and tied under the body. After being placed on a bier, he is taken in procession to a prearranged place just outside the village. The widow, attired in white, on leaving her house throws dust over her head, which is also smeared with clay, and accompanied by her female friends she meets the official mourners, and all dance round the bier. The body is then taken to the cemetery, with the people chanting the while, the widow accompanying the procession with her late husband's sword or knife in one hand and long locks from her own hair in the other. The procession having arrived at the burial ground, the body is placed in an open grave, lying on its right side, with the head towards the south. The shroud is lifted from the face and more Sheikh 'Adî earth is sprinkled thereon. The head

is now placed in a small hole scooped out at one end of the grave. Large stones and boulders are placed in the grave to prevent the earth, as far as possible, from touching the corpse, and the hole then completely filled in, with no apertures. On the grave are placed loaves, cheese and a *gôpal* (a stick having a crook). A Faqîr then prays, saying to the dead man, "When Nâkir and Nakîr (the Archangels) come to you, offer them bread and cheese, and if they are not satisfied with this, beat them with the *gôpal*." The two archangels are then supposed to descend, and one questions the deceased, asking him his name and what deeds he has done, while the other writes down the answers in a book to show to God. Sometimes gold coins are buried with the body as a reward for their services.

Mourning for the departed lasts three days, the women meanwhile wailing and throwing Sheikh 'Adî earth over themselves. Sometimes a Kûchak is hired for the funeral ceremony, when he accompanies the body to the grave and places offerings on other graves. He is then asked by the dead man's relatives for particulars concerning the rebirth of the dead man's soul. He goes into a room set apart, prays to the Yezîdî saints, falls into

a kind of fit, foams at the mouth, and is supposed to communicate with the next world. After the fit has passed he sleeps quietly until revived with drink by the relatives of the dead man. If the latter was of good character, and the offerings of the relatives satisfactory, the soul's rebirth is allowed to take place in Heaven, but if the deceased was a bad man, the Kûchak informs the relatives that the soul has passed into the body of an animal. The relatives, however, may expiate this by subsequent offerings to shrines. In any case, the deceased's clothes and a year's maintenance must be given to his Sheikh, and at each new moon for the current year the poor must be entertained in the dead man's name. It therefore appears to be a somewhat expensive journey for the soul satisfactorily to reach its desired destination.

A distinctive mark by which all Yezîdîs may be recognized at a glance is the shirt, which, by one of their laws, they are forbidden to wear open in front, and it is thus always kept closed up to the neck. They are told they will have a sister in the next world who is directed to open the neck-band.

Generally, tribes farthest removed from the direct influence of the Mîr have gradually adopted

certain peculiarities in dress, customs and religious outlook. Possibly, were it not for the periodic visits of the Sheikh 'Adî Qauwâls, they would in time lose touch with the teachings expounded in their Holy Books, copies of which are unobtainable.

CHAPTER IV

TRIBES AND THEIR STRONGHOLDS

THE total number of Yezîdîs in the early days of the last century was probably 150,000, but through oppression and massacre 40,000 is an outside figure at the present day.[1] Of this number, the Môsul Vilâyet contains about 25,000, of whom roughly 17,500 are comprised of sedentary tribes of the Sinjar range[2] (about fifty miles long and nine miles broad), and about 7,500 are scattered along the Jebel Maklûb and the foothills of the Kurdistân highlands, principally in the Sheikhân district, where many of their Sheikhs are buried.

Tribes numbering perhaps 10,000 are found in North Syria (Damascus), North Kurdistân (Boktân, Kherzân, Diarbekr and Redwân), Aleppo and Teherân districts. About twenty years ago there were nearly 15,000 in South Russia living chiefly

[1] The only definite figures I have come across are those of Dr. Joseph, giving the number of Yezîdî inhabitants as 42,000, living in 86 villages and 650 tents.

[2] About eighty-three miles from Môsul.

in Tiflis and on the slopes of the Caucasus, but this number has since been reduced to a third through the Bolshevik and subsequent revolutions.

The town of Belâd,[1] famous for its figs, in the Sinjar district of the Môsul Vilâyet, is generally known as their secular headquarters, but there is no organized system of administration as understood by civilized peoples. The Paramount Sheikh lives at Milik near by.

The districts north and north-east of Môsul which come more directly under the influence of the Mîr are Ba Idhrâ (where the Mîr lives), Ba'zânî (their principal burial-place), Ba Sheikhâ (containing many Sheikhs' tombs), Semîl and Derebûn. The purely religious side is chiefly centred at Sheikh 'Adî (the Mecca of Yezîdî pilgrims) and Mihrka (East Sinjar).

The chief tribes in Kurdistân are Sheikhân (sixteen villages), Dunâdî, in the district of Dôhuk (fifteen villages), Sohrânî (fifteen villages), Missûrî (about ten villages), Samâkî, in the district of Midyât (six villages), Amu'âd, in the district of

[1] The British opened a school here in 1919. It did not long survive, as four pupils were drowned in a swollen stream they were fording on their way there, and the Yezîdîs thus regarded their innate aversion from learning to be divinely vindicated.

al-Qâus (four hundred tents), Rashukân in the district of Jezîra (one hundred and fifty tents) and Havverî in the district of Zâkho (one hundred tents). There are also nomadic tribes, the chief being the Huwârî, whose district is chiefly Zâkho. The general name for those tribes, not sufficiently important to warrant special notice is Dasnî.[1] The tent-living tribes are known generally as Kûchar. There are also a few detached colonies isolated among Turks and Christians.

The chief tribes in the Sinjar are the Heska, Mendka, Hubâba, Mihrka (guarding the eastern end of the range), Bukra, a small but fierce tribe guarding the northern end, al-Dâkhi, also guarding the north, Samûkha to the north-west, guarding the west, and the Kirân to the south-west, guarding the south. Other tribes are Jowâna, who occupy six villages in the north, Gabâra (two villages), and the al-Dâghî, Chalka, Faqîr, Jâbri and Ulekî, all of one village each.

The extreme western part of the Sinjar is chiefly inhabited by the Kherrânîya tribes. The Sinjar has always been a refuge for the more oppressed tribes to the north.

[1] This may have been derived from *Dasnâyê*, the Syriac tribal name of the Yezîdî Kurds.

The Sinjar tribes which appear to have died out are the Baît-Khalad and the Amera. It is also possible that there may be other tribes living in the fastnesses of the country south of the Caspian Sea who practise a form of Devil Worship, but every decade or so in the past there has been conflict between them and the followers of Islâm, and only those protected by their natural strongholds in the mountains of Kurdistân exist in any number.

CHAPTER V

HISTORY OF THEIR FAITH

THE religion of the worship of the Devil is probably an offshoot of the doctrine of Dualism, which in the dawn of creation was professed by several ancient peoples. They vaguely recognized that earthly existence to some extent was connected with the warring elements of Good and Evil, and that offerings must be made to the spirits of both. The principles of the religion of Mani (Manes, Manichæus), was to a certain extent a revival of it in the Syrian form, and this system of religion in the fourth and fifth centuries became so powerful as almost to rival Christianity itself. There was another sporadic revival of it in the twelfth century in Syria.

It is undoubtedly a fact that at the beginning of the fourth century Manichæism in Western Asia was an almost universal religion. It was essentially Dualistic and a certain part of it was founded on Chaldaism, but later was impregnated with

Christian, Parsic and perhaps Buddhistic ideas. In Manichæism the Hellenic element was absent, but it bore traces of the Chaldæo-Persian religion. Little is known regarding the source of Mani's beliefs, but the Magi to some extent shaped his teachings. His name has not as yet been explained, nor is it known whether he is of Persian or Semitic origin. A Persian of this name was born at Ecbatana in A.D. 216, where he may have absorbed some of the ideas of the Persian Dualists. He was educated at Ctesiphon, near Baghdâd, and started teaching in 242. He returned to Ctesiphon in 270, and was crucified seven years later.

Although the Manichæistic system consists largely of uncompromising Dualism, it is in the form of a fantastic philosophy of nature. Thus, Adam is a discordant being, created in the image of Satan, but carrying within him the stronger spark of light. Eve is given him by Satan as his companion who bore him Seth (a name meaning full of light). The Manichæans believe that Cain and Abel are not the sons of Adam and Eve, but of Satan and Eve. Heavenly bodies are regulated by different shares of light (something in the nature of an aura), and Satan was thus allotted a large share.

Towards the close of the tenth century the Manichæans in Persia and Mesopotamia had already been in a large measure ousted from the towns and had withdrawn to the villages. From this time the cult, due to outside influences, steadily dwindled.

Dualistic practices are also found in the teachings of Zoroaster, who also absorbed much of the Magian religion. It is thought that Zoroastrianism was one of the elements borrowed by Mani, and that during his travels, becoming aware that Dualism was the most popular religion among the people of Western Asia, he added beliefs of his own and welded them.

Devil Worship also existed in Shâmanism, a form of Animism. Indeed, this religion is sometimes called pure Devil Worship, but in reality the Shâman (Turkish, Kâm), who is a wizard-priest, closely akin to the medicine-man of savage tribes in other parts of the world, deals with good as well as evil spirits. The epithet of Devil Worship as applied to Altaian-Shâmanism is so far justified that the great enemy of man, Erlik, the king of the lower world, from whom death and all evils come, is much courted, addressed as father and guide, and propitiated with offerings. He is not, however, a power co-ordinate with the Good God, Kaira Khân,

SHEIKHÂN YEZÎDÎS

who created Erlik and afterwards banished him underground for his evil deeds.

Many Orientals say that the Yezîdîs were originally Christians, who have forgotten the fundamental principles of their faith, basing this belief on the fact that Dasnî (as they are generally known) was the name of a Nestorian diocese, which disappeared at the time the Yezîdîs first appeared, but they do not give the date of the occurrence. They also say that in the Sinjar there is an old Syriac library guarded by the Yezîdîs, which is supposed to have been inherited from their forefathers, who, the Yezîdîs say, were originally Eastern Christians. Further, a few Yezîdî villages bear old Syriac names.

Dr. Joseph, basing his assertion on the statements of as-Sahrastânî, thinks that the Devil Worship of the Yezîdîs was originally practised by a Khârijite sub-sect, akin to the Abâdiya, bearing the name of their founder, Yezîd *ibn* 'Unaissa. He says that certain distinctive Khârijite peculiarities seem to have out-lived the common faith of Islâm, such as the tolerant judgment of Jews and Christians and the condemnation of every sin as implicit idolatry. He thinks that in their new seats in Kurdistân they were drawn in the fourteenth century into the

movement of which Sheikh 'Adî was in his lifetime the leader, and after his death the Saint. He goes on to say that this sub-sect eventually ended by making him the incarnation of God in the present age. With this they joined elements drawn from Christianity, with here and there a trace of Judaism, and with survivals of the persistent old Semitic heathenism, many of which they share with their neighbours of all creeds.

Whether we can take it that as-Sahrastânî is correct or not in identifying the Khârijites with the Yezîdîs, the propitiation of the Evil One was avowedly one of the tenets of the old Persian Dualists, who also professed nature worship. This basis, grafted on to the Shî'as' ideas of dissimulation of doctrine, human sacrifice and transmigration adopted from the pre-Islamic pagans, and the teachings of the Jews who identified Ahrimân the evil principle, with Satan, and their principles regarding food-prohibition, together with their practices of circumcision and blood offering (obtained possibly from the Mosaic ritual), added to observance of Christian belief so far as the divinity of its Founder is concerned—although they consider Melak Tâ'ûs a greater spirit—baptism, and a respect for the Sign of the Cross,

and the whole moulded by a form of Gnosticism, practically makes up the principles of the Yezîdîs' creed.

Little study is necessary to make it abundantly clear that their religion is syncretic, to which at various periods, the teachings of Sheikh 'Adî and heretical Christian, pagan and Persian Dualistic influences have undoubtedly contributed. It is, however, difficult to imagine how such a strange compound inspires the Yezîdîs with fortitude in face of oppression, but the smallness of their population is in no small measure due to the fact that they are nearly all martyrs to their cause. The two big massacres of 1845 and 1892 would have put an end to a sect less strongly imbued with the essential spirit of unity.

It is by no means conclusively proved that any one founder of a religion was indirectly the cause of the rise of the Yezîdî Devil Worship, which first evinced itself in sufficient strength to have a definite religious centre about the middle of the tenth century. On the other hand, one has not to look far to point to religions which were essentially Dualistic. Even now the Yezîdî creed does not deny the existence of Jesus, though it is true no propitiary form of worship is accorded him.

Owing to the lack of authentic documents dealing with the rise and growth of this form of Devil Worship, one is forced to admit that history has apparently not considered these tribes worthy of serious attention.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION, BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS

As usually understood by civilized peoples, the Yezîdîs have no religion and no God, but they have a creed and form of worship of the Principle of Evil, which is more propitiatory than eucharistic. They definitely recognize that all forms of "bad luck" are instigated by a deity whose very name they are forbidden to mention, and they believe that Shaitân is endowed with great power in this respect. They therefore conceive it their duty to ward off danger by a careful avoidance of anything likely to cause offence to the Evil One. As their great object is to secure and retain the capricious favour of this Deity, their conciliatory attitude towards the Devil is thus governed rather by fear than love.

They, for the most part, believe that the Devil is a fallen angel, but God reinstated him in heavenly rank and forbade the angels to scorn him; mankind should not therefore treat the power of evil lightly.

It is largely this belief that has given rise to the idea that they are purely Devil Worshippers.[1] At the same time they do not deny the existence of Jesus and Muhammad, but their full power in this world they believe to be very limited and they are therefore relegated to the position of prophets. God is considered to be a remote Being, and not of this world.

Shaitân is the Arabic for Satan, and the utterance of this word is apparently a disrespect to the Prince of Darkness, of which no Yezîdî would be guilty. Neither would he malign the Devil and make him the scapegoat for his own shortcomings. Followers of this belief may be said to agree that his (Shaitân's) virtues are negative, but that his evil qualities may be rendered negative by propitiation also.

The Yezîdîs' belief in the transmigration of souls has an interesting origin. The story goes that a sister of Mansûr al-Hallâj[2] was filling her

[1] It is, however, the case that owing to the geographical position of most of their tribes, the Yezîdîs actually show some surviving traces of the old Devil Worship anathematized by Zoroaster.

[2] Husain *ibn* Mansûr al-Hallâj (the wool-carder) was executed at Bagdâd on 26th March, 922, for pretending he was God. The usual story is that the Caliph ordered him to be decapitated and his head to be thrown in the Tigris.

jar in a river when the soul of her brother came floating along and entered the jar. After drinking the water, she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Mansûr al-Hallâj is also held responsible for the origin of one of their fetishes. When the head of Mansûr was thrown into the water, it gurgled, and for this reason they never use drinking vessels having narrow mouths, as they also gurgle when being filled from running water.

There is no order of prayer or command to pray in their holy books, and as they believe that Melak Tâ'ûs is sufficiently powerful to save them, Yezîdîs are never seen at prayer, which they regard as a superfluous form of worship. Actual worship entirely consists of the hymns sung by the Qauwâls and the religious rites practised by pilgrims at festivals.

They have commandments concerning cleanliness, but not godliness. There is no implied order for a Yezîdî to love his neighbour as it has to come from his heart. Nearly every thought and action centres on the shrine of Sheikh 'Adî, and in this connection he is told to obey and pay the priests. Thus, between 15th and 20th September all must visit Sheikh 'Adî, when Sheikh 'Adî dust must be eaten daily; moreover, they must possess some at

death. Religious duties take up a considerable amount of time and money, and it is computed that the average Yezîdî spends a quarter of his income in fees, doles and alms connected with the shrines. It is unusual for uncharitableness to exist in any degree amongst their tribes and they are firm believers in charity beginning at home. For instance, he must kiss his brother's hand daily, also that of his Pîr, also if he goes to another place for over a year and afterwards returns, his wife is forbidden him, and anyone who gives him a wife is infidel.

Amongst civilized communities it is usual to think of the Devil as a Spirit and Hell as his abode, but with the Yezîdîs the latter is not so, as Melak Tâ'ûs is mentioned in their writings as having ascended into Heaven. In support of their disbelief in Hell they say that the consuming fires were extinguished by a child called Abrîk Shauthâ,[1] who, being diseased in eyes, nose, ears, hands and feet, cried for seven years into a yellow jar. When the jar was full he emptied it over the fires, which,

[1] Dr. Joseph says Ibrîk al-Asfar, a religious man, was responsible, whilst a Tiflis Yezîdî gives the following version: Satan wept in seven vessels to quench the seven hells of his seven thousand years' exile, and has now been reinstated in Heaven.

since then, no longer torment mankind. For this act Shauthâ was thanked by the Seven Gods.

Paradise to the Yezîdî mind is the destination of the souls of those who are freed from the body in this world. The past and future are an open book to these freed souls, and they are helpers of those earthly bound souls still struggling here below.

The more prominent beliefs of the Yezîdîs are pagan in origin, as the worship of Nature goes back to the dawn of ages. Worship of the Sun is so strong that it is thought the smaller of the two tombs at Sheikh 'Adî was erected in its honour, and that the Sun is known by the title of Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn.[1] Running water also has a significance in the minds of the Yezîdîs, co-eval with that of trees, and the particular spring at Sheikh 'Adî,

[1] Shams is Arabic for the Sun. Some writers assert that the tomb of Shamsu'ddîn was erected in memory of an earthly personage, Sheikh Shams 'Alî Bêg al-Fârisî. This theory is further exemplified by Dr. Joseph, who thinks that the spirit of the seven angels worshipped by the Yezîdîs originally existed in the bodies of men whose tombs are in the neighbourhood of the Temple of Sheikh 'Adî. Thus, one of the divinities worshipped is supposed to be the spiritual remains of Sheikh Hasan of Basra, a celebrated theologian who died A.D. 728. Another spirit, Kâmûsh, is given as that of Fakhru'ddîn, a doctor who preached in Arabic and Persian, born at Kai in Tabaristân A.D. 1150, and who died at Herat in A.D. 1210.

with its sanctuary beneath the Temple, is so worshipped by the Yezîdîs, that a legend has come to be believed in connection with it. They are now firmly convinced that it has an underground passage communicating with the famous well of Zemzem at Mecca. At Ba'zânî there is a sacred spring dedicated to Sheikh Mand, and at Ba Sheikhâ there is also a spring which issues from a small cave in the foothills and is very much reverenced.

Tree-worship is professed by the Yezîdîs to this day.[1] Again and again one comes across trees protected by a low wall of stones in their districts. Mulberry trees especially seem to claim their adoration, as they are thought to be endowed with sacred qualities and are generally regarded as having power to cure disease. Thus, at Ba Sheikhâ and Kabbâra, there are two mulberry trees; the one at Ba Sheikhâ is called Sitt Nafisa and that at Kabbâra is called Abdi Râsh.

They are thus raised above the ordinary level of common trees and are visited by the sick, who believe that they have powers of healing. At

[1] It is interesting to observe that in regard to the reverence paid by the Yezîdîs to trees that Yazid, a deity of the Târhôya tribe of Kurds, who are not Devil Worshippers, is supposed to be identified with the worship of trees.

Ba'zânî there is a mulberry tree near a spring which the Yezîdîs believe to be particularly endowed with special power. This tree is called Sheikh Bâliko, an even higher degree of honour. Sick wishing to regain their health tie a rag to its branches and make their vows before it. These pieces of rag remain until they fall from exposure, and bread is cast into the spring for the fish. The sick visit the mulberry trees at Khâsia.

The Yezîdîs believe that the period since the flood until now is seven thousand years. They believe that Khudâ (Kurdish and Persian for God) created the universe and produced seven angels[1] upon whom its maintenance devolved. Each thousand years one of the angels descends to establish rules and laws, after which he returns to his abode. The principal of these was Lasifarûs (? Lucifer), who also bears the mantle of Melak Tâ'ûs, and they believe that when this angel lived among them he dwelt longer than any of the others, and confirmed the Yezîdî saints before ascending. They also say that he spoke the Kurdish tongue and that the present age is that of Melak Tâ'ûs.

[1] These seven divinities may have originally been regarded as the seven Amshaps or immortal spirits mentioned in the *Avesta* of Zoroaster.

The other angels are supposed (Sabæan fashion) to be, in order of power: the Sun, the Moon, the Vault of Heaven, the Morning Star, Paradise and Hell.[1] They believe these angels control the universe, and for this reason the Yezîdîs kiss the spot where the Sun's morning rays first rest each twenty-four hours. They also sacrifice at Sheikh 'Adî a white bull in honour of the Sun (Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn). This custom is probably derived from the Zoroastrians. The Yezîdîs allege that on New Year's Day God sits on his throne and calls the angels to him, hearing their reports as to the well-being of his earthly people.

A most important belief in the everyday life of the Yezîdî is that if one of their number pronounces the name Shaitân, he or she will be struck blind. This fanaticism even goes so far as to forbid words with similar sounds, such as *khait* (string). Also, as there is an intimate connection in their minds between the Devil and curses, they are forbidden to pronounce the

[1] These angels are sometimes referred to by the names of departed personages with whom they appear to be in some way connected. For example, Sheikh 'Adî, Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya, Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn (Artanus), Melak Fakhru'ddîn (Kâmûsh) and Sheikh Nasru'ddîn (Nisroch).

Kurdish term for "curse" (*la'na*) and its various forms.

The Unmentionable is believed to be the chief of the Angelic Host, now suffering the punishment for his rebellion against the Divine Will (in connection with Adam's nourishment), but in spite of this he is still all-powerful and will be restored hereafter to his high estate in the celestial world.

They believe in the origin of the world as put forward in Genesis, and in the Deluge and in other events in the Old Testament. The New Testament and the Qu'rân are not rejected in their entirety, and there are passages from the latter inscribed in their Holy Places. Muhammad and Abraham are merely minor prophets in their eyes, but they expect the second coming of Christ and recognize the Twelfth Imam (Mahdî of the Shî'as). The Devil Worshippers believe that there were two floods, and that as the water of the second (or Noah's) flood rose and the ark floated, it came to Mount Sinjar, where it ran aground and was pierced by a rock. The serpent on board thereupon twisted itself into a cake and stopped the hole and the ark moved on. This may explain their veneration of the serpent on Feast Days,

when pilgrims to Sheikh 'Adî kiss the black-leaded image carved on the Temple wall.

They appear to believe that Christ will come to govern the world, but that eventually a Sheikh Mêdî (Mahdî) will rule with special jurisdiction over the Yezîdîs. They say that God has three thousand and three names, of which they know two thousand, and add that the remainder are unknown to anyone. As they believe that at some time or other all Yezîdîs have sinned, they lay down that before entering Heaven, an expiatory period must first be passed in another place, but that no one will be punished eternally.

Instances of superstition are legion. One is that Yezîdîs believe that a Sheikh living at Giranjak near Môsul has the hereditary power of charming folk, or casting spells, even from a distance. A story goes that a disappointed suitor for a lady's hand came to see this Sheikh and asked him for a consideration to render his more successful rival impotent after marriage, which was supposed to have been done through pure magic. When the husband apparently discovered what had been done to him, he went to the Sheikh and offered him a larger sum and implored the Sheikh to charm his impotence away.

Another concerns a different Sheikh. The descendants of Sheikh Ruhsit, so called after a ruined village of the same name, between Baibân and Nasarî in the Môsul Vilâyet, believe they have inherited from their ancestor certain magic powers. They live at Baibân and are regarded as snake charmers. This power they are willing to exchange for gifts. The transference of power is simply effected by spitting at people who wish to acquire it.

A notable survival of their pagan religion exists in their law regarding converts to their faith.[1] They do not admit those who originally professed other religions to their community, and for this reason there is a certain dignity and reserve about their daily habits, which is impressive to those of us who have been brought into touch with Christian evangelists.

Their homage to the Unmentionable Being fortunately stops short of imitation, as they have no "works" on earth to perform, and they feel they are under no obligation to make Evil their Good. It is only out of respect for the great name of their Deity that it is never uttered, though

[1] In this respect they resemble the Parsees, who were originally followers of Zoroaster.

possibly the fear of being struck blind has had something to do with this curious survival of pagan belief.

Intolerance by other people of these so-called peculiar religious principles has been the cause of much massacre from the dawn of creation, and religious fanaticism has almost continually been one of the chief factors of tribal unrest in Kurdistân. The Yezîdîs have always been abhorred by Muslims as outcasts, and they are regarded less than the beasts, much in the same way as witches were regarded by Protestant Reformers, but to-day with the spread of Christianity more tolerance is being shown to these tribes, who, after all, purely from a religious point of view are self-supporting and make no claim on the outside world.

CHAPTER VII

SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS ORDERS

LESS than a century ago, the Yezîdîs had their own independent chiefs, the last of whom, 'Alî Bêg, was beloved by the Sheikhân tribes, as he was sufficiently brave and skilful in war to defend them for many years against the attacks of the Kurds and Muslims of the plains. Finally, however, the powerful Bey of Rowandûz in 1832 united most of the Kurdish tribes in his immediate neighbourhood and resolved to crush the hated sect. In the conflict which followed, 'Alî Bêg fell into his persecutor's hands and was put to death; his followers fled and were pursued to Môsul. The boat-bridge having been removed, owing to the spring floods in the river, very few got across and most were massacred at Kuyunjik (Slaughter of the Sheep). 'Alî's son, Husain, was carried by his mother to the mountains and thus escaped the general massacre; but his power was limited, for shortly afterwards, particularly during the years

1838 to 1844, Muhammad Reshîd Pâshâ and Hâfiz Pâshâ[1] continued the tale of oppression and massacre, and the population was reduced by three-fourths. In 1847, however, Lord Stratford intervened and got the tribes exempted from military service, which concession is still in force.

Farther north, for a time the Yezîdîs escaped the Turk's clutches, and at Redwân a strong man named Mîrzâ Aghâ was set up as a semi-independent chief. He is chiefly remembered by a church he built for the Armenian Christians of the Redwân district, a pleasing example of toleration and liberality, which is unusual in this part of the world. Unfortunately he was eventually murdered by the above-mentioned Reshîd Pâshâ, who had the widow placed in his harem. This woman, however, did not live long and soon died in bondage. Mîrzâ Aghâ was buried on the banks of the stream to the west of Redwân. This oppression, which existed through the nineteenth century, was chiefly due to the fact that the Muslims regarded them as infidel, "having no Book," and their choice was between conversion

[1] Dr. Forbes, who was in the Sinjar in 1838, states that the Yezîdîs were then no more than bandits, and that Hâfiz, Pasha of Diarbekr, was forced to intervene.

and the sword. Other contributory causes were their refusal to join the Turkish Army and to the Muslim belief that they used to worship secretly the goddess of Semiramis (Semîram) in the manner the Syrian Nusairis used to do.

Again in 1892, Lieutenant-General Farîk 'Umar Pâshâ, a Turk, endeavoured to induce them to give up Devil Worship. They would not, however, and many chiefs were thrown into prison. 'Umar Pâshâ's son, 'Umar Bey, also slew five hundred Yezîdîs in their villages, carried off their young women, and tore down their shrines. The Mîr, 'Alî Bêg, in spite of this, did not change his belief, and was therefore banished to Katâmunî, near Constantinople. Through British intervention he was later released, but this was virtually the end of the Yezîdîs' temporal power, and for many years they were only to be found in the mountain fastnesses of the higher ranges of Armenia. In return for this shelter, they hid, during the 1914-1918 war, hundreds of Armenian refugees, who crawled from Dairu'z-Zôr to the Jebel Sinjar, and refused to surrender them to the Turks.

What little authority remains is now vested in a personage styled the Mîr (sometimes called Emir or Mîrâ). He is a kind of Prince-Pope and

is said to descend from Yezîd. In a small way he had the "Divine Right," both temporal and religious, over his subjects, but nowadays this is usually only exercised on the religious side. The present Mîr is Sa'îd Bêg, son of 'Alî Bêg (grandson of the last independent chief) who, with two brothers, were sons of the Mîr, Husain Bêg. Incidentally, 'Alî Bêg was, it is believed, murdered about a dozen years ago—at any rate he died very suddenly.[1] Sa'îd Bêg comes from the family of Chol Bêg, well known in the Sheikhân district. The males of this family always marry Pesmîr women (a noble caste). His aunt was for many years the Khâtun, or female keeper, of the shrine at Sheikh 'Adî. Sa'îd's cousin, Ismâ'îl, was very active during the 1920 rebellion of Mesopotamia, and called himself the Mîr whilst away from his people, but he is not heard of now.[2] Another cousin, Husain, lives with the present Mîr, and although he has no near claim to the position, in an unofficial way he wields a certain amount of power in the Mîr's household. Husain is a

[1] One writer definitely states that he was killed in 1913 by a Muhammadan Aghâ, named Safar.

[2] On one occasion he called on Colonel Cunliffe-Owen at Bâquba near Baghdâd. On his visiting card was inscribed "Emir Sheikh Ismâ'îl Bey," surmounted by a peacock.

pleasing personality; he is intelligent, has a fine bearing, and would, one imagines, make an ideal chief.

Sa'îd Bêg, with whom I conversed through an interpreter, is about thirty years of age, and wears the *shafiya* (head-dress) and *agl* (camel-hair fastening) of the orthodox Arab, but without the *abba* (cloak). He is a gentle, sad, and a depressing sort of chief, with slim hands and a silky black beard, and he has a perpetually irresolute and lack-lustre expression. He has, moreover, a cast in one eye. From his earliest days he has been under the direct influence of his mother, Mai'yam Khânim, who keeps all the household affairs under her thumb. It is rumoured also that she, in conjunction with a paramour, connived at the sudden death of her late husband. She is of particularly aristocratic appearance and above the average stature of Yezîdî women. By all accounts, she encourages the use of drugs and alcohol by her son, hoping for some reason that he will in time become entirely incapable of carrying out his duties and thus become an easy prey to a more ambitious successor. The Mîr's word is absolutely final in all secular matters, and not being bound down by the laws of polite civilization, could, of course, make almost

impossible demands with success. There is, however, always the possibility that one day soon another chief may call himself Mîr, and then Sa'îd Bêg will never be seen again. He informed me that he occasionally goes to Môsul and had once been as far as Baghdâd, but had not travelled farther afield. The Yezîdîs seldom wander about in the towns, and townsmen keep aloof from the despised sect's district. His cousin, on the other hand, was more versed in the modern developments of the country to the south, and, indeed, had for a period served as an officer in the Arab Army. Sa'îd Bêg is married, and has a pleasant-looking wife, who lives in a wing of the fort at Ba Idhrâ.

The Mîr has personal authority over the disposition of three of the *sanâjiq*, or images of Melak Tâ'ûs, but does not usually avail himself of the privilege. It should perhaps be explained that whilst each tribe has its own chief, the Mîr is the religious head of the whole sect and is therefore treated with great reverence and respect. Although the office is supposed to be hereditary, if the eldest son is unsuitable, the Yezîdîs sometimes chose another member of the family. As the Mîr can do no wrong, the probable successor

generally harbours designs against his life; consequently few Mîrs die in their beds.

Immediately after the Mîr, and with some of his temporal influence, comes the paramount Sheikh of the Sinjar. The present man is Hâmo Shêro, who is about ninety years old, and lives at Milik in the centre of the Jebel. During the war he was a Faqîr, but was later appointed by the British "Râ'is of the Jebel" and "Wakîl of Belâd Sinjar." These rather pretentious titles no doubt impressed his followers, who appointed him their paramount Sheikh. He is very unorthodox, which is unlike a true Yezîdî, but is not lacking in personality. In April, 1925, Hâmo's unorthodoxy brought him into conflict with the Chief of the Mihrka tribes of the Sinjar, Dâ'ûd al Dâ'ûd, and so bitter was the feud that the British were forced to intervene. The result was that Hâmo surrendered and Dâ'ûd is a fugitive. Fines were, however, levied on the followers of both, and for the present quietude reigns. It is probable, however, that this is the end of Hâmo's power, and that the orthodox Dâ'ûd will eventually become the paramount Sheikh of the Sinjar.

The orders of priesthood as laid down for many centuries are four in number; they are hereditary,

and may descend to females, who, when enjoying them, are treated with the same respect and consideration as the male holders of the posts.

The highest sacerdotal order is the Grand Sheikh, who is the patriarch or supreme pontiff of the whole sect. He is known as the Ikhti'âr-i-Margâhi; he is appointed by the Mîr, and is believed by the Yezîdîs to be a descendant of Imâm Hasân al-Basrî.[1] He is distinguished by a large black turban. He receives fees paid by groups of families at times of birth, marriage and burial; also fees paid to shrines, to priests in time of trouble and misfortune, and at thanksgivings. He has power to issue *fatwas*, or religious decrees, and has certain spiritual and temporal powers, including excommunication. He wears a special belt and gloves.

The Grand Sheikh usually has assistants, known as the Sheikhs,[2] each of whom is chosen by the head of a family to act as advocate in the next world. They are usually known as "heavenly brothers," and have to be near their employers at the time of death. These officials allow their hands to be kissed daily by the head of the family in question. In dress, they are allowed to wear white,

[1] Some say Sheikh 'Adî was his forefather.

[2] Sheikh is Arabic for old man or elder.

except the skull-cap, which must be black. They also wear round the body a band of red and yellow or orange plaid. Those living near Sheikh 'Adî watch over the tomb, receive pilgrims, take charge (in rotation) of offerings, and sell clay balls (special balls made of earth from the tomb of Sheikh 'Adî made into paste with Sheikh 'Adî water and regarded as sacred). It is difficult to place a Sheikh in order of precedence as far as the priesthood is concerned, as he is a kind of offshoot, and the office is not hereditary.

The next are the Pîrs,[1] which in Kurdish literally means "old men." The Pîr is a hereditary priest, and receives half as much in dues as the Sheikh, but has few temporal duties. He is supposed to possess the power of curing disease and insanity. He leads a life of sanctity and honesty, and is looked up to with great reverence. His duties being practically nominal, the office is a sinecure, and in spite of the stringent regulations as to priests' wearing apparel, none apply to his office. He usually wears a white turban, with a black plume.

The most numerous grade of priests are the Qauwâls.[2] They are able to play and teach the

[1] Pîr is Persian for abbot.

[2] *Qauwâl* is Kurdish for chanter or orator.

playing of drums, flutes and tambourines, and they are also singers. They go on missions with Melak Tâ'ûs, and being young and therefore active, they dance at festivals. They also instruct the young in dancing and religious pleasure. They are allowed to wear coloured fabrics, but white is more usual. Both their turbans and skull-caps are black. Usually they are well dressed, as they are given clothes by pilgrims to wear for two months. These are then returned sanctified.

The last grade are the Faqîrs[1] or Mullas, sometimes colloquially called Qârâbâsh (meaning black-heads), who are akin to the Levites of the Jews. They wear a *khurqa* (black cloth, or canvas coat) reaching to the knee and fitting tightly, which, according to the Yezîdîs, hung on a tree will stop a disturbance or brawl. The cloth is dyed with a special fast colour made from Chinâr leaves, by boiling the cloth in a solution of this dye for twelve hours. The duties of the Faqîrs consist in guarding the books and mysteries of their religion and of filling and trimming the lamps placed in niches in the courtyard walls. They usually serve in squads

[1] *Faqîr* is Arabic for a poor man or a beggar. They are administered by a Kâk (Persian for master or teacher), who lives in a holy place in the province of Aleppo.

of ten weekly. They wear a black turban, over which is tied a red handkerchief, and if they wear a chain round their necks it signifies they have renounced all earthly vanities. They also clean the various buildings of the shrines and generally do menial work. At one time they used to fast for eighty days each year (forty days in summer and forty in winter), when they only eat once each twenty-four hours. Whilst fasting they sleep on grass mattresses.

In addition to these Orders, there is also an interesting body known as Kûchaks, nomadic usually, who are regarded as seers, visionaries, mediums and miracle workers. They are supposed to receive these powers from a hereditary source, but they may be possessed, nevertheless, by an outsider. They fall into trances and see visions. Their power in olden times was practically unlimited, and if they were popular they could become Grand Sheikhs. One, named Bêrû, was approached by the leaders of some of the tribes during a particularly dry season, who asked him to send rain to the district. The story goes that this Kûchak said that he went up to Heaven that evening and there saw Sheikh 'Adî and invoked his help. Together they referred the matter to a heavenly

priest named Isaac (Ishâq), who was sitting beside God. The priest, who had evidently had many appeals of this nature from his earthbound brethren, informed the Kûchak through Sheikh 'Adî that he would cause rain to fall within seven days. The chiefs duly waited for this period, but still no rain fell. The Kûchak was brought before them, and he thereupon explained that so many calls had been made on Heaven for the desired rainfall that each apparently had to wait its turn. This explanation seemed to satisfy the chiefs, but the Kûchak was implored to do all he could to see that the promise of rainfall was fulfilled. By sheer luck rain fell within a short time, and the Kûchak's alleged powers were vindicated and he was hailed with acclamation by the tribes of the district.

Another, a shepherd, recently impressed the Mîr's mother with his aspirations. She told her son to get a Chaldean priest from Tel Uskof to test the shepherd's powers at Ba Idhrâ in the presence of the people, but no miracles were performed, and his potential power over the people vanished. He was assassinated shortly afterwards; but so credulous are the people at the mention of the word Kûchak that these alleged miracle-workers nearly always have a following. Kûchaks wear

black, and marry within their caste like Sheikhs and Faqîrs, but are not circumcised.[1]

The saints venerated by the priests are in order of precedence: Sheikh 'Adî, Yezîd, Muhammad Rashan, and Sheikh Mand. A sacred spring is dedicated to the last-named at Ba'zânî, and his descendants are said to be able to pick up poisonous snakes with impunity. It is nevertheless a fact that snakes are unknown in this district.

The Archangels worshipped by the Yezîdîs are (1) Jabrâ'îl (Gabriel), who bears the word of God to prophets and believers; (2) Mikhâ'îl (Michael), who brings rains, snow, wind and hail; (3) Azrâ'îl, the archangel of death; (4) Dedrâ'îl; (5) Raphâ'îl; (6) Shamkâ'îl; (7) Azazîl, also said to be Azrâfîl; (8) Azrâfîl, who announces minor messages with a trumpet; (9 and 10) Nekir and Nukir (properly Nâkir, for Munkir, and Nakîr), who examine men's souls at their death.

According to Heard, some Yezîdîs believe Mikhâ'îl, Azrâ'îl, Dedrâ'îl, Shamkâ'îl and Isrifîl to

[1] The priests having the immediate charge of the shrine are called Shawîsh, and are unmarried. Menial duties at Sheikh 'Adî are also carried out by women called *Kabâna* and *Fuqraiya*, the latter chiefly at festivals. These servants are also unmarried. The Faqîrs are known locally as Farrâsh (Arabic for sweeper).

be incarnated in the Sheikhs Abûbakr, Salju'ddîn, Hasân al-Basrî, Nasru'ddîn and Shamsu'ddîn respectively, some of whom have shrines to their memory at Sheikh 'Adî.

According to Yezîdî teaching, Melak Tâ'ûs was, however, originally regarded as the incarnation of Yazîd, whom the priests now speak of as a saint and inferior to Sheikh 'Adî.

It is worth noting that, according to tradition, when the Yezîdîs were naturally powerful they had a royal house. Sâbur I (A.D. 224-272) and Sâbur II (A.D. 309-379) are mentioned by them, and it is said that the first five kings reigned together over one hundred and fifty years (A.D. 224-379), and were the ancestors of the present family of Mîrs, known locally as Mairî Khân. There is, however, no trace of such a royal house at any later period of their history.

CHAPTER VIII

SHEIKH 'ADÎ, THE SAINT

So little is known about Sheikh 'Adî that much that has found its way into books about him must be laid at the heels of conjecture. Even the present-day Yezîdîs cannot, or will not, definitely say much about his birth, life and death, and it has been left to the present writer to narrow down possibilities to certain definite schools of thought, which bear characteristics that would indicate their probability.

The Saint's full name is given variously by Eastern scholars who have endeavoured to trace ancestry. The consensus of opinion is that he was called Sarafu'ddîn Abû'l-Fadail 'Adî *ibn* Musâfir *ibn* Ismâ'îl *ibn* Mûsâ *ibn* Marwân *ibn* al-Hasan *ibn* Marwân.[1] Thus for at least six generations there is agreement as to his forefathers, and it is unnecessary to go farther back than this.

[1] One Oriental continues to trace his ancestry five further generations, namely *ibn* Muhammad *ibn* Marwân *ibn* al-Hakan *ibn* al-'Ass *ibn* 'Umayya, but the name of the ninth (al-Hakan) alone is corroborated by any other authority.

As to how 'Adî became identified with the Yezîdîs, the tribes themselves are inclined to believe that he was a Syrian Magian, who in the tenth century took refuge with the Yezîdîs, who were already established in the Kurdish highlands. He was a man of some learning and wrote holy books for them, and on his death a shrine in the Temple was set apart for his tomb and the Temple re-named Sheikh 'Adî. As the Qauwâls at Sheikh 'Adi maintain that this shrine was built A.D. 960, some credence must be given to this story. On the other hand, it may have been handed down from generation to generation, and owing to their inborn credulity the Yezîdîs probably refuse to believe that this is not the case.

Most of the available information on this subject, however, inclines one to credit the following story. The shrine at Sheikh 'Adî, as originally conceived, was not the religious centre of the Yezîdîs, but the site of the Christian Church of Mâr Yuhannan and Mâr Yshoh Sabrân. In the twelfth century Christian monks employed a Târhôya Kurd of the Beni-'Umaya tribe named 'Adî, son of Musâfir al-Hakkârî, as an agent to collect their tithes. After a time, realizing the importance of his position, he conspired with his own and the Zednâya tribe,

overpowered the monks and seized the monastery. The story goes that he eventually married a Mogul woman and had three sons, Sharafu'ddîn, Muhammad Fakhru'ddîn and Shamsu'ddîn, who thereafter lived at the monastery. He then founded a religion based on doctrines from various faiths, resembling a form of paganism, with a deity named Yazîd as the central figure, and regarded himself as a prophet. In order that the origin of his family should not bear subsequent investigation, he forbade the arts of reading and writing. His period of influence, however, did not last long, and he was taken prisoner by the Amîr Gengîs Khân, was deported to Persia and subsequently executed at Marâgha. His sons shortly afterwards fled from the district, the eldest, Sharafu'ddîn, being killed; Fakhru'ddîn established himself in the Sinjar district, and the youngest, Shamsu'ddîn, and his wife settled in Damascus. For a time the monastery was closed, but a son of Shamsu'ddîn having reached maturity, successfully petitioned the Tartar Sultân that he might regain possession, and erected the present shrine to his now-illustrious grandfather.

The chief bone of contention in the above story, and that believed by the Yezîdîs themselves, is that Sheikh 'Adî was not a Kurd, but a Syrian, and

curiously enough, an Arab scholar named Kâsî Ahmad *ibn* Khallikân of Môsul, says that a man of this name, a Sûfî saint and mystic[1] was born at Bait Fâr near Baalbek in Syria in the early part of the twelfth century. He is supposed to have gone into retreat to a ruined Christian monastery in the Sinjar, where he died and was interred in A.D. 1162-3.[2] He says that Musâfiru'd-dîn, King of Arbîl, near Môsul, said that when a boy he saw Sheikh 'Adî at Môsul. According to him he was a man of medium size and tawny complexion, and died at the age of ninety. If this is the same man, then the Yezîdîs are two hundred years out in their calculations, but it is noteworthy that Syria is mentioned in their assumed scripture, the "Black Book." This Sûfî was a pupil of Sheikh Abdu'l-Kâdir of Gîlân in Persia, was born A.D. 1078-9, founded the Kâdirî dervishes, died A.D. 1164-5, and was buried at Sheikh 'Adî. This Sheikh 'Adî once went on a pilgrimage with him to Mecca for four

[1] From *sûf*, Arabic for wool, meaning a wool-weaver, typifying simplicity of life. Sûfism, which is eclectic, is the antithesis of Manchæism, which is dogmatic. It came into prominence during the eighth century A.D., and afterwards gained adherents in Persia.

[2] Soane mentions Sheikh 'Adî's burial-place as the valley of Kenwî Lash (meaning body) in the Hakkârî range, near Môsul.

years. He afterwards led a wandering life and professed strange doctrines.

Thus the Yezîdîs may have grafted his cult on to their own and on his death erected a shrine to his memory in the well-watered valley now known as Sheikh 'Adî. It is, moreover, recorded that his name like the Târhôya Kurd was also *ibn* Musâfir al-Hakkârî, but the discrepancy of two centuries in the date of the shrine is difficult to account for. It has been suggested that a possible explanation is that the present-day Yezîdîs are correct in stating that the monastery (not the shrine itself) was built in the tenth century, but that it was in use for the intervening two hundred years as a Christian monastery, when it was seized by the Sinjar Yezîdîs, who adapted the buildings as a shrine for Sheikh 'Adî. A certain Môsulî once said that it was a local tradition that Sheikh 'Adî died near Ba Idhrâ and that he thought this more likely than that Sheikh 'Adî died in a Christian monastery in the Sinjar.

Miss Gertrude Bell says that she is not at all clear about the Saint's origin, and mentions the districts of Aleppo and the Haurân (also mentioned by Muhammad Amîn al-'Umarî) as his birthplace and the date of his death as A.D. 1162. His Sûfî

teaching was in accordance with that received by Mansûr al-Hallâj, who suffered martyrdom for asserting the permeation of all created things by the Deity, with the phrase " I am God." Definite evidence that the building, which is now the Yezîdîs' religious headquarters, was once a Christian Church is difficult to produce, but this is not surprising as the late Lord Percy, who visited the place in 1897, found the edifice in ruins.

Another tradition the Yezîdîs have is that Sheikh 'Adî, who lived near Môsul, fled before the Tartar invasion of King Arghun, intending to take refuge at Aleppo, but on the road he was captured by the men of the Sinjar, who afterwards revered him as a holy man, naming him Nabî (Prophet), and later Sheikh 'Adî. On his return to his country (now Sheikhân) he died and was buried on Mount Lâlish (the present shrine at Sheikh 'Adî).

So much for evidence based on a certain amount of research in connection with the period of the Saint, but legendary stories in connection with his life are by no means lacking. One which the Yezîdîs firmly believe is that he was responsible for bringing the springs now rising in the valley in which his tomb stands from the well of Zemzem at Mecca.

The mythical power of Sheikh 'Adî attributed to him by the Yezîdîs is symbolic of their general tendency to create a mystical atmosphere around anything connected with their religion. The following is typical of their beliefs. They believe that the Saint will, on the Last Day, carry unquestioned all the then living followers of Melak Tâ'ûs (whether worthy or unworthy) to Heaven on a tray, but they cannot explain exactly how the feat is to be accomplished. Some, however, believe that Sheikh 'Adî was a mere mortal, who had in life bitter experience of the devilment of Melak Tâ'ûs, for when he was at Mecca on a pilgrimage, Melak Tâ'ûs impersonated him and finally ascended visibly to Heaven. When Sheikh 'Adî returned, he was supposed to have been slain as an impostor, but Melak Tâ'ûs reappearing, confessed his trick and gave orders that Sheikh 'Adî was henceforth to be honoured as a saint.

Another legend concerning Sheikh 'Adî is that he and his followers and horses were invited by God to Heaven. On arrival, he discovered there was no straw for the party to rest on, so he ordered some to be sent from his home on earth. On the way some was spilt, which was scattered in the firmament and is now "The Milky Way."

Investigations on these lines could be carried out indefinitely, but it is difficult to sift the wheat from the chaff. Rejecting references to his name in the Holy Books of the Yezîdîs, wherein he is portrayed as a Prophet of the highest,[1] it is impossible to point to sufficient evidence that he was the author of the cult of Melak Tâ'ûs. It is more likely that in his youth he was a devout searcher for an unorthodox religion, and in his wanderings across Syria came in touch with the Yezîdîs, threw in his lot with them, and they, on his death, immortalized his memory about A.D. 1163 by placing his tomb in the already existing temple at Sheikh 'Adî.

A Muhammadan writer, Yâsin al-Hâtib al-'Umarî, who lived in Môsul, says that a Chaldean manuscript in the Church of Karmâlis near Môsul (supposed to have been written by a thirteenth-century Bishop of Arbîl in honour of the Chaldean Saints) bears out the fact that the Nestorians do not share the same opinion of Sheikh 'Adî as the Yezîdîs themselves. He is supposed to have been a Muhammadan, a descendant of Hagar, who

[1] In the *Poem of Sheikh 'Adî,* which is not of sufficient historical value to lay down precepts, we are informed in verse 57 that the Saint is 'Adi as-Shâmî (the Syrian). The poem says that he is the son of Musâfir, who according to Yezîdî tradition, is a venerated personage. Sheikh 'Adî's mother is supposed to have come from Basra.

deceived them, and finally took possession of their monastery in which he consecrated illicit things.

The following variant of the story is attributed to Mr. Thomas Mugerditchian, an Armenian dragoman of Diarbekr, who, from childhood, made a special study of the rites of the Yezîdîs. He states that it is recorded in the Chronicles of the Nestorians that a certain 'Adî, a monk in the monastery of al-Qâus, in consequence of a quarrel with a superior, seized the monastery now known as 'Adî (said to have been originally consecrated to Mar Addai[1]) at Lâlish, which he converted to his use, compiled the sacred books and founded their religion. This authority also says the monk in question possibly impersonated the Syrian Saint of that name.

As far as I can ascertain there are no relics appertaining to the Saint, but, until it was stolen by the Turks in 1892, there was a copper sieve, known as a *takhi* or seat, kept at Ba'zânî on which it is reputed Sheikh 'Adî used to sit whilst he was giving judgment to his people.

[1] Saint Thaddæus.

CHAPTER IX

SHEIKH 'ADÎ, THE SHRINE

On the few existing large scale maps, the name Sheikh 'Adî may be seen, but to call this a village would scarcely be correct, as the only building is the Temple. There are, it is true, a few cave-like dwellings in the immediate neighbourhood, in partial ruin, but they are uninhabited except at festivals.

Reference to Sheikh 'Adî indicates the Temple and the Inner and Outer Courts, the entire area of which is not much more than an acre. The small valley in which the Temple is situated is approximately Latitude N. 37° 46′ and Longitude E. 43° 18′ at about 3,100 feet above sea-level.

To arrive there from the south, starting from Môsul the pontoon bridge spanning the Tigris is crossed, and after a mile one turns off nearly due north at the south-east corner of Kuyinjik, one of the two mounds comprising Nineveh.[1] The road

[1] The other is Nebi Unîs, and associated with Jonah.

surface is one of the best in the district, and no difficulty is experienced in passing the Christian villages of Tel Kaif, Batinai and Tel Uskof. A few miles farther on the surface becomes more stony, and care is necessary in negotiating an outcrop of hills consisting of soft marble and gypsum running nearly due east and west, called the Jebel Kand. A short distance on the far side of this low range is encountered the small village of Sharafîya and between here and the Kurdish village of al-Qâus, the country is typically undulating with long easy slopes. Al-Qâus boasts of a fairly large but primitive collection of stone huts, situated at the foot of the first large range of hills which is met with when approaching Kurdistân from this direction. At the edge of the village, which is a veritable sun-trap, a sharp turn is taken to the right and three miles farther on lies a great recess in the mountains. At the end of this pocket is one of the most interesting Christian relics in these regions, namely, the Chaldean monastery of Rabbân Hormuzd, dating from the eighth century, which has always been inhabited since its foundation, but it is now only the *succursale* of the big modern monastery on the plains a mile or so to the south.

From now onwards a Ford car should have no trouble in negotiating the numerous *wâdîs* (dried watercourses) encountered, but for heavier vehicles careful handling is necessary. Incidentally I made the first trip in a Rolls Royce car between al-Qâus and Ba Idhrâ. A mile or two from Ba Idhrâ two tiny villages, Baibân and Jerehîya, to the right and left respectively, are passed before the track descends and becomes more difficult. In this district may be found a few Assyrians who emigrated to South America many years ago to escape persecution, and afterwards found their way back to this out-of-the-way spot. Their speech betrays traces of their residence in a Spanish-speaking country.

Dominating the village of Ba Idhrâ, and indeed the country for many miles, is the fortress of Kasr of the religious chief of the Yezîdîs. It is situated on a plateau and immediately catches the eye as one tops the last ridge. The village itself, a distance of sixty-two miles by road from Môsul, is not at once visible, as it nestles in a long, winding valley and is watered by a small stream which runs horseshoe fashion along its boundaries. Buildings of a more superior type than are seen *en route* are evidence of the prosperity of the

inhabitants and are surrounded by olives, almonds and mulberries. Near the village is a particularly noticeable sacred tree, walled in with stones, and is typical of many in the neighbourhood. The castle or fort, which has two floors, is built of undressed stone, and its main entrance, surmounted by gazelle antlers,[1] leads into a rectangular courtyard where building operations were, in 1925, apparently being carried out. Turning to the right and passing under a narrow archway there is another small courtyard with stalls and loose boxes. The women's quarters and the room where the Mîr's personal *sanjâq* is kept, are on the left, and at the far end of this courtyard is a flight of rough steps leading to a balcony. On either side of this veranda or porch are the guest rooms. Beneath these are situated quarters for servants and minor officials. The main guest room is a fairly lofty apartment and quite devoid of ornament. There are a few rough inscriptions on the white-washed walls, which I was unable to decipher, as they were of a Kurdish dialect and written in Arabic characters. Two or three rough seats, covered with clean cotton covers, placed against

[1] It is an interesting fact that horns of bulls are sometimes placed on houses in Malta to ward off the Evil Eye.

the walls together with a small table, unpainted or polished, comprises the furniture.

After a few minutes, Sa'îd Bêg, the Mîr of the Yezîdîs, appeared, and the usual presentations having been made, coffee was served. Husain Bêg, a cousin of the Mîr, superintended this, and indeed appeared to be the major-domo of the establishment. We were later presented to the Mîr's mother, a well-set-up woman of about fifty, of striking appearance, but the Mîr's wife was not visible. The Mîr's agent, a Chaldean Christian, one Abdu'l-Ahad Effendi, in conjunction with our Arab interpreter, then made known to Sa'îd Bêg our intentions for the following day. Plans were therefore made for us to stay the night at the fortress. We were most hospitably entertained, were presented to several of the local Sheikhs, and made a tour of the village. A most elaborate dinner was prepared by the Mîr's mother for our consumption; it was sufficient for a company of infantry, and the remains were given to the household servants. The night was spent in the courtyard on divans provided by the Mîr, and a guard watched over us whilst we slept.

Early the following morning, before the sun had appeared, we rose and proceeded by Ford car to

THE QÂIM-MAQÂM OF ALKOS (left)

Ain Sifnî[1] (according to Yezîdî tradition the building-place of the ark) a distance of twelve miles. It is worthy of note regarding the qualities of this type of motor-car, that prior to the spring of 1925 no motor vehicle had ever attempted the journey to Ain Sifnî, and it is probable that only a Ford could have accomplished it without mechanical trouble. The stony track is of a tortuous and unpromising nature, ravines and deep ruts being numerous. Indeed at times it seemed miraculous how the car remained on its four wheels, so rough was the going. Bruised and shaken after an hour we espied Ain Sifnî, having passed two collections of stone hovels, dignified by the names of Esiyau and Beristek. Ain Sifnî is a typical Turkomân village, and is now the headquarters of an Arab police detachment. The last stage of the journey was now reached, and leaving the Ford we immediately mounted hardy Arab ponies or Kurdish mules with their picturesque trappings.

Through the kindness of the local Chief of Police a mounted escort consisting of a Qâim-

[1] A more direct route from Ba Idhrâ may be followed, avoiding Ain Sifnî, but little saving in time is gained, as the track is in places difficult and even dangerous.

maqâm (local government representative or deputy) and four other ranks was provided. Two policemen preceded the party and two remained in the rear. This sparsely populated district has been for hundreds of years a happy hunting ground for bandits, and the escort was a necessary precaution. As we topped each ridge the two leading policemen galloped ahead to make sure the route was clear. After an hour's going, crossing several *wâdîs*, the track became more tortuous, and suddenly the pass through which our way lay became visible. Without a guide progress would have been impossible. Huge boulders made the track indefinable, but by careful going and keeping well in touch, at last the entrance of the pass was made. The scenery as we ascended became awe-inspiring, and a sense of the terrible lawlessness of the past, which has made the beautifully wooded Kurdish hills scenes of bloody massacre, was now felt. Picking their way carefully, now and again slipping and stumbling, our steeds zigzagged their way along the narrow path on the side of the hills without guiding rein. Up and up we rode, and although the sun was now fairly high in the heavens, so steep was the face of the hillside, we were still in shadow. The cool, stimulating air

was welcome after the hot aridness of the plains, and mountain oak, pomegranates both of the wild and cultivated variety, sloes, figs, olives, tobacco, vines, water-melons, giant thistles, rhododendrons, hawthorn, poplars, jasmines, tamarisk, walnuts, pistachios, galls, crab-apples and many other varieties of trees and plants were visible growing along our path.

Crest after crest appeared, and still the sacred valley hid from sight. The apologies for villages called Geli Hudaida and Avrîva, inhabited by nomadic Yezîdîs, were now passed, and at a small open space a halt was made and also inquiries of the police as to the distance still to be traversed. As we were informed that another twenty minutes would see the party at its destination, we soon remounted and after altogether two and a half hours' steady going we came across a well-worn track on the left of a mountain stream overhung with shady oak trees. We now had ascended nearly 1,500 feet since leaving Ain Sifnî and our efforts were well rewarded, for at the very end of this winding path in this secluded valley we came upon two white-washed fluted spires of the Temple of Sheikh 'Adî, the most sacred sanctuary of the Yezîdîs, emerging from plane, mulberry, fig and

other shade-giving trees. Abruptly we pulled up at a crumbling stone doorway. We were now within the precincts of the only temple extant, which is specifically and avowedly dedicated to the Author of Evil himself. Nothing more incongruous could possibly be imagined. It appealed to us more as an earthly paradise than as the headquarters of the worship of the Malignant One.

Having been greeted by the custodian, a cousin of Sa'îd Bêg, and the members of the various orders of priesthood, it was noticed that our immediate surroundings disclosed a narrow court-yard, at the south-west corner of which was a fairly large stone bath containing the clearest spring water imaginable. Dismounting, our syces (grooms) retired with the ponies and mules to the stables (partially underground), and left us with the Qauwâls. The water in the aforesaid tank, which is supposed to travel miraculously from Mecca and never to run dry, soon proved an irresistible attraction and we assuaged our thirst in its cool depths, despite the presence therein of numerous water cameleons and frogs of vivid colours. Our interpreter having presented us to a boy of perhaps fourteen (who, it was later understood, was

THE MIR'S KASR FROM BA'IDHRA VILLAGE

the acting Sheikh) smoking a huge pipe, led the way along an avenue of crumbling masonry and through an open gateway to a kind of platform, above which grew masses of mulberry foliage. Steps then led down to the Inner Court in front of the west wall of the Temple itself. The Temple lies on its longer axis due east and west. This was possibly intentional, but is more likely to be dictated by the nature of the site, especially as the shrine itself is on the northern side. One authority considers that the Temple was conceived as a model of the Persian Audience Hall.

In the Inner Court we found Faqîrs and others smoking their typical long Kurdish pipes, who with less curiosity than we imagined quietly watched our entrance. Soon we were bidden to be seated on the mats spread out on the stone floor, and greetings were exchanged all round. Presently the keeper of the shrine called for refreshments, the usual custom before entering the Temple proper, and shortly afterwards we were regaled with numerous cups of sweet tea and bowls of *shenînî* or curds and whey. After smoking a cigarette or two, a Qauwâl informed us that we could, if we wished, now enter the shrine. It is probable that during the refreshment interval advantage had been taken

of putting out of sight any object in the Temple it was considered we should not see.

The door of the Temple, which is on the left of the west wall, is interesting on account of the symbolic engravings cut on the portico, including crude peacocks, crescents, stars, hatchets and combs. (A hatchet forms part of the Mîr's insignia when fully arrayed for performing religious rites, and a comb is supposed to guard against witches by entangling their hair.) To the right of the doorway, immediately arresting our attention, is cut a large black figure of a serpent, showing up clearly on the white masonry. Prior to 1892, when the Temple was sacked, a seven-branched sceptre was carved on the wall to the right of the serpent. On either side of the pillars were small bunches of withered red flowers stuck on the stonework with bitumen and Sheikh 'Adî earth made into a paste by pilgrims, who look on this offering as a symbol of blood and sacrifice. Having removed our shoes, we were bidden to watch carefully the Faqîr's movements and to follow his footsteps. In single file we carefully stepped over the sacred stone at the entrance and entered the Temple. The first impression of the interior is its shabbiness, bareness and dampness. Our eyes, unaccustomed

to the obscurity, were vaguely conscious of a quite bare greasy floor with water trickling from under the wall on the left and a tiny rivulet running from a basin immediately to the right of the door to a large tank situated a few yards away near the junction of the south and west walls. In slow, solemn state the procession turned to the right, down a single step to the lower of two naves, into which the central hall is divided. Water also appeared to be issuing from the stone flags with which this, the southern nave, is paved. Continuing along its length we became conscious of open lamps hanging from the roof, with lighted floating wicks, burning pure olive oil. We later heard that the wicks and oil were manufactured in the sacred valley. Unoccupied niches were made in the south wall, and about half-way along there appeared to be a larger opening in the wall where a dim lamp was lit, in which, it was understood, was usually kept on non-festival days the headquarter peacock, but neither then nor later was this story confirmed.[1] Certainly nothing was to be seen.

Having traversed the length of the nave,

[1] Yezîd, whom they sometimes call God, I am given to understand, has a place of honour in the Temple, in conjunction with Melak Tâ'ûs. A lamp burns in this spot and texts are written on the wall invoking the mercy of the Supreme Being

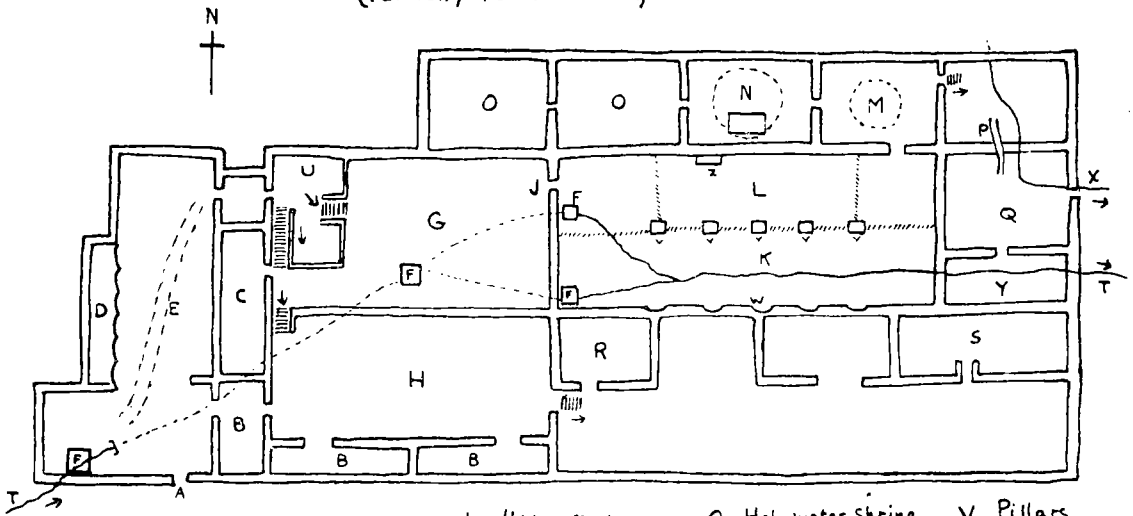
which is supported by four or five arches, we turned to the left, and carefully stepping over another threshold stone of a low doorway, we found ourselves in a small chamber, quite bare, serving as a kind of ante-room. To the left of this is another open doorway which communicates with a second chamber or chapel in which stands the tomb of Sheikh 'Adî himself.[1] This chamber or *shak* is surmounted with the larger of the two fluted spires. (The other spire which rises a few yards from the Temple enclosure is dedicated to Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn.) But for the presence of an attendant carrying an oriental lamp lighted with eerily flickering wicks, it was so gloomy as to be difficult to distinguish anything clearly. The only rays of light which normally enter this chamber come through small holes in the roof. The tomb, about the size of an old four-poster bed, was covered with faded red and green cloth (the

upon them. In the dim light it was impossible to see whether this was the place of honour referred to, but it is probable this niche is not the one in question, as Badger mentions seeing a lighted niche outside the Temple with inscriptions referring to Yezîd and Sheikh 'Adî.

[1] Some Yezîdîs have a vague belief that he is not the historical person mentioned as coming from Syria, but regard his name as one of the names of the Deity. In this case the tomb is a myth and the word "Sheikh" added to conciliate the Muhammadans.

THE TEMPLE AT SHEIKH ʿADÎ.

(Partially reconstructed.)



A. Pilgrim's entrance
B. Stables
C. Servants kitchen
D. Bazaar
E. Covered way
F. Tanks
G. Inner Court
H. Outer Court
J. Temple door
K. Lower nave
L. Upper nave
M. Shrine
N. Tomb of Sheikh Adi
O. Oil store
P. Tunnel
Q. Holy water shrine
R. Guest room
S. Wood store
T. Stream
U. Covered terrace.
V. Pillars
W. Lighted niche
X. Sacred stream
Y. Clay ball store
Z. Rude altar

NOTE. The underground portion of the stream is shewn by a dotted line. A part of the S.W. outer wall is merely a rubble heap.

Sheikh's colours), which was reverently kissed by the Faqîr. It is understood that beneath is some wonderful wood carving bearing Surah II of the Qur'ân, but we were not allowed to approach the tomb closer to inspect it. In a whispering voice the priest pointed out one or two details, but as it was evident our presence was a great privilege, we did not too closely pursue this delicate subject, the Saint being in the eyes of the Yezîdîs to some extent connected with Melak Tâ'ûs, though not requiring so much worship. At festivals a small plaster case is placed close to the tomb containing small balls of Sheikh 'Adî clay. Beyond was a closed door leading to the oil store where the olive oil is kept in large earthenware jars resting against the walls.

On retracing our steps into the smaller chamber, we noticed the low door which communicates with the subterranean cave, which is venerated by the Yezîdîs even more than the tomb of Sheikh 'Adî. It is situated in the east wall and leads down about half a dozen steps into a small dark chamber. Here, issuing from the north wall, is the spring which the Devil Worshippers believe to originate from the well Zemzem. The stream, which is in reality a mere trickle of water, runs through a small

hole in the wall at the east end and turns off to the left on the far side. A low passage now leads south, and bearing off to the left, admits one to a second chamber, slightly larger than the first, which is the veriest Holy of Holy Yezîdî ground. The sacred clay given to pilgrims comes from this chamber, which was at some period built over it. The water, whilst passing through, is supposed to possess certain healing qualities. At the end of this passage and to the left of it reappears the streamlet, which runs a yard or two across the floor, turns off to the left again, and flows out through a crevice in the east wall, eventually joining the main stream in the valley below.

As pilgrims follow the stream, and are not allowed to retrace their steps through the central hall, a small door is constructed in this wall, through which they pass into the open air. The water-chambers just described have only been visited by one or two Christians, and even Layard was ignorant of their existence. A pace or two to the right and one comes to the south-east corner of the Temple, near which is carefully stacked, in an enclosure, about seventy-five years' accumulation of wood logs, offerings of pilgrims. This wood is only burnt during the annual sacrifice of

the sacred white bull to the Sun God, and as many more logs are brought than are required, it is probable that a *fatwa* or proclamation is necessary every century or so to dispose of the surplus.

Surrounding the Temple itself are guest-houses,[1] stables, stores and a bazaar consisting of a row of *khâns* or small caves, where at times of pilgrimage may be obtained fruit, tobacco and sweetmeats. On the hillsides near the Temple are a number of caves, each named after a Sheikh and supposed to be his tomb. They are lighted at dusk during festivals, but the oil is not replenished during the night.[2] There are also a few buildings where the pilgrims live during the feasts. With the exception of the porch of the Temple itself, which has been practically rebuilt within the last fifteen years, little restoration has been carried out for many years, and parts of the walls are already crumbling away. It is extremely unlikely that the collection of buildings was at any time much greater than at the present time, as the configuration of the ground prevents extension. With

[1] Badger tells us that he, in 1844, was the first European to spend the night in one of these buildings.

[2] It has been computed that over three hundred and fifty lamps are lighted in the valley during the principal feast.

regard to its origin, the Yezîdîs agree that their Temple was originally built by Christian workmen, and that the Valley of Sheikh 'Adî must have been a holy place long before the days either of Christians or Yezîdîs. They, however, admit that Christian monks may have had a settlement in the valley at the time of the Roman Empire.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Turks made a determined attempt to destroy the place, and in 1897, when the late Lord Percy visited the Temple, he found it in partial ruin as a result of the 1892 attack. Certainly portions, particularly part of the north wall, appear to be much older than others, but much of the stonework has been merely rebuilt from fallen stones. Owing to the almost entire lack of inscriptions, it is extremely difficult accurately to fix even the date of its foundation.

The most important of the ceremonies performed at the festivals held at Sheikh 'Adî three times a year is the April feast, called the Feast of Assembly. Layard, in the first volume of *Nineveh and its Remains*, and in his later work, *Nineveh and Babylon*, fully describes the rites he witnessed. To this feast, which lasts a week or ten days, come representatives from as many Yezîdî tribes as

possible. The ceremony, which is performed between the 15th and 20th of April, begins an hour after sunset. Sheikh 'Adî's *sanjâq* is first exhibited to the visiting Sheikhs and chief priests. The Qauwâls then sing and play their instruments in the Inner Court, during which time the Sheikhs and others form a procession in pairs, led by the chief priest, which marches round in a circle and sings to the praise of Sheikh 'Adî and afterwards of Melak Îsâ (Jesus Christ). The excitement gradually increases, the women in the Outer Court raise their shrill voices, the chanting becomes louder and louder, and the procession moves quicker and quicker with much stamping of feet until the leader gives the signal to stop. This ceremony having ended, all kiss the Serpent near the entrance to the Temple, and one member from each tribe fixes on the walls small bunches of flowers gathered from their villages. The Mîr then receives the homage of the visiting Sheikhs, who kiss his hand. The villagers then kiss their Sheikh's hand. The younger men and women continue the dancing and singing in the Outer Court until a late hour.

The next morning the Sheikhs utter a short prayer inside the Temple. This done, they remove

the cloth cover from Sheikh 'Adî's tomb and carry it through the Inner to the Outer Court, the Qauwâls playing the tambourines the while. All those assembled endeavour to kiss the cloth and make offerings. After the cover has been replaced, as many as possible sit round the Inner Court and the Kûchaks bring food and drink. A collection is now taken for the upkeep of the shrine. Dishes of meat are also brought by pilgrims for their Sheikhs, who signify their acceptance by tasting, and afterwards it is distributed to the lower grades of priests. The pilgrims usually return to their homes during the afternoon.

On the last day of these ceremonies the oldest Faqîr is sometimes stripped and dressed in a goat-skin, and small bells are hung round his neck. He then walks round the courts on all fours, uttering noises supposed to represent a he-goat. Those present are supposed to be particularly sanctified.

On what is known as Qauwâl's Road Day, the Faqîrs wear a rope round their shoulders for carrying and lifting the wood brought by pilgrims to the shrine, which is then stacked near the Temple.

New Year's Day, known as Sarisâl, is, on the other hand, quietly celebrated. No music other

than the funereal variety is played by the Qauwâls, as the Yezîdîs believe that God is sitting on his throne decreeing their destiny for that year and is not to be disturbed. Bunches of red flowers, particularly wild red anemones, which abound in the neighbourhood, are brought by pilgrims to the tomb of their saint and fastened or stuck on near its entrance. These are left until they fall.

In addition to their own feast days, the Yezîdîs also observe Christmas Day (of the "Prophet" Christ), the Bahrâms and the 'Îd of the Prophet Elijah.

The Faqîr in charge of the shrines is responsible for making a nightly inspection with bitumen flares to see that the tomb is intact, and is allowed to expend moneys in the upkeep of the Temple. He also receives pilgrims' fees, and in former times fees at festivals; this must have been a lucrative affair. For these privileges he pays the Mîr a varying sum of money based on his takings for a number of previous years. He is also responsible for the safe keeping of the headquarter *sanjâq*. It was once removed to Môsul without his knowledge, but it reappeared before the next festival and the priest escaped with a mild punishment. Whilst at Ba Idhrâ, the question of permission to view this

image was broached to Sa'îd Bêg, who said he would mention the matter to the guardian of the tomb. As we expected, nothing further was said in our presence at Sheikh 'Adî of the image, and our guide informed us in English that if we were to be allowed to inspect Melak Tâ'ûs, the Mîr would have said so himself. A decree from the Mîr alone would remove any scruples from the mind of the priest as to the advisability of its exhibition before Christians. We did not therefore like to press the matter again, especially as we had been allowed to wander round the courtyards freely, and we felt there was nothing to be gained by further questionings.

Having again sipped another cup of the excellent brew of tea offered us, we made our salaams to the priests and attendants, gave a pilgrim's offering to Faqîr and Qauwâl, and mounted our beasts. In single file we slowly rode down the sacred gorge, accompanied as far as the outer entrance by the smiling young Sheikh, still smoking his full-sized pipe.

Turning in the saddle, I caught a last momentary glimpse through the trees of the fluted spires of this strangely situated shrine dedicated to the memory of Sheikh 'Adî, and then crossing the stream a

THE KHANS AT SHEIKH'ADÎ

hundred yards or so farther on, our path led into a wider valley, where our procession re-formed.

Unimaginative as Englishmen are supposed to be, I think we all felt that the valley we had just left was the nearest approach to our conception of an earthly paradise. Tucked away in the mountains of Kurdistân, far from modern ideas of civilization, where time is of little or no account, lives in seclusion a handful of fanatics, who rightly or wrongly believe in their faith and who honour the memory of one of their most devout departed. Speaking for myself, after a journey across the plains of Northern 'Irâq, I never hope to set eyes upon a more peaceful scene than the place which we had just left.

Following the same track as in our outward journey, after a ride of about two hours in the heat of the day, we reached Ain Sifnî and eventually Ba Idhrâ.

CHAPTER X

MELAK TÂ'ÛS[1]

IN order to avoid the difficulty the Yezîdîs at first experienced in referring to Satan, it became necessary to them to choose as an appellation a word which by the wildest stretch of imagination could not be put under the self-imposed ban forbidding the utterance of words having a sound similar to Shaitân. Thus it came about that the sacred symbol of the Mîr's Master and Lord became a *tâ'ûs* (from the Greek *taôs*[2]) or peacock,[3] and the

[1] Sometimes known as : The Tempter, Beelzebub, The Prince of Devils, The Strong One, The Wicked One, The Enemy, The Hostile One, The Malignant One and The Prince of Darkness.

[2] One writer thinks *tâ'ûs* is a contraction of the name of the God Tammûz.

[3] Hêra, the Greek goddess, appears with a peacock, her sacred bird, perched near her, in a group which is in the Palazzo degli Conservatori at Rome. The peacock of Hêra is mentioned in an article on symbolism in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics,* Vol. XI, p. 141. "The peacock,

Devil, Satan, Shaitân, or the Evil or Fallen One —call him what you will—is spoken of as Melak Tâ'ûs, or the Angel Peacock.[1] (The Yezîdîs would not recognize the usual horned, cloven-hoofed and forked-tail representative.)

The word *tâ'ûs* probably reached the Yezîdîs through Persia, and it is significant that some of their *sanâjiq* were made in that country. Melak Tâ'ûs is considered by the Yezîdîs to be the master of this earth, all-powerful and all-present. They regard the Deity, not as continually warring against Heaven, but rather as having been granted power over this world by God's decree. They conveniently disregard the facts that Melak Tâ'ûs abused this power so as to give Adam much pain and abandoned him, and that it was necessary for an act of God to remedy the angel's false counsel.

Prosperity and health, as well as sickness and disease, are in his power, and those who serve and worship him prosper, and those who curse him suffer. It is believed by his followers that certain

which is Greek art, belonged to Hêra, became to Christians a symbol of the resurrection, probably because the flesh of the peacock was supposed not to decay."

[1] Some think that the title should be translated King (Malik) Peacock, but the Yezîdîs regard the symbol purely as an angel.

limits are set to his power over the material world and that he is not capable of witchery and sorcery such as were alleged to exist at the time of the Christian Martyrs. On the other hand, the power of Melak Tâ'ûs in the celestial regions is supposed to be limitless, requiring much worship, and in the *Black Book*, this angel is credited, after Adam had been on the earth three hundred years, with the creation of the Yezîdî nation as far as its rulers are concerned.

Although the cult of the Peacock Angel,[1] as it is known in modern times, was probably founded a long time prior to the period of Sheikh 'Adî, it is possible that the image or *sanjâq* did not then occupy such a prominent position as it does to-day, and it is interesting to see that when the Sheikh died, Melak Tâ'ûs, according to a legend, gained ascendancy over the people, bade all to honour his (Sheikh 'Adî's) memory, and was obeyed. It would seem that the Sheikh's successor took on the mantle of Melak Tâ'ûs and issued a symbolic *fatwa* or *ukase* in his name.

The Yezîdîs are careful to point out that the image of the Angel is merely a symbol, and not an

[1] The Môrî Clan of the Bhîls of Central India worship the peacock when alive.

idol of their faith, but to the lay mind this sounds like splitting hairs. It is not unusual for birds to be reverenced by pagan tribes, and it is thought that the symbol of the Yezîdîs is in substance the *farûhar* of Zoroastrianism.

Very little is known of the actual *sanâjiq* (symbols) now in use, and it is doubtful if half a dozen people outside the Yezîdî faith have ever set eyes on any one of them. The following information throws some light on the question of their use in connection with the religious ceremonies at Sheikh 'Adî and elsewhere.

In Layard's time, the image consisted of a brass, bronze or copper stand, of a shape somewhat similar to the candlesticks generally used in the Môsul *liwâ*, which was surmounted by a rude image of a bird in the same metal, and more like an Indian idol than a peacock.[1] There were no inscriptions on it, and the bird and stand were made in three pieces for convenience during transit. This is

[1] The actual shape to some extent varies. The sketch made by Mrs. Badger of the one she and her sister-in-law saw at Ba Sheikhâ on 20th April, 1850, depicts the stand portion having two seven-pointed bowls (the top one slightly larger), which are intended to be used as receptacles for oil, and are ignited on special occasions. The image of the bird also was of less crude design than the one Layard describes.

probably still the case with the images used by the travelling Qauwâls, but the headquarter *sanâjiq* are now more imposing and richly carved. (See frontispiece.)

At the festivals held at Sheikh 'Adî, all the *sanâjiq* on the spot are exhibited to the visiting priests, except one which remains with the Mîr and is carried with him wherever he may journey. Another is used by the outlying tribes in the Sheikhân district.[1] When Qauwâls are sent to any distance to collect money for the support of the tomb and the priests, they are furnished with one of the small images (called *tâ'ûskushîs*) which is shown by them to those whom they visit as an authority for their mission. There are four of such Qauwâls, who instruct young Yezîdîs in the faith, and are divided among four districts: Sinjar, Hâlitîya (south-east of Mardîn and near Redwân in Diarbekr), Mallia (Aleppo) and Sarahdâr or Moskov (Georgia). The Melak Tâ'ûs carried by the Qauwâls is usually protected by a red coverlet. These missions take place every four months. The ceremony varies according to the district and the

[1] Possibly the tribes who live east of the confluence of the Tigris and the Batwân Sû and those south and west of Jazîratu-l-'Umar (Tigris).

time of year, but the following account gives a general idea of what takes place. On approaching a village in the district about to be visited, the Qauwâl responsible for the exhibition of Melak Tâ'ûs sends an assistant on ahead on horseback to warn the inhabitants of his arrival. The latter don their best clothes and collect outside the village, all those who are not Yezîdîs being excluded. They move off in a procession to the place where the Qauwâl is waiting. On meeting him, bidding among those present takes place for the honour of having the *sanjâq* exhibited at his house. The highest bid having been made, the Qauwâl removes a saddlebag (containing the image) from his horse which is usually the property of a Pîr, and places it across the shoulders of the waiting recipient. The procession then re-forms, with the Qauwâl and the holder of the *sanjâq* at its head. On arriving at the latter's house, the visiting Qauwâl removes the saddlebag and its red cover and places the symbol in a dish (*tesht*) of water, covering it with a square of silk.

The eldest Qauwâl now asks the assembly whether any are non-believers, and on being assured that only those of the Yezîdî belief are in the room, he removes the cover and proceeds to go into a

kind of trance, foaming at the mouth. He then chants a hymn until his head droops near the bird. Dead silence now reigns, and all present crouch round and gaze at the priest and the image. Although the Qauwâl is apparently unconscious, he begins to sing very softly and a slight commotion is seen in the water. The Qauwâl then rises and informs the worshippers that the spirit of Melak Tâ'ûs has entered the image through the water. He then questions Melak Tâ'ûs, who is supposed to answer.

Later, the Qauwâl places the peacock on a pedestal and each of those present kneels and kisses it, placing his gift on a plate before the Qauwâls, who also kneel near by.

All having propitiated the Devil with offerings, music and dancing follow, and the image is sometimes made to dance. The peacock remains in the house overnight, guarded by the owner and the Qauwâls until it is removed the next day to continue its itinerary.

The *sanâjiq* on tour are carefully guarded by the visiting Qauwâls, and on more than one occasion during troublous times ruses have had to be resorted to for their safe custody. Until 1892, it is understood, no image had ever been stolen or lost, but

a rumour has it that about that time the principal peacock was removed from the shrine by a Kurd and taken to Môsul, where it was, however, discovered and supposed to have been returned to Sheikh 'Adî. A story is also current that in the same year when the Turks tried to convert the Yezîdîs living near Sheikh 'Adî to Muhammadanism, they took five of the images with them, but the Yezîdîs themselves have always maintained that they were imitations.[1]

On another occasion trouble was experienced in this respect, when, during the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the Caucasus image disappeared and has not been heard of since. Indeed, it is doubtful if any Yezîdî settlements of any size still exist in the country bordering the Black Sea.

Formerly, in order that in times of trouble the travelling peacocks should not be captured and exhibited by aliens, they were made of wax so that they could be easily melted and so destroyed; but this practice had the obvious disadvantage of continual involuntary replacements due to their melting during the fierce heat experienced in the summer

[1] The images were dedicated to Hadrat Dâ'ûd, Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn, Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya, Sheikh 'Adî, and Sheikh Hasân al-Basrî.

months. Also there was no guarantee that they were genuine, as it was a comparatively easy matter for counterfeits to be used by infidels bent on collecting contributions.

It is rather difficult to imagine why such inordinate secrecy obtains in this respect, as from the point of intrinsic value the travelling *sanâjiq* are worth perhaps a couple of shillings or so, and if regarded from any other point of view, including that of the Yezîdî priests themselves, until the spirit of Melak Tâ'ûs has entered therein, they are merely symbols of their order. It may be that the Qauwâls imagine an act of desecration is committed in allowing Christian or Muslim eyes to regard this strange emblem of their faith, and this is feasible when their primitive mode of life is taken into consideration.

Melak Tâ'ûs at one time had a flag, composed of three horizontal strips of red, green and white. The Yezîdîs believed that this had certain curative powers. For instance, when a woman became insane, the flag was put into some Sheikh 'Adî water and the woman on drinking it was supposed to be healed.

I have come across the following information in a legend concerning the origin of the choice of a

peacock by the Yezîdîs.[1] It is said that the Divine Will ordered the creation of seven spirits, who were to be responsible for the governance of the world. The first and foremost of these was Melak Tâ'ûs, who was to reign for ten thousand years, of which, so the story goes, four thousand have yet to pass. Seven sheep are his sacrificial offering. The second spirit is Melak Îsâ (Jesus) whose reign has not yet begun. One sheep is his offering. Melak Îsâ will also reign ten thousand years when Melak Tâ'ûs had finished, and so on. The first coming of Christ was premature and failed to break the power of evil. Christ, according to this legend, did not die upon the cross,[2] as Melak Tâ'ûs snatched him away. Here we meet the first official explanation to account for Melak Tâ'ûs being represented as a peacock. When the Maries came to the empty tomb and found nobody, Melak Tâ'ûs appeared as a dervish and related what he had done. To silence their

[1] This somewhat differs from the Yezîdîs' general belief, as they put the reign of the seven angels at one thousand years, and, moreover, they do not believe that Melak 'Isâ is a spirit, but an angel.

[2] In this respect the legend agrees with their belief in denying his crucifixion, and it is also in accordance with Muhammad's teaching (Kurân iv. 156). Soane, the well-known authority on Kurdistân, confirms this.

doubts, he took a dead cock and restored it to life in their sight. He then vanished, first informing them that henceforth he would choose to be worshipped in the form of the most beautiful of birds, the peacock.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOLY BOOKS

As will be imagined, the written word as far as Yezîdî doctrines are concerned, is almost unknown. Ignorance of writing has for a long time been fostered by the Mîrs, and it was at one time believed that this was one of the tenets of their religion, but such is not the case. Fanatics and semi-fanatics are apt to be sceptical of books, and the refusal of the Yezîdîs to believe anything that has not been handed down from generation to generation is the chief stumbling block to their enlightenment. In addition to this, the Yezîdîs hide themselves away in difficult country, far from modern inventions, and thus are able to preserve their individuality.

Some of the Qauwâls have a smattering of the arts of reading and writing, but although the existence of Holy Books is an open secret, it is only recently that anything definite has been discovered about their contents. No Muslim is allowed to see

or hear of them, in fact this was so rigidly enforced that a Yezîdî who, it transpired, had revealed information concerning them was punished with death. No Yezîdîs other than the public readers may read these books, but those who understand Arabic may listen to extracts read by the Qauwâls in that language.

1. *Mashaf Râs* (*Kurdish*), *Kitâb al-Aswâd* (*Arabic*): *The Black Book*

This book is supposed to have been completed by Sheikh Hasân al-Basrî about A.D. 1342. It is in the keeping of Sheikh 'Alî, of Kasr'azu'ddîn, near Semîl. For a long time it was supposed to be the Qur'ân in Arabic, with all references to the Evil One carefully deleted. (It was called "black" because the word "Shaitân" is blacked out.)

The book is twenty-eight centimetres long and twenty-one centimetres wide, but the written portion only measures eleven centimetres from top to bottom, bearing one hundred and fifty-two lines of disjointed phrases. The language is an archaic Kurdish dialect. The cover is of wood. The book, when not in use, is covered with linen and a

material dyed red, made from goat's wool. It was begun soon after Muhammad's death. It is more than probable that in its original form it contained but few lines, and it is possible that Sheikh 'Adî may have contributed to it.

In its present form it is a mass of contradictions. The Yezîdî belief in the creation of man varies considerably, as the disjointed tribal jottings found in the *Mashaf Râs* contain statements to the effect that the angel Fakhru'ddîn was responsible for this after he broke the great pearl from which the universe came into being, and later on God Himself is mentioned in the book as having created man from the elements brought by Jabrâ'îl. Incidentally, it mentions that Sheikh 'Adî *ibn* Musâfir will come from Syria to inhabit Lâlishî (the hills in the district of the Holy Temple).

The power of evil is represented as tempting man to disobey God's commands, with the permission of God. Regarding the creation of the universe, again *Mashaf Râs* contradicts itself, as both God and Fakhru'ddîn are mentioned as being responsible. Later also, when speaking of the heavens, God, Jabrâ'îl and the first of the six created gods are credited with the achievement. In this book it says that God caused nipples to

grow on Adam in order that he might suckle the boy and girl (the first Yezîdîs) born in jars, and adds that this is the reason why man has nipples. It also contains a statement that the first fathers of the Yezîdîs are Seth, Noah and Enoch, who were conceived by Adam only. Adam is mentioned as having afterwards known Eve, who bore him two children, male and female, and that from these all other religions are descended. Mu'awiya is mentioned as a servant of Muhammad, and his son Yezîd is their god.

Several interesting tabus are found in its pages, notably the wearing of the colour blue. This colour is considered by Muslims to have power to ward off the Evil Eye, and the book seems to assume that devotees of the worship of Melak Tâ'ûs are immune from this particular evil. The eating of certain foods is also forbidden; firstly lettuce, the tabu being said to have originated during Sheikh 'Adî's lifetime. The story is that he was passing a garden and called to this vegetable, which, of course, did not answer him. He then called out *huss* (worthless) and forbade Yezîdîs to eat it. Another reason given for not eating lettuce is that the word sounds like the name of a Yezîdî prophetess, Hassia. Other foods, which

are similarly tabu, are fish, out of reverence for the prophet Jonah; gazelle, believed to be the sheep of one of the prophets; cock, representing the image of the peacock; pumpkin, haricot beans, and *bâmiyâ* (marrow).

Public baths and latrines are forbidden, and all Yezîdîs are enjoined to urinate sitting down and to pull on their nether garments standing up.

In addition to a veto on the use of the full word Shaitân, words having a similar sound are also forbidden such as *kaitân*, thread; *shatt*, river (for which *nahr* is substituted); *sharr*, meaning "the coming." Other tabued words connected with the idea of Shaitân are *ma'lûn* meaning accursed, and similar sounding words such as *la'an*, cursed; *na'l*, slang for curse (it also means sandal, and horse-shoe), and *na'l-band*, a farrier.

2. *Kitâb al-Jilwa* (*Arabic*), *sometimes rendered Ktebî Jalwe*: *The Book of Enlightenment or Revelation.*

This book is supposed to have been written about A.D. 1162 by Sheikh Fakhru'ddîn, secretary to Sheikh 'Adî, at his dictation. It is much revered

by the Yezîdîs. Few of the rank and file have ever read its pages, and the priests jealously guard its whereabouts.

The book is written in an old dialect of Kurdish, and in special characters in its more secret portions. Whilst extolling the power of Melak Tâ'ûs, who speaks throughout in the first person, it lays down no precepts or codes, but simply promises reward to the devotees of the Lord of Evil, who reverence him, and a calamitous end to those who do not.

Each page consists of sixteen lines, and I am given to understand that the book consists of loose pieces of parchment made from gazelle-skin, measuring twenty-seven by nineteen centimetres, of which the written portion, consisting of sixteen lines, takes up seventeen by eleven centimetres. Symbolic designs appear, such as a crescent, the planets, a horned human head, and a multi-tongued flame of fire. The original copy, wrapped up in linen and silk wrappings, was (for a time at least) kept in the house of the Mulla Haidar of Ba Idhrâ, and twice a year, during the April and October feasts, it is taken to Sheikh 'Adî.

Most of what is known to-day of this work was gleaned by Père Anastase Marie, a Baghdâdî Carmelite, originally through a Yezîdî named

Habeb, between the years 1898 and 1900. This Yezîdî, who has since died, desired instruction in the Christian faith from the Père, and revealed certain secrets of his renounced religion. Before he died he informed the learned Father that the books were then in the care of a librarian and lay hidden in the Sinjar. Subsequently the librarian was found, who offered for a consideration of five hundred francs to make tracings of the books, a laborious process, as he was only allowed access to them during the quarterly feasts. The task took two years to complete, and was most carefully done.

Not even the Yezîdîs themselves know of the whereabouts of either of these books, except during festivals, when they are exhibited to the Qauwâls. No Christian or Muslim has even been permitted even to see them. In times of danger the manuscripts are kept locked in a wooden and silver box, measuring thirty-three centimetres long, twenty-two centimetres wide, and seven centimetres high, which is hidden in a cave having a concealed entrance. Three keys are in existence, one each being held by the Mîr, the Grand Sheikh and the librarian himself. On the lid of the box are silver images of the seven angels, as follows: in the centre is a silver peacock, the symbol of Melak

Tâ'ûs; to its right is the Sun; to the left is the Moon. In each corner are symbols, also in silver, representing the earth, air, fire and water. There is also an eighth image, situated just above the peacock, in the shape of a star, which it is believed was fixed at a later date, its significance being rather obscure.

3. *The Poem of Sheikh 'Adî*

There is also, or was, a volume consisting of a few tattered leaves containing a rhapsody on the merits and attributes of Sheikh 'Adî. In this singular recitation, in verse 58, Sheikh 'Adî expressly says that the All-merciful, meaning the Creator of all things, has given him names, and the Yezîdîs admit him to be a prophet or a vicegerent of the Almighty, thus disposing of the fallacy that Sheikh 'Adî and the Almighty are one and the same in the eyes of the Yezîdîs.

This work contains eighty lines or verses extolling his virtues. He informs us in verse 57 that he is 'Adî as-Shâmî ('Adî the Syrian), which is supposed by a translator to be the Damascene, and is the son of Musâfir. In verse 17 allusion is

made to the *Book of Enlightenment*, and in verse 42 is mentioned the "Book that comforteth the oppressed," which is supposed to be the same work, namely the *Jalwe*, containing the theology and religious laws.

Most careful and annotated translations of the two chief Holy Books are given in volume six of *Anthropos*, 1911. Parts of the original text are also given there, including the secret alphabet used.[1]

[1] Professor A. Mingana is of the opinion that Père Marie's Kurdish translation of the *Ktebî Jalwe*, together with those of Professor E. G. Browne (Arabic, 1895), Mr. J. B. Chabot and Mr. S. Giamil (Syriac, 1900), and Dr. I. Joseph (Arabic, 1909), are all based on documents, the authenticity of which he doubts. Mingana gives the name of one Shammas Jeremias Shamîr, a deserter from the monastery at Rabbân Hormuzd, who died in 1906, as their probable author, and states that from their construction they are not much more than half a century old. Certainly their contents were unknown in the sixties of last century, though Dr. Forbes, when on a visit to the Sinjar in 1838, heard of the *Black Book*, and was told that Sheikh 'Adî was the author. The Rev. A. N. Andrus of Mardîn also casts doubt on the genuineness of A. Marie's discovery, and asks why the books were not under the care of the Mîr at Ba Idhrâ. In the absence of proof to the contrary, the scepticism of Professor Mingana must be respected. A story is current that the genuine documents were lost in 1849 from the Sinjar, and accidentally discovered in 1889 in India. It is not known if they were subsequently returned. Captain G. R. Driver also mentions the fact that the works purporting to be the sacred books of the Yezîdî were being circulated in 'Irâq a few years ago, but it is considered that they were forgeries.

There are also several prayers and hymns which are chanted during festivals, but none of these have been set down in writing, and indeed if they were, it would be a waste of time, as no Yezîdî would be able to read them.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

In a discussion on origin of faith, no less than origin of species, it is well not to dogmatize, but there is much to be said for the belief that the beginnings of the worship of the Devil by the Yezîdîs sprang from the rituals of the Zoroastrians, who have for centuries been becoming less numerous and influential in Asia. The points of similarity between the Yezîdîs and the Zoroastrians include the veneration of fire and the sun, also the worship of mulberry trees and a horror of the Evil Eye. The Persian Manes, who may be regarded as a disciple of Zoroaster, added beliefs of his own to those of the Persian Dualists and moulded them, giving Satan precedence over all other heavenly bodies.

The cult of Manes dwindled at the close of the tenth century, and for nearly two hundred years Dualism was at a low ebb in Persia, consequently, on the coming of Sheikh 'Adî from the Zoroastrian

element in Western Persia, the wilder people were ready to accept anything in the nature of a new doctrine; but as the Shî'as have always been powerful in that district, it is conceivable that the dissatisfied tribes found it desirable to emigrate to territory more suited to the cultivation of, after all, an unorthodox religion. The "Persian Prophet" prediction had undoubtedly made an impression on the Persians, who under Sheikh 'Adî's influence adopted the new doctrine as a native cult, a little removed from purely pagan belief. As the fame of the Saint grew, large numbers flocked to the hilly districts outside Shî'a influence, and although they were originally unknown as Yezîdîs by the other tribes, I am of the opinion that, owing to their new dwellings being situated chiefly in Kurdistân, they became known as the Worshippers of Yazed (Kurdish for Devil).

Moreover, though the Arabian Muslims have from time to time produced heretical sects, the practice of Dualism, on which it may be said the Yezîdîs based their early beliefs, undoubtedly originated in Persia long before the Kurân was written.

Muhammad, in laying down precepts for his followers, counted on undivided support, and taking

into consideration the plastic religious state of the Middle East at the time, he secured it as far as was possible. The tribes who did not entirely embrace the new religion formed a small minority, and never at any time had any great hold over the mass of Arabian peoples, as the schismatics had nothing lasting with which to replace Muhammad's teachings. Thus their sporadic rebellions came to nothing.

Some writers connect the Persian word Yazdân, meaning Good Spirit, and Yezîd Farfar, a certain Evil Spirit, worshipped by the Persian Parsee element, with the name of Yezîdî. Also it must not be forgotten that numbers of Zoroastrians from the Persian province of Yezd have emigrated from that country to adjacent territories. It is just possible, therefore, that one or more of these nearly similar words may have contributed to the tribes under review adopting the name they now bear. One has only to live among the Kurdish tribes for a short time to realize how the Persian type of Yezîdî predominates.

Finally, authorities like Badger and Professor Jackson identify the Zoroastrian Dualists with the old Persian Yezîdîs to such a degree that it is highly probable that the eleventh and twelfth

centuries, due to the mystical welding influence of Sheikh 'Adî, saw the rise of a faith emerging from little more than Dualism and Nature Worship.

Although it is true that the Yezîdîs themselves cannot explain exactly how the Saint became connected with their faith, the reverence paid to him is such that one cannot for a moment neglect to believe that without his presence amongst them, the emigrant Persian tribes would have continued their wanderings, leaving no trace of another religion in Kurdistân. Since then, however, it has for many centuries been reinforced by oppressed neighbouring tribes from Persia, 'Irâq and Syria, who absorbed the essential teachings of Sheikh 'Adî. A check on immigration has occurred during recent years, owing to continual hostility of the Turkish Muslims to the Yezîdîs in Asia Minor, but it is fairly safe to prophesy that as long as the tribes of this strange sect do not themselves stir up religious feeling, British protection will at least prevent a repetition of the massacre which occurred during the nineteenth century.

PART II

A COMMENTARY

BY

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A COMMENTARY

I AM asked to write a Commentary, which shall not be perfunctory, on the latest first-hand account of the Yezîdîs, usually known as the Devil Worshippers of Kurdistân. I feel some diffidence in intervening in this subject, as so many scholars have tried their hands at elucidating the Yezîdî rites, yet it cannot be said that research has so far succeeded in exhausting it. I may note here that the term for these Devil Worshippers in the index, though not in the text, of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, eleventh edition, is Yezedi. Driver, *Religion of the Kurds*, in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, calls them the Yezîdî Kurds.

I will commence my remarks by asserting—as does also the author of this book—that the Yezîdîs in Muslim environment are not Devil Worshippers, just as I pointed out in 1894, when editing Dr. A. C. Burnell's manuscripts on the Devil Worship of the Tuluvas in South Western India,

that they, too, in Hindu environment, did not worship the Devil. Yet another race of "Devil Worshippers" with whom I was once familiar for a number of years—the Nicobarese, who are Far-Eastern Animists—were so far from worshipping the Devil that the "worship" really consisted of ceremonial acts to scare away evil spirits. These acts were performed in connection with images set up in their houses and elsewhere, which were in reality spirit-scarers. They were taught by missionaries of various kinds to call these images "devils," and they still so call them when speaking to English people. Mr. Empson states in addition that there are numbers of Devil Worshippers in Persian Seistân, whence the people have a tendency to migrate towards Kurdistân. In their case the worship is of mulberry trees containing "the Spirit of Satan," i.e., an evil spirit, just as innumerable trees in India and farther East are held to do.

In one sense the entire illiterate population of Hindu India may be called Devil Worshippers, though the term is always a misnomer. The general feeling in such people is that there is a Supreme Being who governs human life and its surroundings and is beneficent, and there are also other supernatural beings who can do harm in various degrees;

but the Supreme Being is very far removed and the lesser supernatural beings are always close at hand. So harm might be inflicted before good could intervene. It is therefore well to propitiate the lesser harmful beings always, while worshipping the Supreme Being on set occasions. It seems to me that these observations represent the feelings which permeate the minds of the Yezîdîs also. They propitiate the Evil Spirit while believing in the existence of God. It must be remembered, however, in applying generalities to illiterate peoples that among them all religious feelings, however strong they may be, are vague and subject to unintelligent obedience to custom.

It has been observed above that the environment of the Yezîdîs is Muhammadan, and therefore in regard to their religious beliefs they are best studied as a Muhammadan sect, just as are the Nusairîs, Qizilbâshîs, Baqtâshîs, and a host of other eclectic heretical sects, which have beliefs and customs far removed from those of orthodox Islâm. Looking at them in this light, they should be classed as Ghulât, or—if it is desired to use that plural term in the singular with an Anglicized plural—as Ghâliyas. The Arabic term *ghâlî*, *ghâliya*, plural, *ghulât*, signifies an extremist, one who exaggerates

or goes beyond all bounds, particularly in reverence for certain things or individuals, as when certain sects, e.g., the 'Aliyu'llâhî, raised Muhammad's son-in-law 'Alî and his descendants or chief followers, the 'Alids, to the rank of incarnations of the Deity (Allah); or as when the same and certain other sects adopted beliefs foreign to Islâm, like incarnation (*hulûl*) or metempsychosis (*tanâsukh*) and so on. I propose in this Commentary to treat the Yezîdîs at Ghulât, as I think it can be shown that the basis of their religion is Islamic, with a large admixture of other faiths with which they have come in contact at some time or other: e.g., aboriginal Paganism, Nestorian Christianity, and Zoroastrianism in some form. This is really the history of almost any heterodox Islamic sect one may mention.

The tendency of the Yezîdîs to adopt any extremist belief, however pagan in its nature, is shown in a story of one of their leaders given by Mr. Empson, Mîrzâ Aghâ, who, during the Turkish persecution of the Yezîdîs in 1832-47, set up as an independent Yezîdî chief for a while in Redwân, in Armenian Asia Minor, and secretly worshipped Semîram, i.e., "the goddess Semiramis in the manner that the Syrian Nusairîs used to do."

In Islâm heterodoxy began in the very days of Muhammad himself, for he was not by any means allowed to have his own way in things religious without opposition. Sects at the very first sprang up in numbers; as soon, in fact, as his followers had time to look into the Qur'ân and endeavour to interpret the meaning of the texts. The great schism of Sunnî or orthodox traditionists, and also, as they may be called, followers of Muhammad, and Shî'a, or followers of 'Alî, began at the latest immediately after the death of the Prophet, and largely from political causes has continued ever since. Another way of looking at these two chief divisions of Islâm is to hold that, very roughly, the Sunnî sects are the puritans and that the Shî'a are the ritualists of the religion. In this view the sects, presenting an infinite variety of opinion, that have risen up in immense numbers on the ritualistic, i.e., the Shî'a side, are more likely to produce and absorb extreme ideas than those on the Sunnî side; and, as I read history, this has been the case. Indeed, among them every possible sort of extravagance and divergence from the original tenets and fundamental beliefs of Islâm has occurred. The unorthodox ideas attributed to the Yezîdîs are by no means the most estranged, and it is not more

difficult to include them in the Muslim fold than many another heterodox community.

Mr. Empson describes the Yezîdîs as an unpromising field for Christian missionary enterprise. I can well believe this to be the case. Centuries of minority combined with persecution have caused their faith to have an undue value in their eyes and roused the martyr's spirit. But even without any attempt at ill-treatment, it is quite possible for missionary efforts to fail with "Devil Worshippers," or, as I should prefer to call them, Animists, believers in the power of "Spirits." In the Nicobar Islands of the Bay of Bengal, where no kind of coercion has been used, two centuries of missionary effort on the part of several European Christian creeds and nations—Roman Catholic, Protestant, Moravian—failed to have any effect whatever on the Nicobarese, beyond giving them a few names, such as Devil for a Spirit and also for a Spirit-scaring image, Deuse for the Chief of the Spirits, and Devil-murder for the execution by a sort of communal law of one deemed to be possessed by an evil spirit and thus gravely undesirable to the community. It is only quite lately that Protestant Christianity has taken any hold in one of the islands, Car Nicobar.

Like the rest of the world—including all extremist sects of whatsoever kind or nation—the Yezîdîs have a tendency to split into sub-sects, which follow, at any rate for a time, some unorthodox leader—unorthodox, that is, in Yezîdî eyes. There is one such mentioned by Mr. Empson in Hâmo Shêro of Milik, who is a very old man and has a following of his own.

If, then, we may class the Yezîdîs as a sect of Shî'a Ghulât or Extremists, all that is further necessary is to inquire into the details of their heterodoxy. It will be found to consist of foisting on to an Islamic base bits of all kinds of beliefs, just as do the Lâlbêgî scavengers of Northern India, who are "outcastes" and have a creed of their own—a shadowy deity, Lâl Bêg, being the object of their veneration. They have priests, or perhaps we had better call them leaders, and some "books." On inquiring into their belief in 1883 (*Legends of the Panjab*, I, 529 ff.), I found that it had a Hindu basis, on to which were grafted ideas from Islâm and Christianity, and that it really consisted in holding to be holy anything that was found to be considered holy by the people with whom they came in contact. It was indeed Hagiolatry, of course, in a garbled fashion. This is precisely

what the Yezîdîs have apparently done with a Muslim basis. Their action has been the outcome of a natural process of the human brain. There has been no imagination to speak of, but a determination on the part of some independent intellect of the days gone by to become "peculiar," and found a sect, of which he is naturally to be the leader. Later on he, or at any rate certain others, profited personally by the leading, and so the sect ran on, as everywhere, and especially in the East, such persons have always found followers.

One can see, in fact, how the Yezîdîs and their religion came about from the study of an analogous story in the Panjâb. There is in that region a Muslim shrine with a special cult famous all over the province, erected to a saint named Sakhî Sarwar at Nigâhâ, in the foothills of the Salaimân Range in the Dera Ghâzî Khân District. The cult has a Hindu basis with a strong Muslim gloss, and is typical of those of Guru Gûzâ and Shâh Madâr *alias* Ghâzî Mîyân of Northern India and Oudh. Indeed, in their cases there is a dual personality —one Hindu and one Muslim. The shrine of Sakhî Sarwar is very popular and has still a large following.

Sakhî Sarwar as a name means the Lord of

Generosity, the Bringer of Wealth, and his story in outline is as follows: About 1120 a holy man, perhaps an Ismâ'îlîya, and so a Shî'a, from Baghdâd, with the title of Zainu'l'âbidîn settled at Shâhkôt in the Jhang District of the Panjâb. There he married among the Hindu Khôkars and had a son, Sayyid Ahmad, who went to Dhaunkal in the Gujrânwâlâ District where a family of Mônâ Jatts became his followers, and this aroused enmity in this Hindu clan. He fled to Multân and thence to Nigâhâ, where he settled, and was finally killed at forty-six years of age in 1174 in a faction fight over division of property with the Hindu heirs of his father's Indian family. After his death, interested followers and some members of his family set up a shrine to his memory at Nigâhâ, inaugurated a special cult and established a fair in April, in a manner which is very common in India and familiar to all students of Indian hagiology. The shrine is still maintained by hereditary *mujawirs*, or attendants, and wandering *bharâîns*, or bards, who act as missionaries (*da'îs*). Although the cult is professedly Muslim, its followers belong to all castes and creeds, and the Hindu basis is clear throughout the ceremonies, traditions and customs, and also in the stories told

by the bards. An examination of the Yezîdîs, and their shrine and the customs connected with it, will serve to show the reader that they must *mutatis mutandis* have a history of the same nature.

The situation of the Yezîdîs is, in fact, universal in the case of local heterodox tribes which have founded a sect of their own. A similar tribal position has been discovered in Burma in conditions totally differing from those of the Yezîdîs, and is recorded in the present writer's study of the *Thirty-Seven Nàts*, 1906 (page 19), where it is stated that "Andrew Lang in his *Custom and Myth* has correctly laid down an axiom: 'What the religious instinct has once grasped, it does not as a rule abandon, but subordinates or disguises when it reaches higher ideas.' This accounts for the phenomenon in Burma, both among the cultivated and the wild tribes of to-day, of an overlay of Buddhism on the indigenous Animism in so many of the practices and beliefs connected with the worship of the Nàts or Spirits. As Christianity in Europe and as Muhammadanism in Asia, so Buddhism in Burma has strongly tinged, but not destroyed, the older form of belief. A story told in Smeaton's *Loyal*

Karens of Burma, explains the whole situation whether observed in Burma, India, or elsewhere. It relates how some children, left by their parents in a safe place out of the reach of beasts of prey, were, nevertheless, so frightened at the approach of a tiger that, to save themselves, they took some pigs that had been placed in the shelter with them and threw them down for the tiger to devour. 'Their eyes, however,' so the story runs, 'were fixed not on the tiger, but on the path by which they expected to see their father come. Their hands fed the tiger from fear, but their ears were eagerly listening for the twang of their father's bow-string which would send the arrow quivering into the tiger's heart. And so, say the Karens, although we have to make sacrifices to demons, our hearts are still true to God. We must throw sops to the foul demons who afflict us, but our hearts are ever looking for God.' Such is the reasoning of the Karens, who have for a long time past become largely Christian. It is good to stand well with both God and Mammon is the practical reasoning, too, of the masses all the world over [including the Yezîdîs]. They are always eclectic, so far as their general ignorance permits.

By way of explaining how the religion of

Eastern peoples appeared to the early European travellers and how the term "Devil Worship" arose as a name for it, some remarks may be quoted from a forthcoming work of my own on the Italian traveller, Varthema. He wandered in the East—Arabia, Persia, Indian and farther Indian coasts, and the Malay Archipelago—from 1502 to 1508, and produced his book in 1510, so he is one of the earliest of the European writers on travel in the East. He gives a quaint account of the religion of the people in South India in the following words: "The King of Calicut is a pagan and worships the devil in the manner you shall hear." He must, in fact, have observed various ceremonies at Hindu temples and mixed them up with recollections of conversations with educated people. European languages, especially Spanish, were known to many *mamlûk* (foreign) slaves in India in Varthema's time: "They acknowledge that there is a God, who has created the heaven and the earth and all the world." He is here giving voice to his impressions after inquiry about educated Hindus, and then he passes on to an account of the belief in the Hindu godling or *dêvatâ*, who does both good and evil to mankind and is therefore much propitiated:

"The Devil they call Deumo and God they call Tamarani," i.e., the name for the godling is *devan* and that for the Supreme God is Tamburân, Lord or Master. Under the title of Sathanas (Satan) he describes the images of the terrible goddess Kâlî, and as to his account of her worship, he must have looked on at some ceremonies of the lower orders, nowadays classed together as "Devil Worship," and far removed from the religious observances of the philosophic and thoughtful Hindu. There is, however, evidence to show that he applied the term Sathanas to any prominent Hindu image. Varthema also notices the "devil-dancing" ceremonies used at the planting of a cornfield, and on exorcising the evil spirit supposed to possess those who are seriously ill.

The Yezîdî Kurds have attracted a good deal of attention owing to the European description of them as Devil Worshippers, but as a matter of sober fact, they do not differ greatly from some of the neighbouring Kurdish *ghulât* in their extremism. The Qizilbâshîs or Redcap Kurds, who are Shî'a *ghulât*, have, for instance, a large Black Dog, "in which they see the image of the Divinity," and worship him with obscene rites. They go, in fact, to greater extremities in their heterodoxy than

do the Yezîdîs with their Peacock, Melak Tâ'ûs, representing Shaitân, the Muslim Devil. Again, in their cult, as we shall see, of trees, the Yezîdîs have their counterparts—as Driver, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* (1922, II, 198), has pointed out—in the tribes of Asia Minor, probably Zazâ Kurds, which worship the trees of the forest, and have altars formed of rude blocks of stone like dolmens or menhirs in the recesses of their country, but nevertheless are accounted to be Shî'a Muslims.

The Yezîdîs' Deities

It may be safely stated that the modern Yezîdî attitude towards the Deity is that there is a Supreme Being who is God, together with minor gods that have other names and separate origins, and all must be worshipped and propitiated. The Yezîdîs' name for God is the Persian and Turkish appellation Khudâ, Lord. The other gods are known as Yezîd, Sheikh 'Adî, and Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn, Fakhru'ddîn, and Sheikh Hasân

al-Basrî. There are also of equal power and therefore consequence Melak Tâ'ûs, the Lord Peacock or Peacock Angel, and Shaitân, Satan or the Devil. It must be repeated here that their ideas as to a deity, his attributes and his powers, are all very vague.

We hear but little of God, Khudâ, as he is too remote and not of this world. He comes to the earth at the chief temple or shrine on New Year's Day (Sarîsal) to sit on his throne there and fix destiny for the coming year. On this occasion funereal music is played, and in this fact there is a hint of a recollection of Tammûz, the very ancient Babylonian hero-god, of whom more anon.

Nevertheless the legend of Khudâ coming to the earth at the chief Yezîdî temple on New Year's Day refers to a belief that is practically universal, and there is an almost exact parallel to it among the Burmese, who are now a Buddhist people, and yet they have a general faith in supernatural beings or Spirits, whom they call Nàts. These Nàts are relics of their religion before they became Buddhists. It will, therefore, be useful to quote here what is said about them in my *Thirty-seven Nàts* (1906), pages 69 ff., as it seems to explain the religious attitude of the

Yezîdîs. "Thagyâ Nàt is, by the common acceptation of every Burman, the prince of the Nàts of whatever nature or degree: the No. 1 of all Nàts. The antiquity of his cult is indicated by his name, Thagyâ, which represents the Sanskrit word Shakra, and not Sakka, the Pali equivalent thereof, thus throwing the date of the cult back to the early times when the debased Northern (Sanskrit) form of Buddhism was current in Burma and before the present purer Southern (Pali) form began to prevail. The Shakra of the Indian Buddhism was the great god Indra of the Brâhmans, the Lord of the Firmament, turned by the Buddhists into the lowest of the three great ruling angels of the heavens, whom they set up on adapting the old Brahmanic cosmogony to their reformed 'ideas.'"

In the Buddho-Brahmanic mythology connected with Thagyâ Nàt, "the Tâvatimsa Heaven (the Tâwadêntha of the Burmese) is the second out of seven removed from the earth. . . . It is inhabited by the Sakka or Thagyâ angels, of which the archangel, or king, is the deposed god Shakra or Indra of the older Brâhmans and the Thagyâ Nàt of the Burmese. Thagyâ exercises a wholly beneficial influence on mankind, and when a good

man is struggling with adversity, the fact is made known to Thagyâ by his throne becoming hot. He then comes in disguise to the relief of the sufferer. . . . In the Burma of the present day, it is Shakra, as Thagyâ, who takes the most important place and is the Nàt that is the Lord of Life, the Recording Angel, the supernatural being most revered and most respected. At the commencement of the year, during the Thingyàn or Water Festival, so familiar to all foreign residents in Burma, he visits the earth for three days for the general good; and I well recollect, in the last Burmese War, that in the afternoon of the most important of these days, at the beginning of the year 1250 B.E. (April, 1888), there was a sudden and vivid flash of lightning, followed by crashing thunder, which gave great satisfaction to the people of the royal city of Mandalay, because it was positive evidence to them of the presence among them of Thagyâ himself in the days of their adversity (Third Burmese War, 1885-89), a notion having its roots in the very foundation of Indian belief."

Yezîd, whence Yezîdî, is the name for God, and as such he has a place in the great Temple in conjunction with Melak Tâ'ûs and Sheikh 'Adî.

He has a lamp of his own there and texts dedicated to him, invoking the mercy of God. At the same time he is not held to be so unapproachable as Khudâ. It may be here noted that Yazîd, a deity of the Târhôya Kurds, who are not "Devil Worshippers," is identified with tree worship, and that trees are frequently worshipped by the Yezîdîs, especially the mulberry as a healer. They even have names as Sitt (Lady) Nafîsa and 'Abdi Râsh (? the Black Slave). One mulberry tree near a spring, called Sheikh Balîko, is even more highly honoured, and vows are made to it for health, when rags are tied to its branches in the world-wide animistic fashion. This gives one origin for the term Yezîd, God, and a derivation of the title Yezîdî, but there are others which will be discussed later, and it should be said that in the Yezîdî "Books" the god Yezîd is stated to be Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya, the fourth Caliph, from whom their title is generally said to come.

Sheikh 'Adî is a term for God, or rather as the name for a god—much more often in the Yezîdî mind than either Khudâ or Yezîd—is on a a different footing altogether, because a Sûfî saint of that name actually lived, and had much to do with the founding of the sect of the Yezîdîs.

Sheikh 'Adî *ibn* Musâfir (1072-1160) was a Syrian saint and contemporary of the great hagiologist as-Sahrastânî (1074-1133). He was a Sûfî mystic and pantheist, and founded the al-'Adawîya Order of ascetics, being believed by his followers to be an incarnation (*hulûl*) of the Deity. He has been adopted by the Yezîdîs as a god. Such action constitutes them Ghulât *par excellence*, though it is by no means unique. There seems, however, to be still some memory of Sheikh 'Adî as a man who died like an ordinary human being, since he has a burial-place in the chief temple, which every Yezîdî must visit between 15th and 20th September, eat "Sheikh 'Adî dust," and possess some of it at death as a means of ensuring divine favour.

The "tomb" may, nevertheless, be only a "shrine" set up by some of Sheikh 'Adî's followers, as it is often the case in the Near East that what are known as, and believed to be, the "tombs" of holy personages—many existing at various places dedicated to the same personage—are really shrines in their honour, erected by some forgotten devotees. The shrine or tomb of Sheikh 'Adî is believed by the Yezîdî priests or missionaries to have been built for Sheikh 'Adî himself in 960, i.e., two centuries before the date

of his death! There is also a Nestorian story that a monk of al-Qâus, named 'Adî, who had quarrelled with his superior, personated the Syrian Sûfî saint Sheikh 'Adî *ibn* Musâfir, seized a monastery dedicated to Mâr Addai, i.e., St. Thaddæus, at Lâlishî—where the shrine to Sheikh 'Adî now stands—converted it to his own use and founded the Yezîdî religion.

There are three other gods in a minor position: Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn, Fakhru'ddîn and Sheikh Hasân al-Basrî. Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn is a god with a special chamber to himself in the great temple. He represents the Sun (Shams), and is the only supernatural being to whom a sacrifice is made by Yezîdîs. A white ox, when procurable for the purpose, is sacrificed annually and the flesh distributed to poor pilgrims, otherwise a white bull is seized at the annual festival and taken to a sectional chief (sheikh) for a reward. Here we seem to see a harking back to very ancient Zoroastrian custom—the Yezîdîs occupy a Zoroastrians' land—in which the fat of a white ox had much to do with the great ceremony of concoction of *haoma* as the Elixir of Life.

The god Shamsu'ddîn may, however, like Sheikh 'Adî, be, after all, merely a remembrance

of some holy personage, said to have been named Sheikh Shams 'Alî Beg'al-Fârisî (the Persian).

Fakhru'ddîn is another vague god, who has a shrine at the great Temple, and is variously said to have been the secretary of Sheikh 'Adî and the angel responsible conjointly with God (Khudâ) for the creation of the universe. As a god he is called Kâmûsh, and is then said to be Fakhru'ddîn, a preacher at Herât (1150-1220), born at Kai in Tabaristân. It may also be that he is a recollection of Fakhru'ddîn *ibn* Qurqmas (1572-1635) the great Druse leader, who with his mother, Sitt Nasîba, created an immense sensation in these regions in his lifetime. One is tempted to conjecture here that Sitt Nafîsa, already noted as the name of a sacred mulberry tree, arose out of the name of Fakhru'ddîn's mother.

The great traditionist and early Sûfî al-Hasân al-Basrî (642-728), has much to do with the older Yezîdî legend and will be dealt with later. He, too, appears as a god at the Sheikh 'Adî shrine.

The Yezîdî Evil Spirits

The Yezîdîs have two Evil Spirits, which are more or less mixed up—Shaitân, i.e. Satan, or as he is called in English, the Devil, and Melak Tâ'ûs, the Lord Peacock. Shaitân is, of course, a Muslim name, but in the Qur'ân he is not the Lord of Hell. That being is Malik, as witnesses Chapter XLIII: "But the wicked shall remain for ever in the torment of Hell. . . . And they shall call aloud, 'O Malik, intercede for us that the Lord may end us.' He shall answer, 'Verily, ye shall remain.'" Here the commentators say that by "Malik" Muhammad meant the principal angel in charge of Hell. This title of Malik may be of importance in connection with that of Melak (or Malik) Tâ'ûs, who is rightly identified by the Yezîdîs with Shaitân, thus. The Muslims know the Biblical story of the temptation of Eve (Hawwâ) by Shaitân, i.e., Malik, disguised as a serpent in Eden, and add that a peacock (*tâ'ûs*) was the intermediary between them. The serpent was punished by God (Allah), but the peacock

escaped. Hence it is possible that the Yezîdîs have, now unconsciously, come to call Shaitân in memory of that tale by the name of Melak Tâ'ûs, because the fear of Shaitân is so great among them that he is absolutely unmentionable; even words containing the sound or letters of his name are tabued and substitutes for them have to be used. It may also be useful to note here that a Muslim title of Shaitân is Maliku'l-Qûwat, Lord of Power.

The tabu of the name of Shaitân has been turned by the Yezîdîs to practical purpose for their own benefit. The reason given by them to the Turks for escaping military service and paying a fine instead was that "every Muslim is accustomed to say twelve times a day: 'Take refuge with Allah from Shaitân the Stoned.' If a Yezîdî were to hear this from a comrade he would have either to kill him or commit suicide." This sounds childish, but if there is any truth in the tale, it shows that the Turkish officials recognized the power of their belief in the tabu of the name of Shaitân over the Yezîdîs. The expression "Shaitân the Stoned" is the Muslim Shaitân ar-Rajîm, or ar-Rashîm, and refers to the well-known legend of the stoning of the Devil by Abraham (Ibrâhîm) at Mînâ near Mecca.

Leaving, however, Melak Tâ'ûs aside for the moment, it may be said that Shaitân is held by the Yezîdîs to be the author of all bad luck, and they revere him through fear. He must never be maligned or made the scapegoat of personal shortcomings. He is, in reality, the chief of the Angelic Host, but is under a cloud for disobedience to the will of God (Allah). As a fallen angel he is not to be lightly treated, as he will one day be restored to his rightful place in Heaven by God (Khudâ).

In connection with the Yezîdî beliefs in Shaitân, Melak Tâ'ûs and Hell, there is a consideration which may be of great importance in the inquiry into the memories conveyed in the term Melak Tâ'ûs. In modern Yezîdî belief there is no Hell, as it was extinguished by the weeping of a diseased child, who cried into a yellow (*asfar*) jar for seven years, and this was emptied over the fires of Hell and extinguished them. This child is variously named Abrîk Shauthâ and Ibrîk al-Asfar (the Yellow). A variant of the legend says it was the weeping of Shaitân during his seven thousand years of exile in Hell that extinguished the fires. With reference to these legends it has been suggested that Melak Tâ'ûs is a memory of Tâ'ûz, said to be a form of the very ancient Babylonian hero-god Tammûz, and

it is to be remembered that weeping for the terrible legendary sufferings in the seven forms of death to which he was subjected is a prominent feature in the ceremonies once celebrated in connection with Tammûz. There is a reference to them in the Bible, Ezekiel viii. 14: "Then he ('a likeness as the appearance of fire,' a vision) brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was towards the north, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammûz."

On the principle, then, that as the Devil is actively malevolent, and as God and the gods are passively benevolent, it is wise to bestow special care in propitiating the Devil, and as he can never be mentioned, all worship and propitiation must be bestowed on his representative, Melak Tâ'ûs. That being therefore occupies so prominent a position in all Yezîdî ceremonial that they have to be called Devil Worshippers. It is now necessary to discuss him at length.

To return, then, to Melak Tâ'ûs, the head of the Yezîdî sect is called the Mîr, also Emîr (Amîr) or Mîrâ. He is a kind of Prince-Pope, and is alleged to be descended from the god Yezîd. Yezîdî legend says that the Mîr's Master or Lord was Tâ'ûs (Greek Ταως) the Peacock, a Good Spirit,

and we again seem to hear an echo of Tâ'ûz, representing Tammûz; but as the name of the Evil Spirit was tabued he came to be called Melak Tâ'ûs, i.e., the Lord Peacock. Nevertheless the Yezîdîs seem now to understand by the term "the Peacock Angel." As the representative of Shaitân, Melak Tâ'ûs has many appellations: the Tempter, the Prince of the Devils, the Strong One, the Wicked One, the Enemy, the Hostile One, the Prince of Darkness. Both Christian and Muhammadan influences appear here, but it will be found later on that these titles are modified considerably in practical belief and do not help us to get at his real nature.

As regards the term Tâ'ûs, Ταως, for peacock, it may be remarked that the bird and the term are not indigenous either in the land of the Yezîdîs or in Persia, yet they were known in Greece *c.* 425 B.C., having been introduced from Persia. They must therefore have been known in Persia before that date, and seem to have been introduced from Southern India, *togei* being Tamil for a peacock. As regards Northern India, there has been found a coin of Aryamitra in Ayodhyâ, *c.* 72 B.C. with obverse a peacock and a palm-tree: *Cambridge History of India*, I, 527, 538 and Plate V. If

the translation "peacock" in 1 Kings x. 82 and 2 Chronicles IX. 21 is correct, then the bird was known in Palestine in the fifth century B.C.

A very mixed Yezîdî legend recorded by Mr. Empson accounts for the reading of Tâ'ûs as peacock. It still hints, however, at memories as to the legend of Tâ'ûz or Tammûz. By the will of God (Khudâ) seven spirits rule the universe in turn. The first and foremost is Melak Tâ'ûs, who is to reign ten thousand years and has reigned four thousand of them. His offering is seven sheep, which, by the way, is never made in practice. He is to be succeeded by Melak Îsâ (Jesus Christ) for ten thousand years, with one sheep for his offering. The advent of Îsâ, which has already taken place, was premature, and he did not die on the cross. This is also Muslim teaching, and a modern Ghâliya sect, the Ahmadîas of the Panjâb, have based a wild theory on it. The Qur'ân says, Chapter IV: "They that have not believed . . . have said, 'Verily we have slain Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, the apostle of God. Yet they slew him not, neither crucified him, but he was represented by one in his likeness.'" The Yezîdî explanation is that Melak Tâ'ûs saved Christ by snatching him from the cross, and then he appeared to the Maries

as a *durvêsh*, or Muslim ascetic (dervish), and told them what he had done. He then took a dead cock, restored it to life in their presence and informed them that he chose to be worshipped as the most beautiful of birds, the peacock. In true illiterate sectarian fashion the Yezîdîs have here assumed that all the world at all times has belonged to their sect. It may be remarked here, too, that the ordinary images of Melak Tâ'ûs more nearly resemble a cock than any other bird.

As might be expected, the actual position of Melak Tâ'ûs in the Yezîdî mind is vague, and the beliefs regarding him contradictory. He is and yet he is not a god, e.g., he is connected with the god Yezîd in both a superior and an inferior degree, and yet he is an incarnation of Yezîd, who is himself now held to be inferior as a god to Sheikh 'Adî. But he is a greater spirit than Îsâ (Jesus). At the same time his cult is apparently older than the cult of Sheikh 'Adî. Despite all this, Melak Tâ'ûs, as the progenitor of the Yezîdîs—he created them three hundred years after the coming of Adam—is the god Yezîd, half angel, half man. Further, he is habitually treated as a god, and offerings are thrown to him into a secret cleft in the rocks at Dair Asî in the Sinjar by way of propitiation,

especially in warding off the Evil Eye, but no sacrifices are made to him.

The power attributed to Melak Tâ'ûs is, however, immense. He was created Lord of the Earth by the decree of God (Khudâ), but had certain limits placed on his power, though as regards the celestial regions there is no limit to it. This power is shown in various ways, e.g., Yezîdîs never pray, as prayer is superfluous, because Melak Tâ'ûs is sufficiently powerful to save them without prayer. So also blue clothing is tabued, because it is used by Muslims as a protection against the Evil Eye, and owing to the power of Melak Tâ'ûs no such protection is necessary to believers in him. That is one explanation. Another is that the objection to blue clothing is "its observed character as the colour of heaven," but this seems a little doubtful.

The legends about Melak Tâ'ûs exhibit a strong Muslim leaning, just as does some of the ritual concerning him. Thus, at the Day of Judgment, all the followers of Melak Tâ'ûs will be carried to Heaven on a tray. Also he is said to have impersonated Sheikh 'Adî on a pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca and then ascended to Heaven, and when Sheikh 'Adî was about to be executed as an impostor in consequence, Melak Tâ'ûs saved him and ordered

him to be henceforth honoured as a saint. Here Melak Tâ'ûs assumes a distinctly superior position to Sheikh 'Adî.

A very important part is played in Yezîdî ritual by the *sanjâq*, originally a standard and then an image of a peacock (*sanjâq*, plural *sanâjiq*, means properly a symbol). One legend makes the peacock standard (*sanjâq*) of the Yezîdîs to have been given by Sulaimân (Solomon) to their "first king," Sâbur I (224-271), for the Yezîdîs claim to have had a royal house (Mairî) from 224 to 379. We have here a confused recollection of the great Sâsânian monarch, Shâpur I (241-273) (the conqueror of the Roman Emperor Valerian at Edessa in 260), under whom rose the Manichæans in 242. Those were days of violent religious struggle, for under Shâpur's predecessor, Ardeshîr (212-241), the compilation of the Pahlavî *Avesta* (Zoroastrian) was continued, while Mithraism began to succeed a decadent Zoroastrianism and to dominate it by the time of Shâpur II (310-379). The Mobeds (Great Magi) also began to have power, while there was constant conflict with Christianity. The mythical nature of the Yezîdî claim to royalty can be thus demonstrated. They say that their royal house ruled from 224 to 379, and that Sâbur I reigned from 224 to 272, and

Sâbur II from 309 to 379. But the early Sâsânians reigned from 212 to 379, thus: Ardeshîr 212-241, Shâpur I 241-273, Bahram I 273-276, others till Shâpur II, another very famous ruler, from 310 to 379. The dates for the two dynasties (Yezîdî and Sâsânian) are too close, and there can be no doubt that the Yezîdî "royal house" is but an echo of that of the great Sâsânian Emperors of Persia.

But however all this may be, the Peacock Standard is said to have been made by the "seven gods," of whom more hereafter, and when the god Yezîd was born, he received it "with great reverence and bestowed it on the Yezîdîs." This means that the Yezîdîs became the Men of the Peacock Standard in a manner that would seem natural to the surrounding Turks: witness the Akkuyunlü (White Sheep Standard) and the Qârâkuyunlü (Black Sheep Standard) Turks, once so famous in Western Asian history. There is also a tale of a peacock flag to Melak Tâ'ûs, which, when put into holy "Sheikh 'Adî" water, had curative power. Here we have a reason for the cult.

The *sanjâq* standard has apparently degenerated into concrete images of Melak Tâ'ûs, divided into two categories, the chief at the headquarters

of the sect and the minor called Tâ'ûs-kushi, which are carried about by Qauwâls, chanters or priest-missionaries (*da'ī*) when travelling through the villages to raise funds. In their ordinary condition the *sanjâq* images are held to be only symbols of Melak Tâ'ûs, but they become active on being placed in a dish of water by a Qauwâl, who then goes into a trance and, in world-wide fashion, causes Melak Tâ'ûs to enter the *sanjâq* image through the water. The image then becomes an oracle, of which the Qauwâl is the spokesman.

The Muhammadan nature of the whole legend of Melak Tâ'ûs comes out in the dedication of the images. Five of them, alleged to have been taken by the Turks, were dedicated as follows: to Hadrat (Saint) Dâ'ûd (David), Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn (the Sun), Yezîd I *ibn* Mu'âwiya (the Caliph) (assumed eponym of the sect), Sheikh 'Adî (the god-saint), and Sheikh Hasân al-Basrî (642-728), an important personage in Yezîdî legend. The only new name here is Dâ'ûd (David), well-known in Islâm and taken over by the Yezîdîs as a holy personage with a host of other Biblical heroes, and it will be perceived that this dedication argues that the so-called "deities" of the Yezîdîs at Sheikh 'Adî's shrine should properly be regarded as

sanâjiq, i.e., symbols of the Deity, or shall we say as symbols deified?

Tradition

In examining Yezîdî legends and religious tales, it will be found that they refer to traditions of mixed origin—Muhammadan, mixed Christian and Muhammadan, Nestorian Christian, Zoroastrian, Kurd, Sabæan, Mesopotamian-Syrian, Persian (Yezd), Assyrian and Aboriginal Animistic. Like many another population in remote places, the Yezîdîs are thoroughly eclectic.

The Muhammadan Tradition

Much that has been already said points to the overwhelming influence of Islâm on the religious ideas of the Yezîdîs. They are really Shî'a Ghulât, but several points have not yet been touched on. It must be remembered, however, that Islâm has nevertheless not permeated deeply: e.g., circumcision is by no means universal, and Wednesday,

not the Muslim Friday, is the weekly holiday, though both Wednesday and Friday are holy days, but not to the exclusion of work. The Yezîdî orientation (*qibla*) is towards the Pole Star (Qutb), and not towards Mecca.

A legend that accounts for the title of Yezîdî is as follows: Some of the Jâhilîas, i.e., pagan Arabs, were led by the 'Umayid Caliph Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya, who had a Christian mother. He had heard of one, Sheikh 'Adî; went to see him, learnt his religion, and taught it to his followers. This means that a most important person, the 'Umayid Caliph Yezîd I, adopted the religion of Sheikh 'Adî and founded the sect of the Yezîdîs. There is a hopeless anachronism here, as Yezîd I lived in the seventh century (Caliph 680-683) and Sheikh 'Adî in parts of the eleventh and twelfth. There is, moreover, nothing otherwise to show that Yezîd I was ever heterodox or ever founded a sect, but the acts attributed to him—the murder of Husain *ibn* 'Alî, the sack of Medîna, and the killing of eighty Ashâb or Companions of Muhammad—were enough to ensure the persistent hostility of the Shî'as and to account for the persecution on the part of surrounding Shî'as of all Yezîd's followers, as the Yezîdîs set up to be. Indeed, in Shî'a eyes

the name of Yezîd the Caliph has become so hateful as to be in Persian a synonym for all that is execrable, and to crown this detestation, Yezîd was also the name of an early arch-heretic. In addition to all this, in making out the 'Umayid Caliph Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya to be the son of Abû Sûfiân, the Yezîdîs are mixing up two separate personages, for, as above remarked, Yezîd *ibn* Mu'âwiya was Caliph (Khalîfa) from 680 to 683, whereas Yezîd *ibn* Abî Sûfiân was an important official who died in the plague epidemic which afflicted the Saracen Army in Syria in 639.

There is also a wild Yezîdî tale of origin which is extremely Muhammadan in form, though it begins in a manner familiar to students of Hindu cosmogony and has some Zoroastrian affinities. There were seventy-two Adams of ten thousand years each, with intervals of worldly cessation of ten thousand years between them. The Yezîdîs are sprung from the last of these Adams. It seems hard to believe that this has not been taught by someone who knew or had heard tales of Hindu cosmogony. But the Yezîdî tale goes on to explain about Hûriya, a rival to Eve (Hawwâ). Hûriya was introduced from Heaven by a cavalier named Jinnîs, and subsequently a quarrel between Adam

and Eve was settled by the Angel Gabriel (Jabrâ'îl), who arranged that Adam should produce a son, Shahîd Jayar. Eve then bore Cain and Abel to Shem. Here, to give the Arabic forms, we find Hûrî, Jinn, Hawwâ, Adam, Jabrâ'îl, Shahîd, Hâbîl, Kâbîl, Sâm; all familiar words and names in Islamic legend from the Qur'ân onwards.

It is, further, not necessary to go outside Islâm to account for the prominence given to the black serpent carved on the doorway of the shrine of Sheikh 'Adî and kissed by all pilgrims. Mr. Empson gives the legend thus: "They believe that there were two floods—the first seven thousand years ago—and that as the waters of the second, or Noah's (Nûh), flood rose and the ark floated, it came to Mount Sinjar (if Ararat may be taken to be a form of *al-arat*, it means merely a hillock), where it ran aground and was pierced by a rock. The serpent thereupon twisted itself into a cake and stopped the hole, and the ark moved on." There is an analogous tale in Arab legend connected with the Ka'ba at Mecca. Ibrâhîm (Abraham) dug a hole—known to pilgrims of the Hajj as al-Akhsaf—in the Ka'ba for a treasury, which was frequently plundered by the Jurhum Arabs, now long non-existent. In consequence, a serpent, commanded

by God (Allah), took up its abode in the hole and guarded the treasury. Later on it opposed the renovation of the Ka'ba by the Quraishî, and God sent a bird, which carried off the serpent.

In this connection it may be remarked that Mr. Empson quotes Wetnhiyûn as a name for the Yezîdîs. The term seems to represent Watnu'l-Haiyûn, the Land of the Serpents, but Mr. Empson says the belief is that the name Wetnhiyûn was changed to Yezîdî as the worship of the Good Spirit waned and that of the Evil Spirit gained ground. He therefore refers the belief to a form of Dualism.

The Yezîdîs have an angelology which is Muhammadan in type; even Melak Tâ'ûs is as much an angel as a god. The archangels are almost purely those of Islâm: e.g., Jabrâ'îl, the interpreter; Mikhâ'îl, the rain-bringer; Azrâ'îl, the angel of death; Didrâ'îl; Rafâ'îl; Shemkâ'îl; Azâzîl, the Devil masquerading as Azrâfîl; while Izrâfîl, who is the same personage in Islâm as the last, is the trumpeter at the Day of Judgment; Nâkir (Munkir) and Nukîr (Nakîr) are the examiners of souls on the death of the body. In this last case the Yezîdîs have adopted the vulgar Nâkir for Munkir. Some of the archangels are

held to be incarnated (*hulûl*) in the more prominent Yezîdî sheikhs or leaders: e.g., Mikhâ'îl (Michael) as Sheikh Abûbakr; Azrâ'îl as Sheikh Salju'ddîn; Didrâ'îl as Hasân al-Basrî; Shemkâ'îl as Sheikh Nasru'ddîn; Isrâfîl as Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn. Sheikh Shamsu'ddîn is also occasionally confused with the Jewish and Christian Messiah. Of the above, Abûbakr, the first Caliph and Companion of Muhammad, and his almost contemporary al-Hasan *ibn* Abi'l-Hasân al-Basrî, may be taken to be legendary heroes of the Yezîdîs. It may be noted, too, that the latter in his lifetime was an outspoken opponent of Yezîd I, the eponymous hero of the Yezîdîs and a developer of Sûfism, which facts are of interest in the present connection.

In the midst of all this Islamism, there is a vague cosmogonic legend with a Zoroastrian tinge in it as regards the angels. God (Khudâ) created the universe and put seven angels in charge of it, each for a thousand years, of whom somehow Melak Tâ'ûs is at present in charge. He had a great predecessor, Lasifarûs, who spoke Kurdish and confirmed the Yezîdîs' saints in their position. Here is another instance of admixture of Islâm and Zoroastrianism. Fasting also is observed in Muslim fashion by the Yezîdî priests, but is, and

also is not, observed by the public, the feeling on the subject being very vague. Here we seem to see a traditional conflict between Muslim ideas—strongly for fasting—and the Zoroastrian idea that it is a foolish custom. It is possible also that Lasifarûs has a Christian origin. Lucifer, the light-bearer, is used by Isaiah in the Bible for the King of Babylon: "How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning; how art thou cast down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations" (xiv. 12). The early Christians held that the words ascribed to Christ in Luke x. 18 (*cf.* also Revelations ix. 1): "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven," referred to the next in Isaiah, and so in their theology Lucifer came to be regarded as a synonym of Satan.

The Mixed Christian and Muhammadan Tradition

The Yezîdîs believe in two floods, including that in Hebraic legend in the cosmogony developed in Genesis, and in other events in the Old Testament of the Bible, and partly in the New Testament and the Qur'ân. They have for minor

prophets, Muhammad, Abraham, Noah and so on through a number of names familiar to Jews, Christians and Muhammadans. Îsâ, Jesus Christ, is also a minor prophet, and they believe in his advent, and also in that of the twelfth Imâm of the Shî'as—the Mahdî, whom they call Sheikh Mêdî. God (Allah) has three thousand and three names, in place of the ninety-nine given by the Muhammadans. Here we have an interesting instance of the kind of megalomania common in Indian religious philosophy, where the Vaishnava division of the Hindus adopted a theory of ten *avatâras* or incarnations of their patron god Vishnu, gave him one hundred and four holy names, and thereby made their philosophy popular and powerful, whereupon their rivals of the Shaiva division created a greater number of *avatâras* of their patron god Shiva and gave him one hundred and eight holy names.

The Yezîdîs have, too, an expiatory period before entering Heaven, just as there is al-Barsakh in Islâm and purgatory among some Christians. Their whole eschatology is, however, vague and of a mixed character. So also are their festivals: Christmas Day, Christian; Bahrâm, Muhammadan; the 'Îd (Feast) of Elijah, Hebraic.

The Nestorian Christian Tradition

This tradition runs generally thus: the chief Yezîdî shrine, which bears traces of Christian architecture, was originally a Nestorian monastery. The saint Sheikh 'Adî entered it, took possession, altered the building to suit his teaching, and was buried there. Also, the Yezîdîs are locally said to have been *dasinî*, impure, i.e., cast out from the Nestorian diocese, which disappeared when they arose, possess a Syriac library kept hidden away, and name villages with Syriac names. They say, too, that Sheikh 'Adî's shrine was built by Christian workmen, but they hold that the valley which contains it was a holy place long before Christianity or Yezîdism existed. Nevertheless, the name Dasinî, Dasnî, is also said to be a Syriac form, Dasnâyê (Arabic, Dâsin, plural, Dawâsin), for a name given by the Yezîdîs to themselves as a Kurdish tribe, and so is a tribal and not a religious name.

Among Yezîdî legends is one that the reign of Melak Îsâ (Jesus Christ) has not yet begun, and that

he will reign after Melak Tâ'ûs, for, as has been already observed, his first advent was premature. The Yezîdîs allot an inferior divinity to Îsâ, respect the Sign of the Cross, adopt baptism and observe Christmas Day; while some of them, the Hâlitîya Yezîdîs of Diarbekr (Asia Minor) even observe the Eucharist. The hymns sung at a great festival, 15th to 20th April, are first in honour of Sheikh 'Adî and then in honour of Îsâ. Finally, brides pay reverence to any Christian church they pass on the way to the bridegroom's house, but this may be because Christian churches are reverenced by everyone in Kurdistân as possessed with healing properties. There is an odd idea as to the name of Gurgîs (Jirjîs), i.e., St. George. It is highly objected to as a name for children and is never given, but no explanation of this seems to be forthcoming, though it is to be observed that in the Near East Muslim boys born on St. George's Day, 23rd April, are named, not Jirjîs, but Khidrelles, after two holy personages, Khidr and Ilyâs (Elias), confounded by the people with St. George.

The Zoroastrian Tradition

Before considering this subject it should be borne in mind that Zoroastrianism had undergone numerous and sometimes almost incompatible changes before Yezîdism came into existence. There are, however, several points in which Yezîdî ideas approach the old Zoroastrian. Thus, there is a tradition that the term Yezîdî represents Yazdân, the Good Spirit, as opposed to Ahrimân, the Evil Spirit. It may be noted, too, here that it has been said that among the Zoroastrian Parsees of India Yezîd Farfar is the Evil Spirit. In modern Persian both Yazd and Yazdân are used as terms for God, and Yazd Farfar would mean philologically God the Creator, or God the Destroyer, according to the sense of the uncertain Arabo-Persian term Farfar in the mind of the speaker or writer. Other reminiscences of Zoroastrianism among the Yezîdîs are the clear persistence among them of Dualist principles, as shown in the rival Spirits of Good and Evil with equal powers, and in the worship of Fire, besides others already noticed. It may be mentioned also that,

like the Zoroastrian Parsees, the Yezîdîs do not admit converts from other religions, but this exclusiveness was far from being an attribute of the older Zoroastrianism, which was a vigorous missionary religion. Among the later Zoroastrians generally, ritualism, especially that connected with magic, became all powerful, and it is to be observed that some of the Yezîdî village sheikhs or head men claim magic powers. E.g., the Sheikh of Giranjak can cast spells, and the descendants at Baibân of the Sheikh of Ruhsit, a ruined village, are regarded as snake-charmers, a property they can transfer to others by merely spitting at them. Then again the Zoroastrian objection to the burial of corpses, because their presence in the earth would pollute it, seems to survive in the Yezîdî custom of not allowing earth to touch the corpse as it is laid in the grave for Munkir (Nâkir) and Nakîr to descend from Heaven to examine it.

There is another interesting point in this connection which seems to have its origin in the old Zoroastrianism. Wood is collected in large quantities at the shrine of Sheikh 'Adî to burn at the annual sacrifice of a sacred white bull to the Sun-god Shamsu'ddîn. There is also, as has been already noticed, a ceremony of the capture of

a white bull at certain festivals. A white sheet (*kifrî*) is used to wrap the corpse at funerals, a widow must wear white clothing, and white as a colour is held in much esteem. Now, in the brewing of the Zoroastrian Elixir of Immortality (*haoma*), the fat of a white ox and the white sap of the Hôm-tree played a great part. In fact, the ingredients had to be white, as is shown in the *Dâdistâni Dinik*, dated about 875.

The Native Kurd Tradition

This tradition tells us that Yezîdî, as a name, represents the Kurdish 'Azed, an ancient name of God, degenerated to Yazed, when given to the Devil. But the tradition is vague and might equally well refer to an important tribe of the Arabs, the Azd, which played a great part in Mesopotamia and Khurâsân, as well as in Arabia itself, as far back as the days of Mu'âwiya and Yezîd I in the seventh century. In pre-Muhammadan times the Azd were worshippers of idols, and joined Muhammad slowly, in fact, not fully till compelled to do so by Abûbakr. This last

view, however, sets aside the fact that the Yezîdîs are essentially a tribe of Kurdistân.

The Sabæan Tradition

Yezîd *ibn* Abî Anîsa, a heterodox Sabæan leader, is believed by some, without much reason, to have been the founder of the Yezîdîs, who were looked on as his *aṣḥâb* (followers, companions). This tradition is, however, more than doubtful, as that great authority Ibn-Hazm of Cordova (994-1027) calls the leader in question Zaid *ibn* 'Ubaissa, but it may be noted that Ibn-Hazm's father, who was a high official, claimed descent (perhaps apocryphally) from a Persian, Yezîd *ibn* Abî Sûfiân. Historically, Yezîd *ibn* Abî Anîsa founded a sect called Yezîdîyas, which does not appear to have been in any way connected with the Yezîdîs. But he was a Khârijî, who were, if anything, orthodox puritan Muhammadans, as are their modern representatives the Ibâdiyas (Abâdiyas). The only thing that seems to give colour to the idea that he could have been the founder of the Yezîdîs is a statement that "God

will send a new Qur'ân to a prophet among the Persians, and he will found a new religion for them, divine in the same sense as Judaïsm, Christianity and Islâm, which will be no other than that of the Sâbi'ûn mentioned in the Qur'ân." Here, however, it is clear that the Mandæans or Christians of St. John the Baptist are referred to, and they were very far indeed from being at one with the Yezîdîs.

Nevertheless Sabæan tenets may have had much to do with the religion of the Yezîdîs. As-Sâbi'a, Sabæan, is a name for two distinct sects: (1) the Mandæans or Judæo-Christians of Mesopotamia, who were Baptists and known as Christians of St. John the Baptist; (2) the Sabæans of Harrân (Carrhœ), who were Ghulât or Extremists, and largely pagan, but for political reasons they, too, adopted baptism, and they had an important literature in Syriac. The as-Sâbi'ûn of the Qur'ân were Mandæans, but it is the creed of the Sabæans of Harrân that might well have been absorbed, in part at any rate, by the Yezîdîs, among whom baptism is a prominent rite. Indeed, it is worth while to state here Carra de Vaux's estimate of this sect by way of illustrating the Yezîdî beliefs generally, especially as the Sabæans

of Harrân disappeared about 1033—the period of Sheikh 'Adî—when the Egyptian 'Alids took from them their last temple, that of the Moon at Harrân.

"As-Sahrastânî classes them among those who admit spiritual substances (*ar-rûhânîyûn*), especially the great astral spirits. They recognize as their first teachers two philosopher prophets, 'Adhimûn (Agathodæmon = the Good Spirit) and Hermes, who have been identified with Seth and Idrîs respectively. Orpheus was also one of the prophets. They believe in a creator of the world, wise, holy, not produced and of inaccessible majesty, who is reached through the intermediary of the spirits. The latter are pure and holy in substance, in act and state; as regards their nature, they have nothing corporeal, neither physical faculties, nor movements in place, nor changes in time. They are our masters, our gods, our intercessors with the sovereign Lord. By purifying the soul and chastising the passions one enters into relations with them. As to their activities, they produce, renew, and change things from state to state; they cause the force of the divine majesty to flow down to the lower beings and lead each of them from the beginning to his perfection. Among them are the administrators of

the seven planets, which are like their temples. Each spirit has a temple. Each temple has a sphere, and the spirit is to his temple as the soul is to the body. . . . Their condition is very spiritual and analogous to that of the angels. . . . The shape of the temples, the number of the degrees, the colour of the ornaments, the material of the idols and the nature of the sacrifices varied with the planets, and this is interesting for the history of the liturgy. . . . All the Sabæans had three prayers (which the Yezîdîs have not). They purified themselves by ablution after contact with a corpse, forbade the flesh of swine, dogs, birds with talons, and pigeons. They did not have circumcision, allowed divorce only by decree of the judge, and forbade bigamy."

The Mesopotamian-Syrian Tradition

There is a Yezîdî tradition of origin referring them to Basra, then by emigration to Syria, and thence to their present site, Jebel Sinjar or Bird Hill. If any reliance could be placed on this story it would account for much of their faith—a mixture of Animism, Islâm and Christianity.

The Persian (Yezd) Tradition

Persian persecution of the Yezîdîs, through Shî'a animosity, continued for centuries and brought about emigration towards Kurdistân. Traditionally the migration took place from Yezd and Seistân, where Zoroastrianism flourished, and the Zoroastrians (Magians) brought items of their faith with them—Dualism, fire-worship. Also some of the pagans—tree and spirit ("Devil") worshippers—from Seistân brought "Devil Worship" with them to avoid persecution of themselves. If, however, Yezd gave a name to such emigrants it would have been Yezdî, and it is difficult to derive Yezîdî from Yezd.

The Assyrian Tradition

This is really a European's theory. The Yezîdîs are hairy, and their monuments depict them with beards, and they dwell on the site of the old Assyrian Empire. From this an Assyrian

origin has been predicated. This may be so physically in part, but there is nothing to show that they have retained anything of the ancient Assyrian religion that is not common to all Animism.

The Aboriginal Animistic Tradition

Apart from those above discussed several of the Yezîdî stories of origin are of no value to research, as they are merely the result of that desire to magnify social position so observable in Oriental genealogical statements. Such tales abound in India, and are to be found there among all the people of whatever race. Of such a nature is the Yezîdî story, for example, of the great 'Umayid Mu'âwiya marrying an old woman of eighty, who miraculously became twenty-five and gave birth to the god Yezîd, the Caliph Yezîd I being the actual son of Mu'âwiya.

Of Yezîdî customs, however, which are distinctly animistic may be quoted their method of taking an oath. A magic circle, dedicated to Melak Tâ'ûs, is drawn round the swearer, and the fear of Melak Tâ'ûs is said to make him tell the truth. Such an

animistic custom in various forms is frequently observed in India.

Then again, the Yezîdî custom of burying corpses on the right side, with the head to the south, is common among Hindus in India and is universal in Kashmîr.

Also red rags are fixed to the doorway of Sheikh 'Adî's shrine, and red flowers are gathered at the New Year and at baptisms. It is very common among Hindus to use red as a magic or sacred colour, the explanations varying very widely; substitution for human, or blood, sacrifice being a common, but by no means universal, explanation for this wide-spread animistic practice. It may be noted, however, that red flowers are common in the neighbourhood of Sheikh 'Adî's shrine, and so the colour may have really no significance.

Among animistic customs is that of lighting lamps at dusk in the valley in which the shrine of Sheikh 'Adî is situated whenever festivals are held. About three hundred and fifty are lighted at the principal festival, but the oil is not replenished. Here we have an animistic tradition of much interest, as, with the introduction by Muslims of the cult of al-Khizr or al-Khidr into India

between 700 and 900, there came—presumably from Persia or Mesopotamia—the pretty and universal custom of lighting toy boats holding little oil lamps by the thousand at festivals in al-Khizr's honour and setting them afloat on rivers and sheets of water.

Superstitions

Metempsychosis

The Yezîdîs believe that if a man at death has been a good man, his soul is reborn in Heaven, otherwise it passes into an animal. The celebrated Persian Sûfî wool-carder of the ninth century (858-922), Mansûr al-Hallâj, who eventually became a great mystic teacher and martyr, is held responsible for the Yezîdî doctrine of metempsychosis (*tanâsukh*) thus. His sister was filling her jar by the Tigris when the soul of her brother, after his decapitation under the Caliph al-Mustadir at Baghdâd, came floating along and entered the jar. After drinking the water she

became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who, it may be presumed, was the founder of the Hallâjîya sect. It was, however, founded in reality by quite other people. Another superstition connected with al-Hallâj is that when his head was thrown into the water, it gurgled, and so drinking vessels with narrow mouths must never be used. Al-Hallâj's remains were, however, burnt. In these legends we have presented to us a world-wide story of the river-borne hero—instances of which are quite common in India—combined with that of metempsychosis. It must be mentioned here that Miss Gertrude Bell thought that Sheikh 'Adî's teaching was in accordance with that of Mansûr al-Hallâj, who suffered martyrdom for asserting the permeation of all created things by the Deity with the phrase, "I am God (Allah)."

Holy Water

Every Yezîdî must purify his body and clothes in water provided for the purpose at some distance from the Sheikh 'Adî shrine before entering the valley in which it is situated. The ceremony—purifying the body in pure water or in a specially compounded liquor—is very ancient indeed, and goes back to the beginnings of all known religions. The doer of uncertain things became "unclean" until he was ceremonially purified, an idea expanded into the natural uncleanliness of the human body and the consequent necessity for purification before entering the sacred presence of the Deity. Greeks, Romans, Hindus, Jews and every other ancient people believed in this necessity. The situation as they saw it is made clear on a reference to Numbers xix. 17, 19: "And for an unclean person they shall take also of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel. [Here is inserted a reference to a special compound used for purifying.] And the clean

person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day. And on the seventh day he shall purify himself and wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and shall be clean at even."

The spring at Sheikh 'Adî's shrine—Sheikh 'Adî water—is believed to originate in the sacred well of Zemzem at Mecca, and is worshipped by the Yezîdîs. Zemzem, as a name, is also at times applied to Sheikh 'Adî's well itself. Running water generally is greatly reverenced along with the trees in its neighbourhood. There are also other springs that are worshipped, e.g., at Ba Sheikhâ and at Ba'zânî dedicated to Sheikh Mand.

Priests and Holy Men

Mr. Empson writes that the Yezîdî is far from being uncharitable, and that it is computed that he spends on an average a quarter of his income in fees, doles, and alms connected with the shrines. A large portion of these goes to his priests and

holy men. Long ago I pointed out that the difficulty in getting Hindus to subscribe to what Europeans call public charities is due, not to natural niggardliness, but to the fact that practically all their spare cash and funds go to religious "charities" of a domestic nature, which are to them obligatory. As the Yezîdîs have no custom of prayer, their actual worship consists of hymns sung by Qauwâls or priests and the religious rites at pilgrimages and festivals. It is on these occasions, and on the many others at which the priestly class—which, like the old Zoroastrian Magi, is really a caste—officiates, that their funds spent in "charity" disappear.

The Yezîdî priesthood is in four Orders, the two highest of which are hereditary, the office descending in the female as well as in the male line.

(1) The High Priest is called Ikhti'âr-i-Margâhi, and is variously said to be a descendant of al-Hasân al-Basrî or of Sheikh 'Adî. He can issue *fatwas* or religious decrees, and can excommunicate. His assistants are the Sheikhs, who are not hereditary.

(2) The Pîrs (saints) are much revered. They make the dust of Sheikh 'Adî's shrine into balls of

clay, which are sold as sacred mementoes of a visit to the shrine, much as similar objects were of old sold at Buddhist shrines in India and are still sold to prove a visit to a Hindu shrine. The Pîrs are hereditary priests and are credited with power to cure sickness and insanity.

(3) The next two Orders are, strictly speaking, not in the priestly caste, but are really rather missionaries (*da'îs*) and servants of shrines. The Qauwâls (chanters, orators) are young singers and musicians used as missionaries for collecting funds for Melak Tâ'ûs. They also maintain the precepts in the Yezîdî Books among the people. A curious power attributed to them is the purification of clothes lent them to wear. This last seems to be a relic of the idea of purification by water.

(4) The Faqîrs (monks) or Mullas (priests) are also called Qârâbâshîs (black-beards) and Farrâsh (shrine-sweepers, sacristans). They are servants and shrine guardians, but often also mere wanderers. These only marry within their Order, and are headed by a Kâk (Persian, master, teacher). There are also unmarried servants of Sheikh 'Adî's shrine, both male and female, forming a sub-order of Faqîrs, called respectively, Shawash, who are in charge of the tombs, Kâbana, unmarried abbesses

in charge of the nuns of Sheikh 'Adî, and Fuqraiya (diminutive of Faqîr), unmarried attendant sisters.

Besides the priestly Orders there is a special class of holy personages called Kochaks, or Kûjaks. They are nomadic and usually hereditary seers, mediums and miracle-workers. They are not circumcised, and marry only within their class, which is really agricultural.

The priestly Orders have their own saints whom they venerate, named Sheikh 'Adî, Yezîd, Muhammad Rashan and Sheikh Mand. This seems to show that Sheikh 'Adî and Yezîd were saints before they became promoted to be gods. In this category also is Ishâq (Isaac), who is a hereditary priest in Heaven and the rain-bringer.

The Yezîdî hereditary hierarchy seems to be run on the following lines. There is a head of the whole tribe, called the Mîr Hajj, the Prince of the Pilgrimage, and known also as the Mîr, Amîr or Mîrâ. His is the chief family, and after that there come five families of Sheikhs, political as well as sacerdotal chiefs.

Sacred Books

Though the Yezîdîs have long been persecuted by the surrounding Muslims as being "without a Book," they are, in their own estimation, Ahlu'l-Kitâb (People with a Book), because they have now "Books" in a secret kind of way, the antiquity of which has, however, been doubted.

(1) *The Black Book*, *Mashafu'r-Râs*, attributed to al-Hasân al-Basrî in 1342, is a self-contradictory jumble, containing a cosmogony attributing the Creation to the Angel Fakhru'ddîn, who apparently had some of the powers of God (Khudâ). It states also that Sheikh 'Adî came from Syria to Lâlishî, the country round his shrine, and has a long list of forbidden articles (tabus) arising out of the general Yezîdî beliefs.

(2) *The Book of Enlightenment and Revelation* is attributed to Sheikh Fakhru'ddîn, Secretary to Sheikh 'Adî in 1162, and is composed in honour of Melak Tâ'ûs, connecting him with the Sun, the Moon and the Seven Angels or gods. This looks as if it had a Sabæan (of Harrân) origin, but

if, as already noticed, this Fakhru'ddîn is to be held to be the hero now worshipped at the chief Yezîdî shrine as Kâmûsh and representative of Fakhru'ddîn of Kai in Tabaristân (1150-1220) there is no anachronism. He may, however, be a reminiscence of Fakhru'ddîn (1572-1635), the celebrated leader (Emîr) of the Druses, a Ghâliya who believed in metempsychosis (*tanâsukh*). If this be correct, it may be remarked that the belief of the Druses is a mixture of Islâm and Syrian (or Nestorian) Christianity.

(3) *The Poem of Sheikh 'Adî* is a rhapsody in his own praise. It expressly states that he is the representative of the Deity to the Yezîdîs. He calls himself 'Adî *ibn* Musâfir as-Shâmi (the Syrian).

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