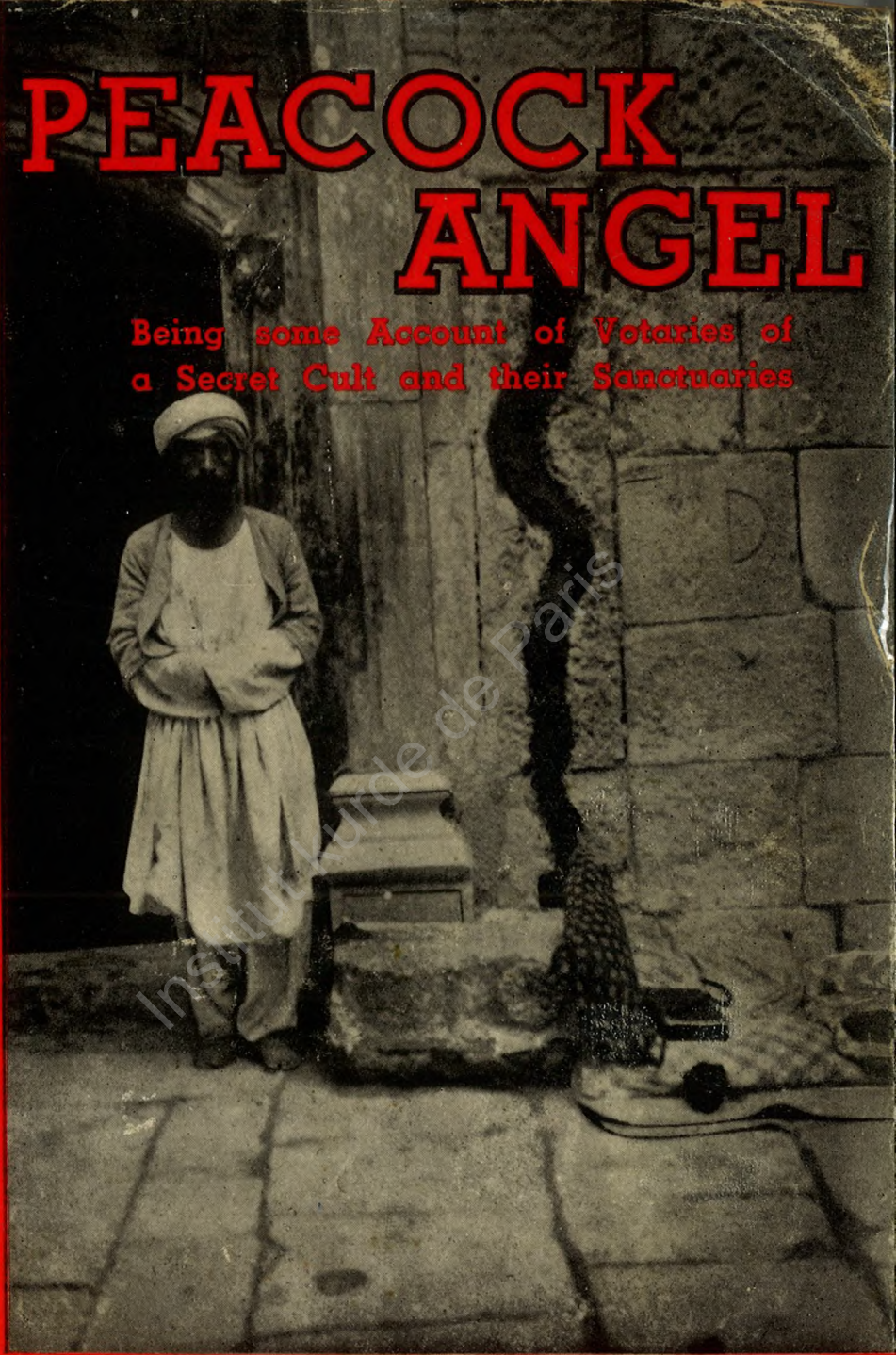
PEACOCK ANGEL

Being some Account of Votaries of a Secret Cult and their Sanctuaries



by E. S. DROWER

PERHAPS none of the minorities of 'Iraq has caused more curiosity than the people called Yazidis, owing to their secret cult of the Peacock Angel, whom Moslem neighbours assert to be none other than Lucifer himself, Prince of all Evil.

This book describes the life of these mountain tribesmen, as seen in a Yazidi village, the priests of the cult, the dramatic Spring festival, and the hill sanctuary of Shaikh 'Adi. Few travellers have honoured this shrine, famous because of its sculptured black snake, with more than a passing visit. Here, however, we have an intimate description of the daily life of its guardians and of their devotional exercises (and a careful noting of the many sub-shrines housed by the holy valley), also something about the white ladies who live there a cloistered existence like Christian nuns, vowed to celibacy and going barefoot even in the depth of winter. These gentle ladies, whose asceticism does not forbid the smoking of cigarettes, were the author's hostesses.

Other books have been written about these so-called devil-worshippers; but Lady Drower, while not pretending to unveil the secret of a religion which still remains hidden, gives a sympathetic picture of a strange and likeable people, and of a state of society at once primitive and self-sufficing. As described here, this holy valley is not only a sanctuary which is the Mecca of every Yazidi, but a place of rare beauty and peace.

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Being some Account of Votaries of a Secret Cult and their Sanctuaries

E. S. DROWER

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CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

SINCERE thanks are offered to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Baghdad, to the Mutesarrif of Mosul, to His Highness the Mir of the Yazidis, and to Captain Corry, of the 'Iraq Police. Mr. Evan Guest was kind enough to supply the botanical names of plants mentioned in this book.

I must also add my very grateful thanks to my daughter, Miss M. S. Drower, for correcting the proofs; as I am out of England, it was impossible for me to do this myself.

Note.—The quotations at the heads of the chapters are, with one exception, from Andrew Lang's translation of *Theocritus, Bion and Moschus* (Macmillan, 1889).

PRELUDE

" When the hoary deep is roaring, and the sea is broken up with foam, and the waves rage high, then lift I mine eyes unto the earth and trees. . . ."

MOSCHUS, *Idyll V.*

I HAD invited the Yazidi princess to lunch with me in our house by the Tigris in Baghdad. She rang up from her hotel to reply. I said, " Who is it ? " A voice replied, " Wansa ; it is Wansa speaking." " Did you get my note, Mira Wansa ? " " Yes, thank you very much. Madame, I will come. Madame, you are very gentle." She had learnt some English and French in Beyrut, so what she meant was " it is very nice of you to ask me."

This girl had been expelled from Syria. When she ran away from her husband, the ruling prince of the Yazidis, she crossed the frontier by way of the Jebel Sinjar, her real home, to shelter with co-religionists in Syria, for assassination would have been her certain portion had she stayed. At twenty-four life is sweet, although the marriage arranged by her father, Ismail Beg, had been a tragic mistake, and although she had lost her only daughter Laila as well. She spoke of her with tears in her eyes : " Madame, I loved her ! " Malaria, the curse of the Kurdish foothills, claimed this little victim and so snapped the only remaining link between the young princess and her husband.

The refugee was without a passport in wartime and the French authorities were suspicious. She was placed in an hotel under military supervision, but it was not

considered advisable to allow this charming young woman, whose name was suggestively "Amusement" (Wansa), to remain in the country. Considering the times, this was natural. Coming as she did from a country where nationalism takes the form of an active interest in neighbouring politics, she became the object of doubts. Finally, as "a menace to public security" "Wansa, Princesse des Yézidis" was sent back over the frontier again and placed herself under the protection of the 'Iraqi Government. She established herself in an hotel in Baghdad, with her mother and brother, and was far from friendless, since several schoolfellows in Beyrut, 'Iraqi of origin, lived in that city. Whenever she goes out, however, she is guarded, for assassination lurks round the corner for her even in Baghdad, and to return to her own people would be suicide. When she came to see me, the policeman detailed to accompany her waited by the house till she came out. Yet she yearns for her hills, like that Median princess for whom the Babylonian king, her husband, built an artificial mountain, called misleadingly the Hanging Gardens.

She talked to me of her home in the Sinjar, and answered all my questions about the habits and customs of her people with an appreciation of the points which showed cultivated intelligence. She is the first Yazidi woman to be educated. Her father, Ismail, of the princely family, broke with tradition by sending her to school, and the failure of her subsequent marriage with the ruling prince, a man older than herself and himself unschooled, has led the wiseacres to shake their heads and say, "There, we said that no good would come of teaching a woman to read."

When I first visited the Yazidis in the north eighteen years ago, practically no Yazidi boy attended school, and none but a few of the religious *shaikhs* could read. Education was forbidden. Now it is different. At the

village of Baashika, where I spent part of April this year, many Yazidi boys attend the local Government school. A few have passed into the secondary schools, and before long there will be a supply of Yazidi schoolmasters to teach Yazidi children : indeed, there is one already in the Jebel Sinjar. The parents, mostly farmers, are not yet enthusiastic. They fear, and perhaps with reason, that if their sons go to school they will find agricultural work demeaning and will hanker, as often happens, to become clerks and petty Government officials. To remove this fear should be the task of the schools, and I hope that the Yazidi teachers, themselves not town-bred, will be able to implant in their pupils a true pride in work on the land which bred them, as well as interest in anything which may improve traditional methods of tillage. To exchange their natural heritage for the office-stool and coffee-house, for the empty life of the *effendi*, would be the sorriest of bargains. Too often, enthusiastic schoolmasters see in successful examination results and office employment the goal for every scholar, no matter what his origin, with the result that the peasant lad leaves his village and becomes a drug in the towns. This is to question the fairy gold which the Little People place at the cottage door, for which the punishment is that the gold turns to black coal.

As for the girls, their time will come : meanwhile, I wonder how much these peasant women lose by not being able to write their names or read the cinema captions, accomplishments which are, too often, the only result of education in a country where a woman rarely opens or reads a book after leaving school unless she has taken up a profession. No, these Yazidi women cannot read. They cannot read the fashion papers, or news columns, or even the advertisements of patent medicines.

But they grind the grain which their men have

harvested, they work in the fields, they bake, they cook, they milk, they make butter, they weave, dye, bleach, sew and wash clothes. All day and every day in Yazidi villages one hears the clop-clop of wooden clubs as they beat the family washing at the springs, great tablets of home-made olive-oil soap beside them on the stones, and garments and cloths spread on the hot rocks to dry. The washing-pools are the women's clubs: here they gossip, and here reputations are made and lost. All this is in addition to the work of bearing and suckling children, which not a woman shirks or evades. I heard many charms for curing barrenness, but never of a contraceptive or of any spell for the prevention of child-birth.

I had intended to revisit the Yazidis for some years past, and not as a quickly passing traveller, but to stay long enough with them to know something of their daily lives and doings. In the spring of 1939 I was upon the point of starting when a rumour, started in the bazaars after the sudden accidental death of the young King Ghazi, led to trouble in the north. Anti-British feeling had long been prevalent in the schools, and in Mosul schoolboys led a rush to the British Consulate. But a short while before, these same schoolboys had been the Consul's guests, and it was his trust in their friendliness which led to his coming down unarmed, and to the brutal attack which killed him. It was not their fault. They believed that we had treacherously killed their king, and answered supposed treachery with treachery. The lie still lingers, for truth is too simple to be believed by a generation trained to expect intrigue from every European. It is a disadvantage to Truth in any Oriental country that she is naked. They expect her, like every decent woman, to be well covered and veiled. For this reason, plain statements of fact over the radio have little chance of being credited. Coffee-house wiseacres shake their heads. "It is all propa-

ganda. Both sides have their propaganda. Both sides tell lies. It is natural."

As Mosul was my jumping-off place, this unfortunate affair wrecked my plans, and it was not until this spring of 1940, in the lull which preceded the German offensive, that I was able to carry them out. Wansa's visit to Baghdad was opportune, for she most kindly gave me a letter to friends in Baashika, as well as satisfying my curiosity about many things I wished to know.

Here I must apologize for this book. It is not a serious contribution to the literature about the sect, although when I went the ostensible reason of my visit was to see how the Yazidi spring festival fitted into the pattern of the other spring festivals of an ancient and conservative land. Being there, however, female inquisitiveness led me into byways, so that those who really do mean to study this interesting people scientifically and thoroughly, may find here scraps and tags of information which may be useful to them. I hope sincerely that some honest and skilled investigator may undertake the task, for I am convinced that most of what has been written hitherto about the Yazidis is surface scratching, often incorrect, based upon hearsay instead of upon prolonged direct investigation. Without a good knowledge of the Kurdish language it would be impossible to gain the confidence of the religious chiefs or to understand chants sung by the *qawwāls*.

In a book I wrote eighteen years ago, I repeated many tales about the Yazidis current amongst their neighbours, and others have taken their material from similar sources, and sometimes borrowed from my chapter. At all these legends, reports and current tales I look now with the utmost caution and suspicion. Years spent in studying another minority and another secret religion have taught me how unreliable hearsay evidence is, and in this book, therefore, I repeat only what

I gather from Arabic-speaking Yazidis themselves, or that which I myself witnessed.

The Yazidis are spoken of as Devil-Worshippers. Apart from the fact that Shaikh 'Adi bin Musafir, their principal saint, was recognized in his time as an orthodox Moslem, my personal impressions are contradictory of this. I cannot believe that they worship the Devil or even propitiate the Spirit of Evil. Although the chief of the Seven Angels, who according to their nebulous doctrines are charged with the rule of the universe, is one whom they name Taw'us Melké, the PEACOCK ANGEL, he is a Spirit of Light rather than a Spirit of Darkness.

"They say of us wrongly," said a *qawwāl* to me one evening, "that we worship one who is evil."

Indeed, it is possibly the Yazidis themselves, by tabooing all mention of the name Shaitan, or Satan, as a libel upon this angel, who have fostered the idea that the Peacock Angel is identical with the dark fallen angel whom men call the Tempter. In one of the holy books of the Mandaeans the Peacock Angel, called by them Malka Tausa, is portrayed as a spirit concerned with the destinies of this world, a prince of the world of light who, because of a divinely appointed destiny, plunged into the darkness of matter. I talked of this with the head of the *qawwāls* in Baashika who, honest man, was not very clear himself about the point, for one of the charms of the Yazidis is that they are never positive about theology. It seemed probable to me, after this talk, that the Peacock Angel is, in a manner, a symbol of Man himself, a divine principle of light experiencing an avatar of darkness, which is matter and the material world. The evil comes from man himself, or rather from his errors, stumblings and obstinate turnings down blind alleys upon the steep path of being. In repeated incarnations he sheds his earthliness, his evil, or else, if hopelessly linked to the

material, he perishes like the dross and illusion that he is.

I say that this seems to me a probable conception, but I have no scrap of evidence that it is the Yazidi theory, no documentary proof, no dictum from the *Baba Shaikh*, who is the living religious head of the nation. One Yazidi propounded to me the curious theory that the accumulated experiences of various earthly lives was, on the Day of Resurrection, gathered into one over-soul, but that the individuals who had once lived those lives continued as separate entities, but how this was possible he did not explain.

However, as I have already intimated, I am not concerned here with Yazidi creeds, but with themselves and the shape of their daily life as I saw it. Whatever may be the vague beliefs of their religious chiefs, their practised religion is a mystical pantheism. The name of God, Khuda, is ever on their lips. God for them is omnipresent, but especially reverenced in the sun, the planets, the pure mountain spring, the green and living tree, and even in cavern and sacred Bethel stone some of the mystery and miracle of the divine lie hidden.

As for propitiation of evil, I can say sincerely that I found less amongst them than their neighbours. Moslems and Christians wear three amulets to the Yazidi one, and though a Yazidi is not averse to wearing a charm against the Evil Eye, many so-called devil-worshipping children go without, though few Moslem or Christian mothers would dare to take their babies abroad without sewing their clothes over with blue buttons, cowries, and scraps of Holy writ, either Qur'an or Bible.

A third impression was of their cleanliness. In the village of Baashika there was no litter, no filth, no mess of discarded cans or scattered bottles. To be honest, I saw a few rusty tins, but these had been carefully

collected, filled with water, and taken to a shrine, there to be left as offerings. Petroleum-tins are utilized to store precious home-pressed olive-oil, so that pitchers and jars are still employed for water-carrying. Paper is rarely used. What one buys in the bazaar is taken home in a kerchief or in a corner of the robe. There is no faint and revolting stench of human filth such as there is in most Arab villages in central and southern 'Iraq, or on the outskirts of the larger towns, where any ditch or wall serves for a latrine. As a newspaper is a rarity, one sees no untidy mess of soiled paper. What they do with their dead animals I do not know, but I neither saw, nor smelt, a decaying corpse, whereas even in such a modern town as Baghdad, owing to the laziness of municipal cleaners who dump dead animals behind the city to save themselves the trouble of the incinerator, any walk outside the city area may mean breathing polluted air. I complimented the mayor of the village, and he replied simply, "They are clean people." [1] Nevertheless, to the authorities belongs the credit of tapping the pure spring water as it issues from the mountain at Ras al-'Ain and bringing it by pipe to the centre of the village so that women can fill their water-pots with good water.

At Shaikh 'Adi I realized what a danger people like myself can be to such a place when I saw the result of my giving a page of pictures from an illustrated paper to the children of the guardian of the shrines. Quickly tiring of looking at the images, they tore it up and the untidy fragments were borne by the wind about the flower-grown courts of the sanctuary.

To return to this book. It would be tedious to recount all the conversations which led to such information as is set down here about marriage and birth and such events. I have therefore woven them, I fear in a somewhat haphazard way, into the narrative of the

[1] Layard comments upon Yazidi cleanliness.

whole. The book is, therefore, merely a personal impression of day-by-day happenings and friendships.

To me this stay of a spring month with the Yazidis was a very lovely experience, and if I fail in transmitting its flavour and quality, it is that I am incompetent. To have escaped in the midst of a European war into places of absolute peace and beauty is an experience which one would gladly share with others.

An old friend of mine in this city of Baghdad, echoing unconsciously an ancient belief, once told me that if ear and spirit can be cleared of the din of this world, one can hear at rare and high moments the separate notes that the worlds give forth, the sun, the earth, the moon and the stars, as they move and vibrate according to the law of their being. The whole blends, he said, into perfect harmony, into an exquisite chant of joy. Whatever this music may be, and whatever its purpose or purposelessness, I fancied that, for a moment or two, during these weeks of escape, I caught a fleeting bar, a faint echo of lovely and eternal harmonies, far removed from the clash and fret of men.

Chapter I

BAASHIKA

"Not of wars, not of tears, but of Pan would he chant, and of the neatherds he sweetly sang. . . ."

THEOCRITUS.

I WAS to stay with friends in Mosul, and it was my host, Captain C., who had taken infinite trouble in arranging for me, with the permission of the authorities, lodging in the Yazidi village that I had chosen as my headquarters. The road thither is impassable in wet weather, and I felt apprehensive when Captain C. showed me pock-marks more than an inch deep in his flower-beds, and plants battered to the ground by hail which had fallen the day before. I was still more anxious when the sky darkened as if Sindbad's roc were approaching. Sure enough, rain followed, heavy and sharp, but the C.s comforted me. A sun next morning and a good wind would dry the road at this time of the year, they assured me.

And so it was. I woke to a blue, rain-washed day. Whilst I paid calls upon the Governor and Mayor, the roads were drying in the bright sun and fresh wind, so that all was well for our start. A kindly thought had led the local officials to allot me a Yazidi policeman as guardian and guide, an honest-looking lad who spoke Kurdish as well as Arabic, and therefore could act as interpreter when the latter language failed. As a guardian he was unnecessary, but he proved to be a pleasant companion. He and his baggage were stowed into our taxi and off we went.

The road to Baashika is only so-called by tradition.

It is really an unmade track through the cornfields and it was still extremely soft and muddy. At times the car waltzed disconcertingly, and here and there the driver forged through the corn in order to avoid a bog. At the worst places we got out and walked, and that was enjoyable, for though our shoes became clogged with mud as we walked through the corn and beanfields, the larks were singing rapturously, the hills and snow mountains grew nearer mile by mile, and wild flowers grew amidst the blades. I was glad to find out that Jiddan, our policeman, being hill-bred, knew the names of the flowers, sometimes in Arabic and sometimes in Kurdish. He never ceased to be amused by my passion for knowing the names of flowers, trees and herbs. What did it matter? and indeed, what does it matter? However, I liked, for instance, to be able to name the small and extravagantly sweet yellow clover that grew everywhere, *nōfil*,[1] and to learn the familiar words by which field plants and herbs are known to the countryman. Perhaps in the Garden of Eden, while Adam was naming the animals, Eve named the flowers.

I had visited Baashika before. It lies at the very foot of the hills of the Jebel Hamrin range, and the white-washed cones of Yazidi shrines rise above the olive-groves with which it is surrounded. We passed by these groves and then by a very new and imposing church, not at all unsightly, but, I discovered, not loved by the Jacobite Christians of the village. "The Pope built it for the Latins with Italian money," they say, "whilst we paid for our church ourselves." Perhaps I should not call them Jacobites, for they prefer to be called Syrian Orthodox Christians. They have nothing to do with the Pope and the Pope nothing to do with them, and they look upon their ancient Oriental communion as superior to that of the Latins. The Uniate

[1] One of the trefoils. Mr. Evan Guest suggests *Trifolium procumbens.*

churches are monied and subsidized : the communities of the Non-Uniates are poor but proudly independent.

Of that later. We were immediately concerned with arrival and settling into the tiny house which had been allotted to me. The house was clean, swept and garnished. Two bedsteads, a table, two benches and four chairs had been provided for us. It was all that we needed, indeed more, as I had already a camp-bed and such pots, pans and household gear as were necessary. I had asked A. to come and spend a few days with me if she could, and had warned her that if she came she must bring her own bed and mug and plate. The house consisted of a tiny kitchen, a room on the ground level, a living-room and a small room off it, both two steps up from the grass-grown courtyard. Steps led to the flat roof, half-way up being the usual Oriental latrine, a hole in the floor. A dry basement was assigned to my servant, Mikhail, the little room off the living-room reserved for A. should she come, and Jiddan elected to sleep on the roof. So that we were all comfortable and happy.

I had just lunched, unpacked and gone to salute the mayor of the village who was sitting comfortably on a bench in front of the police-post, when there was an arrival. Captain C., piling thoughtfulness on thoughtfulness, had arrived with a rug, some curtains and one or two other details which he thought might add to our comfort. He had no time to stay ; he just bestowed his benefits and made off again on the muddy road to Mosul.

The first thing to do was to get into touch with the Yazidis themselves. So I got out a letter which Mira Wansa had written for me to her friend Rashid the son of Sadiq, and went in search of him. The main village street had a deep ditch running down its centre to carry off winter torrents, but, though this was empty, it was not used as a rubbish dump. Jiddan walked modestly a pace or two behind me, and though we con-

versed all the way, the dialogue was over my left shoulder.

The house of Sadiq stood at the farthest end of Baashika and, as he is a man of some substance, it was one of the larger houses of the place. A stone archway, in the shadow of which were seats, admitted us to a large courtyard full of fruit-trees, down which a clear stream ran in a paved bed. On two sides of this courtyard were living-rooms, those on one side being shaded by a pergola of vines. Outside these an aged lady wearing the Kurdish turban was engaged in some household task. She spoke nothing but Kurdish, but Jiddan explained as she came forward hospitably to meet us and place chairs for us in the shade, whilst someone went to find her son. Her husband, Sadiq, she told us, had gone to his estate in the Jebel Sinjar, but hoped to be back for the spring feast.

Even as she was speaking Rashid, her son, arrived. He was a young and good-looking man with a face full of energy and intelligence, for whom one immediately conceived liking and respect. I handed him Mira Wansa's letter, which he frankly admitted that he could not read. There is no shame here in admitting illiteracy. Reading and writing are priestly accomplishments, just as amongst the tribes, until recently, such soft and clerkly arts were despised by the *shaikhs*, each of whom kept a private scribe. Amongst the Yazidis, as already said, school education was until lately forbidden by religion. Rashid, however, is having his own children educated and has a brother who is a schoolmaster in the Jebel Sinjar. He told me laughingly that the learning of his brother was so much esteemed there that his opinion was asked about everything. "He is not only a schoolmaster, but a doctor, a lawyer and a judge, and they even ask him to write charms for them."

He busied himself about making tea for me, kindling

wood in a brazier and boiling a kettle in the capricious shade of the freshly-leaving vines, then pouring the clear brown tea into waisted Persian glasses, called *istikāns*. Meanwhile, Jiddan read him the letter, after which I tried to explain to him why I had come. I wanted to see the Spring Festival, and asked his advice as to the better place to be in for the feast-days, Baashika or Shaikh 'Adi? Shaikh 'Adi is the Mecca of the Yazidis, the great shrine to which all travel at least once in a lifetime and at every Feast of Assembly if they can. The Feast of Assembly, sometimes called the Great Feast, takes place annually in early autumn, but the Spring Feast, *Sarisal* or *Sarsaleh*, falls on the first Wednesday of Nisan in the Eastern calendar, which coincided this year with the middle of the Occidental April.

Rashid considered. "Your Presence has been to Shaikh 'Adi," he said, "and so knows that at Shaikh 'Adi there is the shrine and the valley, but no village. They keep the feast there, it is true, but not as we keep it here. This feast is the feast of the people, and here there are plenty of people, and Yazidis and Kurds come in from all the hills and neighbouring villages to see the feast and the *ṭawwāfi*. Here it is a much better thing than at Shaikh 'Adi. People even come from Mosul and Kirkuk to see the dancing."

Jiddan corroborated him. "It is well known that the feast at Baashika is better than at any other place."

Without committing myself to any decision as yet, I tried to tell him my other purpose, which was, without inquisitiveness, to learn something about his people and his religion. "I feel sure," I said, "that much of what others say about you is false, and I have learnt that only what I see with my own eyes and verify for myself is true!"

Rashid promised to help me. "But as to religion," he said, "I cannot assist you, as we laymen know little.

It may be difficult for you. I will bring you some of the *qawwāls*, but——" he broke off, doubtfully and then added, "No doubt, when you get to Shaikh 'Adi the *Shawish* will tell you much about our religion, for he talks Arabic as well as Kurdish and lives always at the shrine."

Here I should explain that the Yazidi priesthood is graded and subdivided. The religious chief, the Pope of the cult, is the Baba Shaikh, who lives at Shaikhan ('Ain Sifni). He is head of all the *shaikhs*, who constitute the highest order of priesthood. The *shaikhs* are supposedly the lineal descendants of the companions of the sect founded by Shaikh 'Adi early in the twelfth century, although these were so pure, says Yazidi legend, that they created their sons without the assistance of women. These miraculously begotten sons, however, took wives to themselves and founded families. The shaikhly families are of a racial type markedly different from the Yazidi laymen, being darker and more Semitic in appearance. They exercise what are almost feudal rights over the laymen, each lay family being attached to a certain shaikhly family. Only the shaikhly class are instructed in the inner doctrines of the faith, and until lately only the *shaikhs*, especially the family of Shaikh Hasan al-Basri, could read or write. The *shaikhs* officiate at marriages, at birth and at death, and it is from a shaikhly clan that every layman and laywoman choose the "other brother" and "other sister" whom he or she is bound to serve in this world and the next. Of this more in a later chapter. Moreover, a *shaikh* may not marry outside his caste, and the portion of a daughter who marries outside it is death. A sub-functionary to the *Baba Shaikh* is called the *Pesh Imām*.[1] Below the *shaikhs* come the *pīrs*. A *pīr* must also be present at religious ceremonies, and

[1] Lescot states erroneously that the *Baba Shaikh* and *Pesh Imām* are one and the same person.

acts to some degree as an understudy of the *shaikh*, as he may take his place if no *shaikh* is available. Like the *shaikhs*, they are credited with certain magic powers. The *qawwāls* constitute the third religious rank. They are the chanters, as their name signifies, and the chants which they recite to music on all occasions are not written down, but words and music learnt in early youth are transmitted from father to son. They must be skilled in the use of the *daff*, a large tambour, and the *shebāb*, a wooden pipe. Like *shaikhs* and *pīrs*, *qawwāls* may not marry outside their caste, and they do not cut the hair or beard. Most of the *qawwāls* live at Baashika or Bahzané, its sister-village, and it is they who travel near and far with the images of the sacred peacock, in order to visit which the faithful pay money, so that they are usually men of the world, since their tours until lately included Russia, Turkey, Iran and Syria. The next hereditary order is the *faqīrs*, but of them I will speak when I come to my stay at Shaikh 'Adi. There are non-hereditary orders as well, the *kocheks*, ascetics who wear nothing but white, dedicate themselves to the service of the shrines and are credited with seeing visions and prophetic gifts, and lastly, the nuns, the *faqriyāt*, who are vowed to celibacy, wear white and spend their lives in the service of the shrines at Shaikh 'Adi. As to the *Shawish*, of whom Rashid spoke, he has his permanent dwelling there, but, not having seen or talked with him personally, I am not clear as to his functions and powers.

Immediately helpful, Rashid at once sent in search of a *qawwāl* who lived in the village: meanwhile, I took up the tale of my wants. I hoped, I said, to learn something of Yazidi ways, how women lived and managed their households, brought up their children and lived their daily life. I should like, I said, to talk to the village midwife and to go to a wedding, should there be one.

Two qawwāls at Bâashika.
[*Qawwāl Sivu on the left.*]

The shaikh *of Shaikh Mand and his daughter "Snake-Poison".*

The midwife was easy, Rashid replied ; he would send her to me, but perhaps I had heard that the coming month of Nisan was forbidden for marriage ? The pity was that there had been two weddings in the village only last week.

" We cannot order such things," I said, laughing ; " moreover, I have assisted once at a Yazidi wedding when I stayed with your *mīr* at Ba'idri."

Chapter II

A YAZIDI WEDDING

"In Sparta once, to the house of fair-haired Menelaus, came maidens with the blooming hyacinth in their hair. . . ."
THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XVIII.*

I SHALL not easily forget what I saw when I stumbled upon a Yazidi wedding one October, in the village of Ba'idri, where we were staying the night with Wansa's husband, the *mīr*, at his *qasr* or castle on the hill girt about with sacred trees. On the slopes men and women were dancing to the pipe and drum, all in the gayest of colours, the huge silver buckles and silver headdresses of the women flashing in the sun as they swayed and stepped to the music. It was the round mountain dance, the *debka*, which I was presently to see in its original religious form at the Yazidi spring feast. Within an upper room of her father-in-law's house sat the twelve-year-old bride in semi-darkness, for a veil had been drawn across the half of the room where she sat on her bridal bed, silent as custom insists. The sun must not shine upon her for a week, they said.

It was Mira Wansa herself who told me most of what I set down here, prompted by questions which I will leave out.

It is the parents, she said, who arrange a marriage, but they often know already the wish of the son or daughter concerned. The parents of the young man approach those of his prospective bride. Her father asks the girl if she accepts, and her silence gives consent. Should the match be abhorrent to her, she is permitted to speak out and to refuse. The families

being agreed, the bridegroom's father, accompanied by a *shaikh* and a *pīr*, goes to the girl's father to discuss the dowry (Kurdish, *nekht*). When this is settled—a sum of forty dinars is the average sum for a family of moderate means—the *shaikh* writes the agreement on paper, affixes his seal to the document and then reads prayers invoking the blessing of the Peacock Angel and other angels upon the union. The clan of Shaikh Hasan is considered especially fortunate at a marriage and a *shaikh* of this *sinsila* (clan) should be present at every wedding. The *shaikh* presents the bride with some earth from the shrine of Shaikh 'Adi, and she, in return, gives money to him and to the *pīr*, or, it may be, gifts in kind such as a sheep and goat. The value of the gifts depends upon the means of the family. The period between this ceremony and the going of the bride to her future home varies: it may be a few days or some years.

Two days before the consummation of the marriage the bride takes a hot bath, and from this moment she must wear nothing but white. The next day, the hands of the bride and of all her friends are dyed with henna. A large dish of henna is prepared and taken round to the houses of neighbours and friends, sometimes to all the village. Women and girls help themselves to the henna and put money into the dish as a wedding gift.

If the bridegroom is of another village, the day before the wedding all the girls and youths of that village travel to the bride's village, the girls riding three or four on a mule, while the boys and young men mounted on horses gallop about the procession singing and shooting into the air. The young men sleep as guests in various houses, the girls stay that night with the bride. At about four o'clock in the morning the girls and women rise, go to the bride, and dress her in her bridal clothes and ornaments, while she remains

entirely silent. If she can weep, and the mother can weep, it is of good augury. No matter how pleased both may feel inwardly at the marriage, weeping is not only a sign of modesty on the part of the bride, but also helps to keep away the Evil Eye.

The handsomest part of a Yazidi girl's gala dress is the huge embossed gold or silver buckle which fastens her belt, often wider than the girth of her slender waist. Only one girl is allowed to clasp this heirloom, and that is the bride's " other sister ". I should explain what this " other sister " and " other brother " means. A lay girl and boy choose their " other brother " and " other sister " for themselves. The choice may not be made until after puberty and is sometimes left until late in life. The person chosen must be of the shaikhly class, either of the shaikhly family to which the young man or woman is hereditarily attached or of another, it does not matter which. The choice must be made and acknowledged at Shaikh 'Adi and usually takes place at the great September feast at the time of the universal pilgrimage to the shrine. The ceremony is simple. The man (or woman) of the shaikhly caste chosen fills his (or her) right palm with water from the sacred spring of the shrine and the young commoner drinks it from the hand of the chosen liege lord or lady. Henceforth there is a close tie between the two. The " other brother " has duties to perform at marriage, birth and death and must protect and help his brother in every way. The commoner on his part must make his " other brother " a present yearly and serve and help him always, " not only in this world, but in the next, even in hell ". Yazidis look upon this curious dual duty as prolonged into other lives: the link between the two has existed before this life and they will come together in future lives. A girl must have an " other sister ", but she may also choose an " other brother " if she wishes to do so, and so also with a boy.

This is not usual, but may happen, and implies a yearly offering and acceptance of gifts. The relationship is entirely platonic, though usually accompanied by admiration, and is a free choice, for to marry a commoner, however beautiful, is forbidden to a member of a shaikhly clan.

The final touch to the bride's robing is her veil, which is red, and when all is ready the veiled girl takes leave of her weeping mother and is set on a horse. A man of her own village, but not a *shaikh* or a *pīr*, holds the bridle and leads the horse as the procession forms and sets out. The young men of the bridegroom's village are careful to provide themselves with small coins before they start, for it is the duty of the small boys of the bride's village to pelt the young men in the procession with all the small stones and garbage they can find, while the young men distract these attentions by throwing money. All this is carried out, said Wansa, with much gaiety and jesting. Before leaving the last house of the village, the bridegroom's party presents some money to the headman (*mukhtār*).

When the procession has reached the bridegroom's village and house the mother-in-law, standing on the roof of the entrance, showers sugar, sweets and flowers over the bride as she arrives on her horse. The bride's "other sister" helps her to dismount. Then the bridegroom's mother, coming down, hands the bride a jar filled with sugar and sweetmeats. Before the new daughter-in-law can enter, she must hurl this against the threshold-stone, so that it breaks and the sweets are scattered. For these everyone scrambles as they bear good fortune. The bride steps into her future home over the broken fragments and also over the blood of a sheep whose throat they cut just by her feet.

Before she goes into the bridal chamber there is a mock battle between young men of the bride's party and those of the bridegroom for the possession of the

latter's headgear. When one or the other succeeds, the bride puts money into the bridegroom's cap and gives it to the youth who succeeded in capturing it.

Throughout all these merrymakings the bride remains silent as an image, and is veiled in red. When she has entered the bridal chamber, the *shaikh* and *pīr* tie a curtain (*sitār*) across the room. For seven days she and the marriage bed must remain behind this curtain or veil, and when she is forced to emerge in order to obey a call of nature, she must be careful not to pass over any water.

On the day that the bride comes to the house the bridegroom himself stays away, remaining elsewhere with his " other brother ". Should the day of arrival be a Tuesday, no consummation of the marriage can take place that night. The bridegroom must spend that night and the next day at another house in the " other brother's " company, and join the bride on the Wednesday night at midnight. This is because Wednesday is the Yazidi holy-day and Tuesday night, as we should call it, is for them " the night of Wednesday ".

When the young husband enters the bridal chamber at midnight, his " other brother " and two of his friends wait outside the door of the room. The bridegroom is allowed an hour to consummate the marriage.[1] After this has been announced, the young men and bridegroom eat of some light food which the bride must be mindful to take with her into the bridal chamber, and then all go to sleep.

" At the end of the seven days the bride may leave her room. She takes a bath, and women of the bridegroom's village prepare a large dish of dates, together with seven kinds of grain—wheat, lentils, oats, beans (*bajilla*), *fūl* (another kind of bean), and round pease (*verra*). These they boil together on the fire without butter or fat or any other ingredient. Then, carrying

[1] See Appendix A.

this porridge, they go out in gay clothing to the meadows, taking the bride with them till they reach a stream or running water. The bride must put seven handfuls of it into the water, cross the stream, and eat it with her friends. When the oleander is out," continued Wansa, happy memories in her eyes, " this is a pretty sight. We think that oleander is a powerful amulet against the Evil Eye, and make necklaces of it. So the women and girls who accompany the bride, sometimes fifty or more, put the pink blossoms in their turbans."

During the imprisonment of the bride her friends feast and make merry. From dawn till ten of the morning flute and drum sound and men and women dance the *debka*. From ten till the early afternoon they rest and eat. Then dancing begins again and goes on till midnight.

" This is the time," said Wansa, " that young lovers prefer, for they may find themselves dancing near together and can hold hands in the circle."

Certain inauspicious women are forbidden to go near a bride : a woman during her period, a woman from a house of death, and a woman who has borne a child until her forty days of uncleanness are ended and she has taken the bath which makes her no longer dangerous.

Chapter III

SNAKES AND SHRINES

"Then these twain crawled forth, writhing their ravenous bellies along the ground and still from their eyes a baleful fire was shining as they came, and they spat out their deadly venom."

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XXIV.*

BEFORE I left Rashid, his henchman had brought in an ancient *qawwāl*, a bewildered old divine whose sheep-like face had the blind look of one led to the slaughter. I did not trouble his soul with any onslaught on the secrets of his cult, for he was clearly apprehensive, and we sat in amiable discourse which gradually reassured him. Rashid told me aside that the head *qawwāl* was more intelligent, and, after a little, this personage too arrived. I suggested to the *qawwāls* that perhaps they would honour me by a visit, so we walked amicably down the village street to my little house, where Mikhail prepared us tea. I began to explain to Qawwal Sivu something of the purpose of my visit, and then asked about the chants sung at the spring feast and at burials, but as yet he was suspicious and reticent. Their chants, he said with the air of a trout whisking past a bait, were so secret and sacred that no layman might know what they were; moreover, he went on, "we ourselves do not write them down. I learnt from my father and my son will learn from me." We spoke of the seven angels,[1] of whom

[1] M. Roger Lescot in his *Enquête sur les Yézidis de Syrie et du Djebel Sindjār* (Beyrouth, 1938) complains mildly that the list of the seven varied with every person he questioned. I corroborate this. The truth is that on this subject, as on others, the Yazidis are beautifully vague.

the chief is the Peacock Angel, and also of Shaikh 'Adi, who carries the souls of good Yazidis into Paradise on his tray. Then we spoke of reincarnation, which is, perhaps, the only positive form of belief which a Yazidi holds. An evil man may be reincarnated as a horse, a mule or a donkey, to endure the blows which are the lot of pack-animals, or may fall yet lower and enter the body of a toad or scorpion. But the fate of most is to be reincarnated into men's bodies, and of the good into those of Yazidis.

Here the arrival of the *mukhtār*, the head man of the village, put an end to such talk and Mikhail brought another cup. The headman was a tall, well-built man, a landowner who farmed his own land with his sons, and his fairish face was, like many we saw in the village, of an almost Scandinavian type. These Yazidis wear their hair in a bushy shock beneath their red turbans, and the younger men often shave the beard, leaving the moustache long, or shave the face completely. I saw several who could have sat for portraits of Hengist or Horsa ; others reminded me of the youths in Perugino's pictures. Older men let their beards grow. Amongst the children of the village some were as flaxen-fair and blue-eyed as Saxons.

The *mukhtār* overwhelmed me with hospitable offers of food. He offered to send me milk from his own herd as long as I stayed, and begged me to let him know if I needed anything. All our visitors left together and Jiddan and I started for a walk, for he considered it his duty to accompany me like my shadow. I turned my face uphill, for it was good after living in a flat plain to see grassy heights rising behind the village. These foothills are about as high as the Chilterns, though abrupt in gradient, and behind them the altitudes rise until snow-hills are reached.

We mounted past lime-kilns and *juss* [1]-pits on stony

[1] *Juss* is the Italian *gesso*, natural plaster.

and rocky paths where grass was scanty and the wild flowers, mostly scarlet ranunculus, wild iris, anemones and campions, seemed the lovelier because of the sparseness of the green. Young crops grew on the hillside, wheat and barley, and here and there narrow stone aqueducts led mountain springs down to the crops, the kilns and the olive-groves. We climbed up until we had a good view over the vast green plain which lies between the hills and distant Mosul. In the midst of it rose the mount of Tell Billa, looking just what it is, a buried city. The Americans excavated it lately, and it was Rashid who had been their right hand and foreman during the excavations and was now responsible for the watching of the site. From above, the mound looked as if a large green counterpane had been lightly thrown above the whole, and that if it were but lifted, houses, fortress and ramparts would appear intact. Further along the plain rose Tepe Gaura, another buried city, and beyond that again was Khorsabad, whence lately two huge bulls had been unearthed and brought down by lorry to adorn the new museum at Baghdad.

As for Baashika, just below, with its imposing new church and tumble of flat-roofed houses, it looked like a flock of sheep, huddling together for protection. The white, fluted cones of Yazidi shrines rose out of the olive-groves and crowned farther hills. On a grassy knoll by the village I could descry a group of villagers, and as I passed them on my way back I saw sitting amongst them the village priest in his black robes and tall hat. They were enjoying the evening sunshine.

My first day at Baashika was over. I ate my supper and went to bed betimes, falling into a refreshing sleep which ended at dawn when I heard the scutter of hoofs on the road outside as the flocks were led out of the village to feed on the uplands. The spring air blew sweet with herbs and flowers into our small courtyard as I crossed it for breakfast, and I had hardly finished

before Rashid arrived. A *shaikh* of the clan of Shaikh Mand, he said, was visiting the village with his daughter, and they had brought snakes with them and were going from house to house exhibiting their powers in return for a small fee, so he had bidden them come to my house. I had heard about the descendants of Shaikh Mand, who claim to possess power over serpents and scorpions and to be immune to their poison, and asked Rashid if they really were what they claimed to be. He assured me that they were, and that he had seen Jahera [1] (" Snake-Poison "), the small daughter of the *shaikh*, handle unharmed a poisonous snake fresh from the fields, and that the serpents they carried with them had not had their fangs removed. " It has been known," he conceded, " for a *shaikh* of that clan to die from snakebite, but if this happens they say that he was not a good man."

Rashid added that the *shaikhs* of Shaikh Mand ate serpents raw and suffered no harm.

The *shaikh* and his little daughter now entered our courtyard. Large serpents, one brown and one black, were draped about the necks of the man and child, their tails falling behind like fur boas worn years ago by European women. The *shaikh* unwound the big black snake from Jahera's neck, and it slithered along in the sparse grass looking very evil indeed. It was some five or six feet in length and its body two inches or more in thickness. He caught it again, returned it to the child and then displayed his own. I disbursed an offering and then the *shaikh* and the ugly little girl posed for their photographs, holding the snakes' flat heads close to their lips.

I wandered about the village, visiting the sacred trees and some of the white cone shrines. I soon learnt that all places of pilgrimage were called *mazār*, the word being applied indiscriminately to a tree, a tomb, a

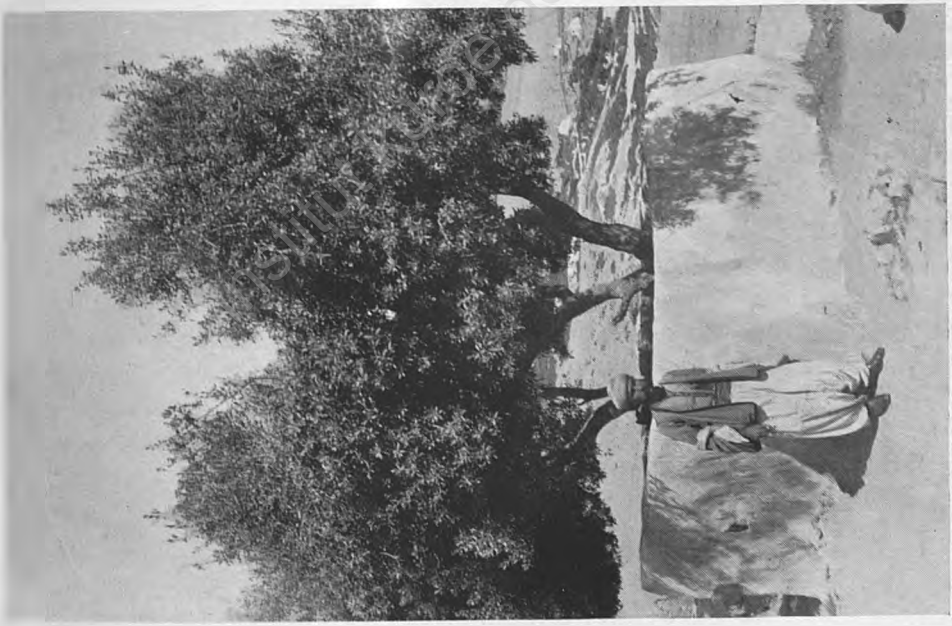
[1] The " J " is soft, as in French " je ".

cenotaph, a spring, a stone or a cave. The name of a *shaikh* may be given to several *mazārs* ; for instance, there is a " Shaikh Mand " at Bahzané and another at Shaikh 'Adi, and two " Shaikh Zendins " within easy reach of each other, one a sacred stone and the other a tomb-shrine. The name Shaikh Shams [1] or Shaikh Shams-ad Din [2] is not only given to the tomb-shrine at Shaikh 'Adi, but several flat rocks or enclosed spaces on mountain-tops in Yazidi districts have that name. Near Rashid's paternal house an ancient olive-tree, enclosed by a low stone wall, just by a stream, is called Sitt Nefisah, and between the villages of Baashika and Bahzané a cone-shrine bears the same name. I could never get a satisfactory explanation of these duplicate and often triplicate shrines, but it was noticeable that one might represent a spring, stream, sacred tree, cave or sacred stone, and the other be actually a tomb. As for Sitt Nefisah, I asked for explanations, but all were vague. The Lady Nefisah used to sit beneath the tree, or, perhaps she had lived there, no one knew. But every Tuesday and Thursday evening at sundown pious hands never failed to place a votive wick saturated in olive-oil into a cranny in the wall, its flickering light lasting but a few minutes. Moreover, those suffering from malaria [3] come to it, scrape some sacred dust from the small enclosure, and drink it in water, thinking to be cured. By the same stream is another sacred tree, called Faqir 'Ali. Indeed, most of the holy springs and streams are coupled with a sacred tree, sometimes more than one.[4] Sacred trees are usually fruit-bearing —the olive, fig or mulberry.

[1] Shaikh Sun. [2] Shaikh Sun-of-the-Faith.

[3] *himma mutheltha.*

[4] This recalls the sacred Aina u Sindirka of the Mandaeans, the mystical " Well and Palm-tree " which are explained by Mandaeans as representing the Female and Male principle respectively. In the Jebel Sinjar, however, according to Jiddan, there is a sacred spring without the sacred tree—Pira Hayi.



" A bold wench . . . asked me to take her photograph."
[*Note her friend's silver belt.*]

The sacred tree Faqir 'Ali, with Rashid in the foreground.

Following the stream by the sacred trees up the valley where it wandered through beds of buttercups and oleander bushes—and one of the latter just below the imposing shrine of Melké Miran was hung with votive rags—I came, after crossing the stream more than once, to the upper washing-place known as Ras al-'Ain. Jiddan remained modestly behind, for it is understood that if a man ventures near this pool in the morning he may surprise a bathing nymph. Several of the women who were beating their clothes on the stones by the pool were, actually, half-naked. Several of the girls were very handsome. The younger women wear caps of silver coins, one overlapping the other like scales ; the turban wound around this cap is decorated with chains, and their heads, as they knelt to work, glittered from afar. Many wore beads, amber and scarlet, and long amulet-chains were suspended round their necks. The brides are always sumptuously dressed. One of the latter, a bold wench and far from comely, asked me to take her photograph and posed with her friend. I did as she asked, then she held out her hand for the picture.

I explained, and promised to send her the picture when it had been developed if she would give me her name, but she refused, sulkily, convinced that I was not telling the truth.

Returning to the village, I found that Rashid had brought me a bunch of flowers, some from the hillside and others from his own garden. Seeing me hunting for something to put them in, he disappeared, to return quickly with a glass from his house. Such charming courtesy was characteristic of him. He came, he said, excusing his call, to tell me that the midwife would call on me that afternoon.

Chapter IV

BIRTH

"Thy queen is Artemis, that lightens labour."
THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XXVII.*

THE midwife arrived. She had several names, and was usually addressed as "Mama" or, more politely, Hajjia, but I named her mentally Sairey Gamp. She was old: her white hair straggled about her face in wisps and she was far from clean. She spoke in a husky, confidential voice, nudging me occasionally to emphasize a point, and her Arabic was so queer that I had to call in Jiddan to interpret into more familiar language. Here, as in Baghdad, women of the villages use words and expressions which one rarely hears from men. Jiddan was not in the least embarrassed by obstetrical details, nor were we. Luckily there is no prudery about such matters in the East. A woman may veil her face, but she will describe in fullest detail before her young sons the bringing-to-bed of a neighbour.

Mira Wansa had already told me a good deal about the way in which Yazidi children come into the world, and now the old woman added detail illustrated by gesture and much dramatic comment. Birth was her all: she was its priestess, standing at the portals of life and death, and I fear that many must have gone out of the world by the latter instead of coming in by the former owing to her ministrations. A good deal of what she and Mira Wansa told me I have put into an appendix,[1] for it may be useful to the anthropologist, but weights my narrative unduly here.

[1] Appendix B.

Mira Wansa had told me that an expectant mother should only look upon "good things". "If she sees a snake or a toad, or an ugly thing, the child that is to be born will be like them. I once knew a woman whose baby was born with a head like a sheep, and the mother told me it had happened because she had gazed at a sheep."

Hajjia said that she was sent for when the labour pains began. The woman is usually hurried down to the cellar, which she is likely to share with goats, sheep, and fowls. The room is not crowded with women, but a mother, sister, and one or two female relatives may be present, and if possible, the "other sister". The woman does not lie for the birth but crouches, clinging to another woman, who comforts and encourages her, while the midwife massages her abdomen and squats behind ready to receive the child when it comes into the world. If labour is protracted, the midwife invokes supernatural help.

"O Khatun Fakhra help her!
O Khidhr Elias help her!
O Shaikh Matti help her!"

This, said Hajjia, was what she chanted over her patient. Now Khidhr Elias is the prophet Elijah, and Shaikh Matti is Mar Matti, the Christian saint to whom the ancient monastery of that name is dedicated, but who was the Lady Fakhra?

Both Jiddan and Hajjia hastened to inform me. She was the mother of holy *shaikhs*, Shaikhs Sajjaddin, Nasruddin, Fakhruddin and Babaddin, and is the especial patroness of women in child-birth. After a safe delivery a thankoffering should be made in her name, and unleavened bread, a simple dough of flour, salt and water called *khubz faṭīr*, is baked and distributed to the poor. If the family is well to do, a sheep is killed and its meat added to the thankoffering. "If this is not done, she appears to them in dream and says to

them, 'Why have you not given to the poor in my name? I helped you and you have done nothing in return!'"

"Shaikh Matti, thou with thine own hand help me!" chanted Hajjia, returning again from the Yazidi to the Christian saint. "That is what I pray over them."

Another way of hastening the birth, she said, was to procure the *gopāl* (stick) of the *Baba Shaikh*, who always carries one, and to beat the woman with it gently seven times. When the child is born, the mother must remain in bed seven days. She is never left alone lest she see angels or demons in various shapes and go mad. A particular danger is an evil fairy, the Rashé Shebbé or Shevvé, who may substitute a changeling for the human child, or harm mother and babe. On the seventh day after birth the mother gets up, takes a hot bath and then goes with her friends to running water or a spring and throws in seven handfuls of seven grains boiled in water (like a bride), and then crosses the water and eats the porridge with her friends. A similar ceremony takes place when the child cuts its first tooth. The father names the child, and when he does so, usually slaughters a sheep, or a fowl, and distributes the meat. The name chosen is often that of a dead relation, a grandfather, parent, brother or deceased child, and some think the new-born infant a reincarnation of the person after whom it is named.[1]

[1] Mira Wansa told me this. She has discussed reincarnation with the *shaikhs*, and said that when she described a curious dream she had in which she was a soldier, the *shaikh* told her that she had probably seen a past life in dream. Formerly, when a person died, the *kocheks* claimed to have the power of foreseeing in a vision how the departed soul would incarnate, but when I spoke of this to Qawwal Sivu in Baashika, he denied it and said, somewhat naïvely, that the *kocheks* had given up their visions nowadays "because they are frightened of the Government".

When the child is forty days old, the *shaikh* comes to the house and cuts from its scalp two locks of hair, one for himself and the other for the *pīr*, and receives a present from the parents. No scissors must touch the child's head until this is done. [I noticed that Yazidi children have a wide bar shaved on the crown, from which bar another is shaved to each temple, the square of hair remaining being trimmed into a fringe which falls over the forehead.]

Hajjia promised that she would fetch me to assist

Shows how hair is shaved.

at her next case. "I bring some thirty babes into this world each year in Baashika," she told me. I gave her some money and promised more if she kept her word.

Hajjia then told me of a trick that the Rashé Shevvé had once played on her.

"I had delivered the woman," she said, "and was back at my house, which had no door to the courtyard. That night there came one shouting outside my room, 'Come, come! So-and-so is in labour!' Now this was the woman in whose arms I had laid a babe that very day, but, thinking perhaps that a twin child was to be born, I hurried out into the dark. I followed the figure, which was very tall—for you must know

that the Rashé Shevvé is very long, like the *ṭantal*,[1] and it went before me and led me, not to the house, but outside the village! When I saw whither I was being taken, I was very afraid and ran and ran till I reached my own place. After that, *khatūn*, I had a door made to my house!"

* * * * *

It was my duty to pay several calls. First, there were the official calls, and I drank tea by invitation one day with the mayor of the village and his comely wife, a girl of Mosul, a kind and hospitable pair. Then there was the schoolmaster. He was a widower with children, so it was his mother whom I visited. She was of a Baashika family and had taken over the task of bringing up his children when her daughter-in-law died in child-birth. She was a simple peasant woman herself, a Christian of the Latin persuasion, and a picture of the Pope hung on the wall. I liked her generous manner and smile, and thought the schoolmaster a lucky man to have such an excellent soul to look after his orphans. Then there was the Yazidi *mukhtār*. I went one morning to return his call and found that he and all his family were out in the fields, hoeing onions, so returned later. They were expecting me and I was taken to a pleasant upper room, whitewashed, its unglazed windows overlooking the olive-groves and the lovely green plain. It was reached in the usual Kurdish way by a steep outer stair unprotected by ledge or rail, upon which tiny children and kids clambered up and down.

Rugs and cushions were spread for the guest, and the *mukhtār* and his friends sat round the room smoking long pipes with small clay bowls filled from capacious woollen tobacco bags, and discussing crops, prices and

[1] The *ṭantal* is a hobgoblin with the power of appearing immensely tall.

local politics. In this village, where there is neither radio nor newspaper, no telephone, telegraph or even daily post-car, the war only meant the increased price of certain commodities ; the rest was mere polite inquiry for my benefit.

" This Hitler—has he not yet made peace ? By the power of Allah, he shall be brought low ! " Or, sometimes, with a slight note of anxiety, " *Khatūn*, think you that the war will come here ? " " If God wills, no," I made reply, and a fervent echo " Inshallah ! " went round the room.

With the Yazidis it is the host or his son who prepares tea or coffee for the guest, for it is a ceremonial gesture, not a household task relegated to women. I brought with me, as is my habit, a small bag of chocolates and sweets for the children, and these regarded me with shy favour from the doorway.

I was on my way from the *mukhtār's* house when I was waylaid in the street by a *qawwāl* whom I had not yet seen. He had a snub nose and a humorous face, and was to become a friend.

" *Khatūn*," he said, " have you not yet been to see the American ? "

" The American ? " I repeated, surprised.

" Yes, there is an American missionary who lives down the hill—a good man ; if you wish, I will take you to him."

I shall never know whether it was the missionary who sent him or whether Qawwal Reshu acted on his own initiative, but I found myself presently admitted to the outer courtyard of a house by an Assyrian woman and led into an inner court, where a chair was placed for me. I learnt then that the missionary was not a real American, but an Assyrian trained by American missionaries. He appeared after an interval, during which he had donned the most European plus-fours I had seen for some time. As I happened to be speaking

Arabic, the conversation was begun in that language, although I was shamed to find out later that his English was fluent. He had the massive physique and strong features of the true-born Assyrian, and was both well-read and intelligent, in fact I enjoyed our talk. He told me several things that I wanted to know, while warning me that it was unlikely I should find out much for myself, as the Yazidis were bigoted and secretive to the highest degree, and would not admit a stranger to their ceremonies. I told him that I knew that, and that my only purpose in coming was to see as much as I could of the spring feast, and get to know the Yazidi women.

In the afternoon I decided to go to the neighbouring village of Bahzané, for I had heard that a Yazidi *shaikh*, said to be skilled in magic, lived there in exile, and I wished to meet him. Jiddan and I set out. The road passes through crops of young wheat and beans in flower. On either side rise grassy hills and knolls crowned here and there with conical shrines, round which clustered a quantity of graves. Jiddan told me that Yazidis like to place a fluted cone over the grave of a young man or boy who has died after reaching puberty without being married, that is, he is treated as a saint provided that he is beloved and his family have the means to raise such a monument. The attitude of the Yazidis towards celibacy is curious and seems to suggest Christian influences. Shaikh 'Adi never married, his brother is said to have created a son without the aid of a woman, and tradition says that other companions of the saint provided children for themselves in the same manner. I have often heard from Yazidis of a saint, " He was very pure : he never married ", an attitude entirely opposed to Jewish and Mandaic ideas, for people of these races look upon an unmarried man as a sinner against Life.

Most of the Yazidi graves are marked with a rough

stone placed at the foot and head, although here and there a tomb is wholly covered with masonry, or has an elaborate headstone bearing an inscription, local marble being used for the slab. The inscription usually states in Arabic that So-and-so passed into the mercy of God on such-and-such a date. All face east. A few are decorated with simple incised carvings: at the side of one I saw was a *shaikh's gopāl* (stick with a hooked handle), and rough representations of a dagger and powder-horn. We learnt afterwards that this dead *shaikh* had been stabbed to death. A stone saddle over another grave records that the departed died from a fall when riding. I have seen plaits of hair attached to headstones in these graveyards, for it is the custom of widows in their grief to cut off their hair and leave it on the tomb.

The air bore sweetness from the hills, for these were covered with grass and flowers except where the rock crops through. Here and there were olive-trees, and groves and gardens lay between the cultivation and the lower plain beyond. Storks paced about the field solemnly, rising and flapping their wings in slow flight when we came near. No one kills these privileged birds.

Bahzané is built on a mound, and the houses, flat-roofed, clustered close together, with the green hills rolling right up to the walls. Here, too, there is absolute absence of rubbish, and no dead dogs or filth pollute the outskirts. The streets are so narrow that with arms extended one can almost touch the houses on either side, and three or four persons at most can walk abreast. They are roughly paved, with a rain-gutter down the centre, so that one can walk dryshod on either side.

We skirted the village and kept to the outermost street. In the middle of the way rose a curious mortared hump, some four feet high, with a small opening in

front which showed within a flat sacred stone. The aperture was blackened by votive wicks. A passer-by told me that it was named Shaikh Zendin. Passing steeply downhill again and coming outside the village, we found ourselves at the celebrated shrine of Shakih Mand, which is lodged just where a narrow ravine above Bahzané debouches into the plain. A mountain stream flows through the rocks and passes just above Shaikh Mand into the washing-pool at which the women of Bahzané beat their household linen. Shaikh Mand possesses its own sacred spring. Before the shrine is a small herb-grown courtyard enclosed by a low wall. Here I found the snake-eater, sitting with the four guardians of the tomb and other scarlet-turbanned Yazidis in a peaceful circle before the shrine conversing in low tones and smoking their *qaliūns*. We were invited to join them, but I passed first behind the white-washed building to lay, at the direction of one of the guardians, my small offering by the clear water which welled from the rock. Then I returned, and Jiddan and I sat awhile, glad to rest, whilst one of the men in the circle produced a lute he had made himself from the wood of a mulberry-tree. The wire strings were four in number, the keys at the top of the neck were like those of a guitar, but the low bridge slanted at an angle. Round sound-holes were bored in the lower part of the belly and also at the sides of the instrument. "We call it a *tanbūr*," they said, putting it into my hands. The lute player's pleasant music, at once intricate and primitive, mingled agreeably with the voices of the children playing and splashing at the pool above, where only a few women now lingered.

But we could not stay, and were directed to the *shaikh's* house in the village. The *shaikh*, dark and lean of countenance, greeted us politely when we arrived and took us up to sit on his roof in the evening sunshine, but it was plain that all was not well. We

soon learnt the cause of his distraction: his little girl of four years old had fallen earlier in the day from the roof upon a heap of rough stones in the courtyard. As the roofs of Kurdish houses, used as sitting-rooms and playgrounds, are rarely protected by a wall, it was a matter of marvel to me that more children did not fall from them. I was taken to the living-room where the child lay on a bed covered with a quilt, motionless, but alive. A *mujebbir* (bone-setter), they said, had told them that no bones were broken. I begged them to keep her quiet, but before we left the mother had picked the little thing up and was carrying her in her arms. It seemed impossible that the child should survive. We left.

Chapter V

BAHZANÉ AND SHAIKH UBEKR

"May spiders weave their delicate webs over martial gear, may none any more so much as name the cry of onset!"

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XVI.*

"*KHATŪN!* Will you speak to the *chaūsh* (sergeant) of the police? He is angry and says he will stay here no longer, and the other policemen want you to come and persuade him."

It was Jiddan, with my servant Mikhail, who spoke, seeking me early the next morning.

The police were our neighbours, and I knew the sturdy Kurdish sergeant, baked by many summer suns, as a most respectable man. As I went along, both explained what had happened. A Yazidi man had run off with a woman outside his caste, and the lives of both were in danger. They had fled for protection to the police, who counselled them to leave Baashika. The lovers were poor and could ill afford the car which the police subordinates, wanting to get to Mosul quickly for reasons of their own, tried to make them hire. The sergeant had taken the part of the eloping couple.

"*Wallah*, my *afrād* are not good men," he chided. "They will not obey me, and I shall resign." Close by sat the couple in the taxi summoned by the police. The men looked sheepish, when I did my best to reason with them, and declared that they had only one wish, and that was that the sergeant should not leave them. The matter was settled with ludicrous speed, the sergeant would stay "for your sake", the taxi was dismissed, and the couple escorted whither they wished.

I could not imagine why I had been called in at all: perhaps it was to witness the sergeant's impeccability, unless I had heard only a part of the story.

I wanted to return that morning to Bahzané to inquire after the injured child. As we set out, Jiddan inquired diffidently whether I would turn aside a moment to visit the house of his *shaikh*? Jiddan is hereditarily attached to the clan of Shaikh Sajaddin, and on the night of our arrival he had eaten supper with them. That very morning, a shower having fallen during the night, I had seen a comely girl on the roof spreading out to dry the gay woollen rug in which Jiddan wrapped himself to sleep, and on asking who she was I heard that she was of the household of Jiddan's *shaikh*. Jiddan told me that his *shaikh* was in prison and that the old *shaikha* his mother, the women and the children were exiled from the Sinjar and lived in Baashika.

"What has your *shaikh* done?"

"*Khatūn*, he had trouble when the law about conscription came in. He helped some Yazidis who escaped into Syria."

Military service is an old grievance. It caused a rebellion most bloodily quelled in Turkish times before the Great War. The trouble was settled by certain concessions at the instance of Sir Henry Layard, the Assyriologist, through the mediation of the British Ambassador at the Porte. War is not actually contrary to the Yazidi creed, but close contact with infidel companions in arms, who eat foods that are polluting, and force the Yazidi to break his ritual laws, is abhorrent to them. The very dress of a soldier contravenes the faith, for a lay Yazidi wears a shirt with a wide collar cut loosely in front and fastened behind, and at prayer-time he lifts the hem of the neck to his lips.

Accordingly, when the 'Iraqi Government introduced conscription the Yazidis again showed opposition, and Bekr Sidqi, the general who murdered Jaafar Pasha and

was responsible for the Assyrian atrocities, quelled them with brutal severity. It was the religious leaders who were behind the resistance ; some were hanged, others sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The majority of the younger men now accept the situation, and it may be that the European war has done more than a little to convince them that a man can no longer live securely within his own religious and racial palisade.

The *shaïkha* lived near by. When I entered the courtyard she came forward to meet me, a frail but dignified figure clad in white cotton, a white woollen *meyzar* (a kind of toga) slung over her shoulder, and the white veil from her turban brought wimple-wise over her chin. Jiddan told me her name, Sitt Gulé. There were marks of poverty about the place, nevertheless tea was brewed for me, and they insisted that I should eat some mouthfuls of the paper-thin bread dipped in a bowl of cream and sugar, and a bowl of butter and sugar. The butter and cream were the products of their own cow, and were wholesome, though flies swarmed above them and a few of the cow's hairs were visible. One ignores such trifles, and I ate a mouthful or two and praised the flavour, watched by the *shaïkha*, three younger women and eight children, two being babies in arms. I took leave when politeness permitted, and continued my way.

We returned to Bahzané by way of the little gorge and the shrine of Shaikh Mand. The sound of the rushing stream was punctuated by the thump-thump of the women's clubs at the washing-pool where clothes were spread out on the hot rocks and naked children bathed whilst their mothers worked. The upper stream passes by the shrine and I sat on its bank to rest. A few children gathered round me, shy but gentle-mannered. One boy, about eleven, with an intelligent merry face like one of Murillo's beggar boys, was, he informed me, the son of the Qawwal Salman, whom I had met in

The shrine of Shaikh Mand, Bahzane.

Seen from the street : the courtyard of a Yazidi house, Bahzane.

Bahzané on the previous day, and had promised to visit. Two little girls carried baby brothers. When they pressed too close in friendly curiosity, Salman's son, whose name he told me was Khidhr, ordered them back, and when I crossed the stream by the stepping-stones he offered me his hand. By the swift stream grew a sacred mulberry-tree; "Hajji Khalu," Khidhr told me, and its cult being probably connected with that of the sacred spring of Shaikh Mand. Khidhr begged that I should now come to his father's house. So we set off through the narrow streets, dogs barking on the wall-tops just by our heads. "They bark at any stranger from another village," explained Khidhr.

Qawwal Salman was expecting us and met me in the courtyard, but before going to sit with the men upstairs, I asked that Khidhr might take me to his mother. The small living-room was crowded with women, and as usual a mattress and cushions were dragged out, upon which they insisted I should sit.

We began to talk clothes, and amidst much merriment I wrote down the names of all their garments, undergarments and jewellery. Only younger women wear the flashing headdresses of coins, amongst which I once espied an English sixpence. The helmet-cap is called the *cumédravé*, and as soon as a woman has passed her thirtieth year, or even before, she hands on the heirloom to a younger daughter or niece. Older women wear only a turban, a dark-coloured kerchief being folded across the forehead, and matrons bring the white wimple, a loose white veil called the *lachek*, placed over the turban, across the lower part of the face.

Girls wear more ornaments than their mothers. The turban, the *jamadāni*, is composed of several silk kerchiefs, and into these are stuck a silver pin with a ball head, to which a second pin is attached by a chain[1] so arranged that the chain is draped at one side of the

[1] *Derzi.*

turban. The centre of the head is uncovered by the turban and shows the *cumédravé* in all its glory. The dress is elaborate. A long chemise [1] and baggy trousers [2] are worn, and above these in chilly weather a short sleeveless jacket.[3] Next comes an outer jacket [4] and over all is draped the *meyzār*, a woollen toga or shawl which hangs loose and square behind, and which is brought under the left arm and knotted on the right shoulder. This is homespun, and the women dye it red, yellow or orange, often adding embroidery in other colours. As for jewellery, they wear earrings,[5] usually of gold filigree with a stone or two, and often triangular in shape. Bracelets,[6] hinged and fastened with a pin securing the two halves, are of silver or gold, and sometimes set with precious or semi-precious stones. Yazidi girls wear no anklets, but prefer several necklaces of beads and wear a long silver chain round the neck to which is attached a large crescent-shaped ornament [7] like an amulet-case and triangular silver boxes on either side of it. These three cases are further decorated with small silver bells—nine hang from the crescent and three apiece from the triangles. I asked if these boxes contained talismans, but they told me No, they were filled with bees' wax.

Round the waist the girls wear a soft folded sash [8]; brides, and even some of the unmarried girls, wear a stiff belt about an inch and a half wide fastened with a huge embossed silver buckle, secured by a silver pin.

When it came to looking at their tattooing, the women laughingly shooed away the men who waited at the doorway. But of tattooing I will speak elsewhere.

I could no longer keep my hosts waiting, and Khidhr took me from the courtyard by the outside stairway to the upper room.

[1] *Krās* or *kirāz*. [2] *Darpeh* (accent on last syllable). [3] *Bindāna*. [4] *Kōtek*. [5] *Gohar*. [6] *Bazinn*. [7] *Barbengq*. [8] *Qambara*.

The *qawwāl*, a bearded man with a gentle expression, had prepared tea, and I stayed his hand as he prepared to fill the tea-glass with sugar. "What kind of tea is that?" they all exclaimed with feigned disgust, for their own tea is a syrup. Later on my kind host roast, ground and made me coffee. In this upper room were benches of a width convenient for sitting cross-legged, and a number of guests were gathered round the room.

Conversation fell upon foods forbidden to the Yazidis, and I asked Qawwal Salman to enlighten me on this matter as I had heard conflicting reports.

"Cabbage we may not eat," he said, "but cauliflower is allowed. *Lūbia* (broad-beans), ladies'-fingers [1] and lettuce are forbidden."

Some of the men protested. "Not *lūbia*!"

"In the Sinjar they eat broad-beans," he insisted, "but here it is forbidden. As to ladies'-fingers, there are those who eat them, but it should not be. Fish is *harām* because it cannot be slaughtered in the proper way, but as for other meats, we may kill and eat any creature permitted by Moslem law, including gazelle and birds. Like Moslems, we eat no pig."

I asked the *qawwāl* about sowing and harvest, for the Sabba in the south will neither sow nor transplant in the dark of the moon. He replied that the Yazidis had no preference for the crescent moon.

When I rose to go, he offered to take me to an olive-grove about half an hour away from Bahzané to see the *mazār* of Shaikh Ubekr. (In repeating the name I said Shaikh *Abu* Bekr, but was corrected. "The name is Shaikh *Ubekr*," said someone in the room, "and it means a pure man who is not married.")

Accordingly we set out, crossing the stream by the olive-trees under which ganders and geese with families of yellow goslings cropped the grass and hissed at us as

[1] *Bāmia*: a glutinous vegetable, often dried for future use.

we passed. Farther up the valley were olive-presses cut in the living rock. On a sloping shelf of rock a barefoot man stood treading out the oil from a sack of olives. Near him water was being heated in pots, and from time to time a basinful was handed to him as he kept up his measured dance on the olives. He poured the hot water over the sack as if it were a libation to some god of increase, not ceasing the while to tread. The oil which oozed from the sack ran over the rock, fell into a cistern of water beneath and gathered on the surface, to be skimmed off later and stored in petroleum-tins.

The shrine of Shaikh Ubekr lies to the north-west. The building is surmounted by a conical fluted spire, the courtyard is surrounded by a low wall, and at the back of the shrine is a room and kitchen for pilgrims. Its real sanctity, however, lies in the cave beside it, the floor of which is partly submerged in ice-cold clear water from a spring in the rock. This water in flowing out has cut its way deep through ferny banks to irrigate an olive-grove. In the sacred pool are small fish and what appear to be enormous tadpoles, but which are neither black nor of the usual shape. Maiden-hair grows on the steep banks of the stream—good, said Jiddan, for curing warts. By the sacred spring, as usual, stood the sacred tree, a mulberry, to which many votive rags had been tied.

I asked the *qawwāl* how the shrine-spires are made.

"First," he said, "a tall pole, of the wood called *ispindar* (poplar) is brought as an offering, together with thinner poles of the same wood. A disc pierced with holes is fitted to the top of the centre pole, and into these holes, slanting outwards at the bottom, are placed the thinner poles. Then they are cemented over, that is, they are covered with *juss*."

We returned, and on the way back saw children collecting something from the surface of a rock.

"What are they scraping up?" I asked.

"*Khatūn*, they are collecting dust to put between the babies' legs when they are small. You buy *botra* (powder) from a chemist for your children; we use this dust, which is free."

Another day I gathered some up to examine it. It was a fine, greenish-grey clay, possibly a form of fuller's earth.

Chapter VI

SITT GULĒ

"He set his knee stoutly against the rock, and straightway by the spring poplars and elm-trees shaded a shadowy glade, arched overhead they grew, and pleached with leaves of green."

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll VII.*

NO water was laid on to our house nor to any house in the village, so once a day a donkey, with earthenware pitchers slung across its back, clattered into the courtyard and water was poured into the large porous jar which stood there on a wooden stand. The filtered water dripped into a smaller pot beneath.

When Mikhail and I had finished our daily conference on food—meat was not always obtainable in the village and fowls not easy to buy, for everyone had their own—Jiddan and I set off up the mountain-side, meaning to reach the ruins of an ancient stone fortress visible on the heights above. As we mounted we met and chatted with peasant women who complained that though rains in the early year had been good, more showers were needed because of the blight that had attacked the barley. They pointed to yellowing and drooping blades and said that rain would give the young shoots strength to resist it, and rains were still due before the summer drought. They scanned the sky with watchful eyes.

The crops in the hill-country are not irrigated by rivers as in the south, but are, like English fields, dependent upon the sky. I asked the *mukhtār* one day what was done in a dry season and he told me of a rain charm. A boy and girl go from house to house in the

village and perform a dance, at the end of which each householder throws water upon them. At the same time I learnt that at the beginning of the harvest a sheep is sacrificed, and another when the last sheaf is gathered in.

The higher we travelled by the rocky track, the more numerous and varied were the flowers. Besides umbelliferae, buttercups, ranunculus and the red and yellow adonis, there were many strange to me. Especially lovely was a flower like a yellow rock-rose, with a leaf and stem like a flaxplant.[1] Jiddan gathered a bunch of it, and it perfumed our living-room for days. Thistles were plentiful and in particular a handsome thistle with milky markings called *kivār*[2] by the Kurds. It is common in Sicily, a country of which I was reminded at every step, and the peasants there explain the white markings by saying that the Virgin's milk was so generous that as she sat in the fields with the Holy Child, it spurted out and marked the green leaves for evermore. Another thistle was the *kaūb*.[3] It is edible, and as vegetables were difficult to come by in Baashika except as gifts, Mikhail had made us a dish of these the night before, sprinkled with cheese, and extremely good it was. I tasted *kaūb* first in the desert when I was the guest of the Shammar Bedouin. Another vegetable that we gathered for ourselves is called *khubbāz* by the Arabs; it is a common weed, with a leaf like the mallow, and tastes like spinach.

We found that we had missed the path to the *qasr*, which was separated from us by a ravine, so climbed up rocks to a plateau from which we could see over long plains and blue hills for fifty miles or more. Here we added our stones to a cairn at the highest point. Jiddan gazed towards the Jebel Sinjar, where he had left his wife and two young children, and praised its air and scenery. Near his home, he said, was a *mazār*

[1] Possibly *Linum mucronatum*. [2] *Silybum Marianum*.
[3] *Gundelia Tournefortii*.

called Shaikh Abu-l-Qāsim. Pilgrims who visit it and abstain from animal food for seven days and nights are, he said, sure to get their desire, but they must not forget to pay the guardian as much as they can, twenty *fils*, fifty *fils*, or even one hundred. (That is, two shillings—cheap for the wish of one's heart.) I asked about the cleft in the rocks said to be in the Jebel Sinjar, into which money and jewels have been cast by Yazidis for centuries. Of this I heard a story. A Yazidi, thinking of the treasure lying at the bottom of the chasm, had an idea. He lowered a piece of wood, thickly smeared with pitch, into the depths on a long rope. Fishing like this, he managed to secure some coins and ornaments. He could not keep his El Dorado to himself, however, and when his secret leaked out, the inhabitants of the mountain chased him and he fled in terror of his life.

"Over there," said Jiddan, pointing north-east, "is Shaikh 'Adi, whither, God willing, *khatūn*, we shall go together." He would go gladly, for he had not been there on pilgrimage since he was taken as a child.

On the way down we paused before a stream gushing from a green pocket on the hillside. We followed it to the spring which fed it, where grass grew lush beneath the poplar-trees. Here at the fountain-head was a tiny shrine with a minute fluted spire and a guardian *qawwāl*. The usual sacred tree had withered, but nevertheless was adorned with rags of many colours, and a sacred stone beneath the cone was in a recess, closed by a stone disc, like a cupboard. Within it was an olive-oil lamp of classic pattern. Some two–three women with their children were whiling the time by the spring: the girls had put red ranunculus in their hair. Their hands and arms were tattooed, and they were amused by my interest in the designs. The *qawwāl*, bearded and benign, told me that his wife was a *daggāga*, a tattooist, by profession. We asked

about the shrine as the *qawwāl* removed the disc so that we might place an offering by the stone. "Those who have fever," he said, "tie rags to the tree and, by the mercy of God, it leaves them."

The patron of this small shrine, enclosed by a rough wall between the stones of which grew borage, ranunculus and thistles, was Azrael, yet in such a spot He, the Death-Angel, seemed far away. Even when I returned to our own courtyard, where the happy twitter of swallows filled the archway as they darted to and fro to their nestlings, it was hard to realize when I opened letters from Baghdad, that He was active and that bombs and machine-guns were scattering death in Norway. The news was troubling, for, till now, the absence of radio and daily papers had almost persuaded me that war was an evil dream.

* * * * *

On the previous morning in Bahzané, seeing in the village street the exiled *shaïkh* on a neighbouring roof, I shouted across to ask after his little daughter. He shouted back "Better!" and when Rashid arrived to ask me to drink tea at his house, news came that the child was still alive. With Rashid came the aged *shaïkha*, Sitt Gulé, to return my visit to her and to tell me that she purposed to journey to Mosul where her son was imprisoned, to plead with the *Mutesarrif* for his release. There was injustice, she said. Men judged by the courts-martial had been given sentences of fifteen years, whereas her son had been sentenced by a civil court to eight. Amnesty had been granted to those imprisoned by the courts-martial, but her son, convicted of a lighter offence, still languished in prison. Would I, whose husband was of the *hukūma*, in the Ministry of Justice, write a letter to the *Mutesarrif* and secure his liberty?

How difficult it was to explain to her as gently as I

could that to reverse or influence a sentence passed by the courts was neither in my power nor my husband's. In this country where public duty is often subordinated to the claims of family interest or private friendship, the cold Western ideal of absolute impersonality in official matters seems both unnatural and inhuman. I tried later to explain this to Rashid, when I returned with him to sit under his pergola of young vines. He boiled a kettle and made me a glass of tricolour tea, white at the bottom where sugar had melted with hot water, above that an infusion of young lemon leaves, pale green, and above that the amber of the tea. "True," said he, but still perhaps a little puzzled. "You English have other ways. But I understand something of the manners of English and Americans, for I was long with them when they were working at Tell Billa." He went on to talk of the excavators, especially of his admiration for Dr. Speiser, of whom every one in the village spoke well. This led us on to speak of the change that was coming over the ideas of the people with the introduction of the State schools. Rashid pointed out that the difficulty was that the cultivation of the land was almost entirely in the hands of the Yazidis, and at some seasons farmers could ill spare the help of their children. Moreover, they feared that the schools would rob them of their sons and send them to the cities.

I assured him that with that point of view I was in sympathy and that education authorities no doubt would eventually realize these difficulties and meet them. Inwardly, I contrasted the good manners of the peasant lads I met with those of elder lads in Government khaki that I met coming from school. These were inclined to talk loudly, and for my benefit as I passed, although, when I had occasion to speak to them about anything, their nationalistic assertiveness deflated, and their natural courtesy reasserted itself. Moreover, it seemed to

me that the children I saw in the fields had not only the advantage in manners, but were equal in intelligence and quickness to any of the school-bred youngsters.

It soon got abroad that letters had been brought to me and I was questioned about the news. This happened every time that a police car brought me mail, and if I could say that some successes had fallen to the Allies, there were smiles and " Allah be thanked ! "

Sitt Gulé had offered to conduct me to some of the shrines ; accordingly, in the later afternoon, after I had shared my news with the *mudīr* of the village, she came to fulfil her promise. She had been handsome in her youth and still carried herself as erect as a girl. Her ankles, thrust into worn old slippers, were slim, and her skin almost as white as her clothes. As we walked uphill she told me, in a disjointed way, more of her history. We paused by the water-mill to enjoy the wholesome smell of flour and watch the water swirling up from beneath the wheel, then continued past the olive-presses, following the stream between the green hills.

" Yes," she said, " I have known trouble, much trouble. My husband was in prison fifteen years, kept there by the Turks. He was a good man, never killed anyone, nor stole nor——" but I forget the string of negative virtues. His crime, it seemed, was of having opposed the Government in some vague way—the Yazidis have got the habit of thinking all " Governments " their natural oppressors, and accept them like the drought or the storm.

That was not all. " I had three children, *khatūn* ; two sons, my son that is in prison in Mosul and another, his younger brother, and the third was a daughter. Lady ! Before me, in my very presence, my younger son slew my daughter : he cut her throat before my eyes." Her voice grew deep as we picked our way over the stones.

"Why?" I asked. "Why? What were his reasons?"

"There was Talk," she answered darkly. "The girl was sweet and there was Talk about her."

"Talk" (*hāchi* in the vulgar Arabic) often means scandal about the girl's chastity, but I learnt later that there was no question of this, it was only a case of love outside the caste. The old *shaikha*, however, did not explain. She only said, as if to herself, "The girl was sweet, and there was Talk. I had but the one, and she was seventeen, no older."

"What happened to him?" I asked. She replied that he had been tried for his life, but that as it was a question of family honour, he had been cast into prison. His wife, mother of a child, was even now in her house together with his elder brother's two wives and children. The thing had happened a short four months ago, and she had nothing to say against the judgement for, said she, he must pay for taking his sister's life.

"But my elder son," she said, "his brother, is unjustly in prison, and, *khatūn*, it is for him that I trouble, and work to get him out——" We were back at the old sad question.

By this time we had reached the upper washing-pool at Ras al-'Ain, where the women knelt on the stones with their fat cakes of home-made soap beside them, thumping and wringing and rinsing. I followed her to the spot where the stream disappears behind the rocks.

"Come!" she said, and began to climb up the smooth rock, putting her foot into crevices here and there. I followed half unwillingly, for I thought of returning. She persisted, "Come, come!"

Round the corner were worn steps cut in the rock. Over the boulder a sharp turn to the right brought us into a cavern, the birthplace of the spring, for here it issued from the rock.

Women at the washing-pool, Ras al-'Ain.

Ras al-'Ain : behind the rock in the foreground is the sacred cavern containing the rock sculptures.

"This," she said, "is Kaf!"

I give the word as she pronounced it, although a schoolmaster pointed out later that the word is *kahaf*, meaning simply, "cavern". I am certain, however, that to Sitt Gulé, whose native language is Kurdish, Kaf is the name of the genius of the place. She pointed out his image to me. Within the cave, where the water has worn a deep channel bisecting the floor, a chamber is formed in the natural rock and the hand of man has been at work. Here are niches, blackened by the smoke of votive lamps, shelves for offerings and lights. Three panels are carved within the chamber. One is completely defaced. A second contains a single seated figure facing the worshipper, almost Buddha-like in its dignity and repose, though it is not cross-legged. The figure wears a conical cap, and is seated in a conventional concave frame, shaped like a lotus or flower-bud. The third panel is chipped and defaced, but a seated and bearded personage also wearing a conical cap is plainly visible, also a procession advancing towards him on a wave of movement and worship. A lifted arm holds a dish aloft, but most of the detail has been destroyed. On the floor of the chamber is traced an oblong with twelve small round depressions, placed six a side, possibly a gaming-board. Crossing the stream to the other part of the chamber, one can see on the rock above the spring the damaged full-face low-relief of a head, bearded and wearing a headgear similar to that of the other two figures. A niche containing a lamp of antique pattern is cut into the rock beside it. On my return to Baghdad, I reported these carvings to the Department of Antiquities, which had no record of the place.

Two girls followed us into the cave. One said that the figure was Kaf, the other, that it was just the name of the shrine. The water, they said, was always cold, and in summer if they bathed here, it was "like ice".

One of the girls, a Moslem but wearing the Kurdish dress worn here irrespective of faith, accompanied us as far as the mill. She was tall, with eyes grey-green like clear sea-water, with black lashes, and an oval face. I remarked upon her beauty when she had left us, with a protective "Mashallah", for one must not praise without invoking the name of God.

The next morning Sitt Gulé was to show me more of the shrines. Jiddan and I called for her. She was ready for us and took us first to the largest and most important shrine of Baashika, that of the Shaikh Muhammad al-Huneyfi. It stands at the edge of the village, hard by the modest Jacobite church, which, again, is a bare stone's throw from the ambitious Latin building. It is at Shaikh Muhammad's shrine that the religious ceremonies of the spring feast take place, and the grassy open space before it is used both as fairground and dancing floor.

We could not get in: the gate to the courtyard and garden was locked, so we took instead the road to Bahzané. There are two paths to that village, and just where they fork the *shaïkha* paused by a *mazār* roughly enclosed by a low wall. There was no tomb or cone, the object of veneration being merely a large stone set in the semicircular enclosure. On either side of the stone were a number of broken pitchers and with them a rusty tin can or so, also a wooden spoon carved from a single piece of wood.

Sitt Gulé bent to kiss the wall in several places, and a woman, passing and seeing her devotion, paused by us to say that one day when walking by the shrine she had omitted to "visit", that is, to kiss it. "And from that moment," said she, "my eye swelled up and became painful." So saying, she too bent and kissed the stone and walls before reshouldering her bundle and going her way.

"This," said Sitt Gulé, sitting on the low wall, "is

the *mazār* of Shaikh Mus-as-Sor (Mus-the-Red) ", and she explained the broken pottery. Those who suffer from itch or any skin affection, visit the shrine bearing water in a vessel. When they have saluted the place, they pour the water on the ground, scrape up some moistened dust, and apply it to the part affected, after which they either break the pitcher, or cast down the vessel, leaving it behind them. " You English," said she, half-smiling, " buy bottles of *dāwa* (medicine) from a doctor, but we go to our shrines."

Jiddan added to this by saying that some *shaikhs* kept by them boxes of dust from various shrines, each good for some complaint such as sore eyes, aching limbs, constipation or diarrhoea. Drunk in water for internal complaints or applied outwardly for external, these were effectual cures if taken after seven days' fasting and prayer.

We followed the left or lower road, and came on another shrine. This time it was a low grave of the common type, rough stones marking head and foot, and without inscription. Like Shaikh Mus it was surrounded by mounds of potsherds, rusty cans and glass bottles. The headstone had disappeared under a skein of white woollen threads, these being twisted round so as to envelop completely the stone beneath. The name of the patron is Pir Mamé, and the shrine is famed for curing heart- or headache. It is not enough to pour water and apply the sacred clay, but a fair white woollen thread, home-spun and washed by a mother and a daughter, must be brought and twined round the headstone.

Skirting the olive-groves below Bahzané the erect old woman held out her bare arm. " Feel ! " said she.

Her skin was burning and dry and the pulse was rapid. " You have fever," I exclaimed, concerned. " Let us return at once ! "

"It is nothing," said she.

"Doesn't your head ache?"

She declared that it did not, and that in any case she intended to go to Mosul at dawn the next day to see the *Mutesarrif*.

Finding her resolved to proceed, we followed her to to the *mazār* of Shaikh Mas'ud. This consists of a small building surmounted by the usual fluted cone, and to the east, of a small courtyard surrounded by a wall low enough to step over. A smaller rounded cone with a hole in it for offerings is placed at the north-west corner of the shrine. Here Sitt Gulé prayed long and fervently in Kurdish, kissing the corner stone many times—"for my son", she said, looking at me and always hoping that I might be an answer to her prayers.

Near by, close to Bahzané, is another shrine, similar to that of Shaikh Mas'ud, built above a grave. A woman passing cried out angrily when she saw me writing down its name, Shaikh 'Abd-ul-'Aziz, in my note-book, "Do not let her take its likeness!"

The *shaikha*, with the authority of superior caste, rebuked her intolerance.

We all called in at the house of the *shaikh* in Bahzané to inquire again after the health of the injured child and were cordially received. The little girl was not only alive, but up and about, though with a very swollen and blackened eye. The *shaikh* said that he would come to see me, and my hope was high that he would do so and would talk, but, in spite of his obvious friendliness, he never kept his word. It is probable that the people of Bahzané, more fanatical than those of Baashika, dissuaded him from his purpose, for he sent me an odd message, "that he was afraid to come".

We returned by the upper road, passing by the shrine of Shaikh Sajaddin, white and shining upon its green hill-top. Sitt Gulé pointed it out as that of her ancestor.

Then, negligently, she mentioned a still more illustrious relative—the Archangel Gabriel.[1]

"Jibrail," she said, "is also of our family. He who cuts off the head of the dead."

"Cuts off the head of the dead?" I repeated, slightly aghast.

"Yes," she replied. "Do not the angels Azrael and Gabriel come at the time of death? It is Gabriel who cuts off the head to let the *ruh* fly out."

I asked a *qawwāl* later about this belief and he qualified Sitt Gulé's statement. "He does not cut off the head," he said, "he cuts the throat so that the spirit can come forth."

Other white cone-shrines on the hill-tops between the two villages are those of Shaikh Hasan al-Basri,[2] below which was a peasant woman devoutly kissing the rock, and a group dedicated to Shaikh Zindan, his sister, Sitt Nefisah and his mother Khadijah. Sitt Gulé told me that Shaikh Zindan, being imprisoned in Damascus, sent a message by carrier pigeon to his mother and sister in the Hakkari mountains. They travelled to Syria, and pleaded for him so movingly that he was released.

We returned to Baashika, and I wrote a letter for the *shaikha* to take with her on the morrow. I did not venture to write to the *Mutesarrif* personally, lest it be said that an Englishwoman was attempting to interfere with official matters. Addressing those convenient people "whom it may concern", I told of the old woman's difficulties and poverty and hoped that if the sentence could be mitigated in any way without inter-

[1] Yazidi legend considers the companions of Shaikh 'Adi too holy to have married and had children in the ordinary way, indeed, it is claimed that they were incarnations of angels, or descended from such incarnations. Hence Sitt Gulé was merely voicing the family tradition.

[2] Either a cenotaph, like many other shrines, or else wrongly named. The tomb of Hasan al-Basri is shown at Shaikh 'Adi.

fering with the course of justice, her circumstances might be taken into consideration. The letter was never delivered. Burning with fever, the old woman set out for the journey to Mosul the next day, and when she got there, found that the *Mutesarrif* had left Mosul in order to see some locust-fighting operations in a village miles away.

Chapter VII

THE MONASTERY ON THE ROCK

" By the guidance of some one of the immortals hast thou come hither, stranger. . . ."

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XXV.*

ON the Friday morning, when I looked at storm-clouds gathering, I decided to make that day a long-planned pilgrimage, this time to a Christian and not a Yazidi saint, before heavy rain should make the road impassable.

" Go to the police," I said to Mikhail. " See if they can find us a car to take us to Mar Matti."

I left him to it, for Sairey Gamp had arrived, full of importance, to take me to see a newly-delivered mother. " Not a Yazidi," she said apologetically, " but a Moslem."

I followed her through the narrow alleys of the village until we arrived at a yard full of mess and dung where fowls scratched and a ragged dog barked at us and was shouted quiet. I went down some mud steps into the cellar where the woman who had just been delivered lay on the floor with a cotton quilt spread over her. She greeted me and tried to rise till I restrained her. The baby, a small chrysalis, its head bandaged and bound and its eye-rims blackened with antimony, was sleeping beside her. Eggs and *leban* and thin Kurdish bread were brought so that the visit might have no evil effect, so I ate, uttered many " Mashallahs " to keep off the Evil Eye, and then began to excuse myself.

" I am going to the *deir* of Mar Matti, and I will ask a blessing on you and your child." The woman

smiled, for the saint is honoured by Moslems, and when I slipped some silver into the baby's clothing, they thanked Allah for my gift. As I left, Mother Gamp showed me the after-birth put carefully aside in a petroleum tin. She lifted it out, wrapped it in a scrap of white woollen cloth, ran a threaded needle into the folds, and told me that she would bury it later.

"Where?" I asked.

"Outside the village," she replied.[1]

When I returned, a rickety Ford stood before our door, and the driver, a sad-faced man called 'Aziz, awaited me. For thirty shillings he would take us there and back. I had heard that the journey to the monastery was a bare hour, and as taxis are usually cheap, I murmured at the price. "But the road is bad," the police intervened anxiously, for they had doubtless arranged matters previously. "*Khatūn*, 'Aziz has just paid sixty pounds for his car!"

So into the Ford we got, Mikhail delighted because he was going on pilgrimage to a celebrated shrine, Jiddan because Mar Matti is invoked by Yazidis as well as Christians, and a Kurdish policeman who begged that he might come too, for he was desirous of the *barraka* or blessing that results from a visit to a holy place.

The road was but a track through cornfields and flowers which passed over stream and ditch, following the line of the foothills until it reached the Akkra highway. After that, it turned left towards the mountains, and became steadily worse. In places it seemed likely that the Ford might smash a spring or fall on its side, but 'Aziz managed to keep it going with a melancholy pride in its acrobatic feats. A particularly vicious spot was just below a village called Bir Banek, where lorries laden with marble from the quarries had worn a deep hole in the road.

[1] It was a Moslem birth: it seems that Yazidis prefer the house-precincts.

There and in other places we preferred to get out and walk rather than endure the violent jolting to our spines. At Bir Banek there is a *bīr* (well), a round deep pond covered thickly with green scum. In winter the villagers drink from a mountain stream which crosses the road beside it, but in summer they subsist on the apparently unwholesome *bīr*.

Soon the car descended towards a valley in which two villages, Mergi and Mughara, were to be seen beneath us, each a nest of brown, flat-roofed houses. Both these villages are Christian. Near Mergi we passed a girl dressed in wedding garments, so gay that I regret still not having stopped to take her photograph. The *mukhtār* of Mergi addressed us from his house-top in hospitable tones, begging us to enter and refresh ourselves, but, wishing to press on, we thanked him and promised to visit him on our return. Here we left 'Aziz and his car, and set off on foot towards the monastery set high up against the face of the rock. It was a full hour's climb by the steeply winding mules' path cut in the rock, in places almost a stairway. Twice we paused to rest and regain our breath, once by an oak-tree to which votive rags were tied. We asked of a Kurdish girl stepping lightly down the path what the tree was called, and she replied that it was named "Qatal Lusia", as once a woman named Lusia had been murdered at its foot. A little above the tree a ruined aqueduct chiselled in the living rock had served to bring water from a broken cistern above, and close by was a small olive-grove on a jutting shelf.

As we toiled up the last stretch of rock, a small black-clad figure wearing a monkish cap came smiling down to meet us, bearing a pitcher and a glass, and poured me out a drink of clear cold water. The boy, aged perhaps twelve, was a novice in the monastery school. We passed a ruined gate, for the present monastery occupies a smaller space than the ancient

deir and, according to the *mutrān*, the resident bishop, twelve thousand monks were once housed on the rock and in the refectory three hundred sat to eat at a time. Allowing for exaggeration, it is evident that it has seen far more spacious times, since to-day it shelters but twenty-five monks in all, together with a few boy novices. Climbing various steps and stairways, we were taken at once to the *mutrān's* cell, a falcon's nest of a room, hung as it were in space above the blue champaign beneath.

His Holiness, a handsome old man with a patriarchal white beard, sat upon the floor, looking magnificent in his black robe over a scarlet and purple cassock or under-dress, a large gold cross hanging from his neck. Coffee was served, first the thick sweet Turkish brew, and then the clean-tasting bitter Arab, while the *mutrān* conversed with us his guests. He asked, how fared the war? He had seen much trouble and persecution, he said, and recalled that during the Armenian massacres monks had been murdered on the mere score of being Christians. He talked of recent earthquakes and floods in Turkey: he considered them, he said sombrely, a delayed judgement of God upon their wickedness. I protested in vain: "The Turks are now our Allies and these poor people who suffered in the earthquake are not the Turks who slew the Armenians, but simple village folk!" But ancient wrongs lay heavy on his soul and he repeated sonorously, "Fire came from heaven and destroyed them: the earth shook and the floods came! The wheels of the Lord's vengeance turn slowly, the children pay for the sins of the fathers!" It was as if one listened to a minor prophet, and I abandoned the dispute.

We were entrusted to a tall young monk with a lively black eye, by name Rahab Daud, that is, Monk David. The lower courtyards, of vast extent, are used for sheep, goats and pack-animals, and a combined

The Mutran, Deir of Mar Matti.
[*The monk Daud on his right.*]

Yazidi women : mother and daughter.

odour of goat and mule hangs about the whole place. We went constantly up and down by steps and roof-terraces : the place is perched on all levels and has an unpremeditated, haphazard effect caused by the fact that it has adapted itself to communities of varying size and epoch, and adjusted itself to vicissitudes of prosperity.

We went first into the lower church and were taken directly into a chapel at the north side of the sanctuary where Mar Matti himself is buried. This saint lived in Sasanian times and his life and miracles are described in a booklet which Rahab Daud gave me. The miracles have gone on uninterruptedly till to-day, according to the monks, and a pilgrimage to the tomb brings benefit and healing. The inscription, in Strangelo on a marble slab, replaced an earlier, destroyed during a sack of the place. I noticed that the cross on the inscription is one that recurs repeatedly in the sacred buildings, each of the three arms being itself a cross with fleur-de-lis extremities. The Jacobites do not depict a figure on the cross, nor have they images or pictures in their churches, such being, they say, idolatry. The cross is for them not so much an image to recall Christ's death, as a symbol of life eternal.

Other tombs are in the same chapel, one being that of Yuhana bar Abri of Malta, who was born in 1226 and died in 1268. In the north-east corner of the church all the *mutrāns* are buried. When a bishop dies, the face of the stone wall is unsealed, and the dead prelate taken to the rock-chamber below, where he is seated amongst his predecessors, in full canonicals, on a chair or throne. It must be a ghastly session there below of seated skeletons in mouldering pomp. Ordinary monks are laid in another and larger rock-chamber on the north side of the church. Here, Rahab Daud said, the ground is deep with rusty-red dust and crumbling bones, all that is left of dead and gone brethren. There

are other rock-chambers ; one leads to a long tunnel which communicated with another monastery, that of Brahom, an hour and a half's distance away. Parts of this tunnel are so narrow that a man must needs wriggle through like a snake, but the passage is no longer used, having become blocked by a fall of rock.

In the chancel is a fine example of the mediaeval silversmith's art in the cover to the Gospels on the lectern. It depicts the Crucifixion and the four Evangelists. Into the sanctuary itself we did not go, for none but a monk or *mutrān* may set foot in it. Should a married priest venture inside, said Rahab Daud solemnly, he and his wife would die.

The upper church, partly hewn out of the living rock, and called the Kaniseh as-Sayyideh, is said to be yet older. It is dedicated to Mariam, wife of Mar Shimuni, who, together with her husband and her seven children, were martyred by King Antiochus. Rahab Daud described the tortures which this family of saints had endured, and spoke of the miracles they perform even to-day. Here the Kurdish policeman chimed in, for, although a Moslem, he had witnessed the yearly miracle which takes place at the festival of Mar Shimuni in the church dedicated to him at the village of Karakosh. At the time of the feast, he said, he entered the church which was packed with people anxious to see the wonder, for, at a certain time, on one of the church walls appear the shadows of the martyred king, his wife, Queen Mariam, and their seven children riding on horses. Women who desire children or have any other wish, fling their kerchiefs at the holy shadows, and if their vow is accepted, the kerchiefs stick to the wall. " I saw this with my own eyes," affirmed the policeman.

From this, the conversation passed to the intercession of saints. " *Khatūn*, you are a Protestant, and the Protestants do not believe in the help of saints," said

Daud, informing the others of my sad condition. "But we say it is like this. Say that I have a case in the courts and I wish for a favourable judgement, what do I do? I know that your honour is the wife of the Adviser to the Ministry of Justice, and I write to you and I say, 'Speak to the judge, speak to your husband, speak to the Adviser, so that I may be helped in the matter.'"

I thought of Sitt Gulé and her belief that it was in my power to have her son instantly released from prison, and I realized once again how hopeless it is to expect the Western view of these matters, which seems so churlish, to be understood of these simple reasoners. No matter to them that such methods may be abused and become the instrument of gross injustice; to these drawbacks they are inured. A kinsman must help his kinsfolk, a friend a friend, and a patron a suppliant, that is all, and finer aspects trouble them not a whit.

"Have you the courage to do a little climbing?" asked Daud, in consideration for my grey hairs. But it was hardly worthy of the name. First steps, then a little shuffling along a narrow ledge on which herbs and wild flowers grew like a rock-garden and we stood at the highest point of the monastery. There was another church in a cavern higher up on the mountain-side, but it meant more climbing and more time, and I abandoned the idea of visiting it.

We saw the dairy and a kitchen partly hewn from the rock, where women-cooks and dairymaids were busy, and then we were taken to see a cavern in which ice-cold water dripped perpetually from the roof, and glistened on the smooth sides. Daud also took us to see the library, sadly depleted of its once magnificent store of manuscripts and books, most of which have been either burnt or stolen. He could only show a few parchment manuscripts in the decorative Eastern Syriac character.

Although the monks were still fasting—and with the Jacobites that means entire abstention from all animal products for fifty days—they had prepared for us a collation of curds, fried eggs, unleavened bread and cream. Before we left, Daud showed us his own cell, decorated with a few religious pictures and furnished with a few pious books, and begged me not to forget to send him his photograph. "Write down my name, lest you forget."

"I shall not forget. Rahab Daud ibn Suleyman!"

He clapped his hands delighted. "That is right, for I am a David son of Solomon! My father was called Solomon."

So we took our leave and set off downwards. Just as we started, we met the *mukhtār* of Mergi's brother and he counselled that we should turn aside to visit a large cavern on the path which leads down to the village of Mughara. We did so, and entered a large cave dripping with water and an artificially contrived rock-chamber in which there was a shower-bath of heavy drops. It was malodorous, and the grassy plateau outside was marred by discarded lettuce leaves, newspaper and orange-peel, the sorry token that a hundred and fifty girls from a Government school in Mosul had made an excursion to the monastery the day before. No villagers would have made such a mess: moreover, luckily, they seldom have paper to leave behind them.

The way down was quick and easy, but we stopped by the sacred oak to tear up a pattern of a dress-material which was luckily in my bag, so that Jiddan, the Kurdish policeman and I were all able to tie votive rags to its twigs—Mikhail had gone before to bring the car nearer. 'Aziz was therefore waiting for us at the foot, and drove us in good style to the *mukhtār's* house.

Our host was a fine solid man of some sixty years. His son met us in the doorway and took us up to him, in the reception chamber where he sat smoking his

qaliūn with village friends. These were sturdy peasants wearing Kurdish dress, baggy embroidered trousers, bird's-nest turbans and huge multi-coloured belts into which business-like daggers were thrust. They looked as if a doctor would have made a poor living amongst them.

With unstinting hand the *mukhtār* had prepared us a sumptuous meal, fresh-made bread, sheeps' curds, green onions, mounds of rice and bowls of cream with *shenīna* [1] and glasses of tea to drink. All this was the more kindly because every man in the village was fasting, and their mouths must have watered at the meal.

The room was roofed with branches of poplar, twigs, leaves and all, and from the unglazed windows we gazed over the valley and breathed the herb-pungent air. A towel was spread on my lap, basin and soap were brought that I might cleanse my fingers before eating, and we were urged to fall to. The *mukhtār* sat on his bench, hospitably benign, while his son, a handsome lad, plied us with food. On the wall hung a gazelle's head: "my son shot it", said his father. "He is a good *sogman* and always brings back plenty of game from the hills."

He assured me that he constrained all pilgrims who visited the monastery to come and eat with him. "The monastery's guests are mine," he said.

Near his house-door stood the very emblem of his mountain-hospitality, a large *tannūr*, an earthenware bread-oven, and upon its side was a cross, both amulet and sign of its owner's faith.

[1] Curded milk beaten with water.

Chapter VIII

"SAIREY GAMP" AGAIN

"The old wife has spoken her oracles."
THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XV.*

THE midwife, the old Hajjia, now became a test of our politeness, for she arrived at all times and seasons, and though we felt constrained to brew tea for her and to have sweets ready for her grandchildren, I did not feel bound to lend her my whole attention, but wrote letters when I wished, or typed out notes on my small machine. This she viewed with interest. It was not so much talk that she needed as contemplation of my various activities.

"A lady from Mosul came here to Baashika once, and she and I were much together, just as you and I are. *Wallah*, I brought my bed and slept in her room."

I looked at her with apprehension. Her presence was always a little malodorous, and her conversation exclusively obstetrical in theme. I shuddered to think of those wrinkled and grimy hands at their work.

On the morning of April the thirteenth she arrived betimes, fully determined to be my "other sister" all day. I was busy turning out things from my suit-case, and she sat in my bedroom watching closely with her old eyes, and would have examined everything piece by piece had she dared. When Rashid arrived to take me, as he had offered, to Tell Billa, her eyes goggled when I said to him that I had a parcel for his wife. We started off all three together, and on the way she possessed herself of the parcel and opened it to see what it contained.

Rashid's young wife was delighted with the length of silk I had brought as a present for the feast, and smoothed the material with appreciative fingers. Then we set off to the mound, Rashid, Sairey and I—the old woman more than ever determined not to let me out of her sight. We went by way of Shaikh Muhammad, and encountered there the guardian, a *kochek*, a gentle old man with a white beard, dressed in spotless white. He inquired whether I would care to visit the tomb, but I thanked him and said we would return another day.

We continued our way through the fields, picking flowers as usual by the wayside. Here the small, smiling blue pimpernel,[1] so common that one often forgets it is there, grew in quantities by the lighter blue of the woodruff. Tall columns of hollyhock rose above the corn. Rashid told me that in the Sinjar its stem is considered an aid to the growth of hair. Women dry the stalks, pound them, mix the powder with water and apply the paste to their scalps when taking a bath, with the result that their hair becomes long and thick.

Talking of snakes, Rashid said, "There is a man, an Arab, who lives half an hour from here who can cure snake-bite and has done so many times, without fee. He has a *kherza*, an amulet, in the shape of a snake's head, yes, one can see the shape of the eyes and something like a snake's mouth, but on the whole it is like the balls that they put into soda-bottles. It is transparent and it fell from Heaven. Yes, he says that it fell from Heaven, and, *wallah*, it cures snake-bite. When one is bitten, he comes and scrapes the wound a little with his knife and puts the *kherza* on it, and it sticks there of itself. And soon all the poison and yellow matter comes to the place and drips down, and when the flesh is clean it falls away. When the Americans were digging at the *tell*, a woman and her husband

[1] *Anagallis cœrulea.*

were sleeping in a room and there fell from the roof, which was of *ispindar* (poplar) wood, a large serpent, *that* thick "—he made a circle with his fingers—" and it bit the woman. We went to the *rais* of the Americans and we asked for their car and he said, ' Yes, we will let you have it, take her quickly to the hospital,' for her arm and leg and body were swollen. We said, ' No, we shall take her to the man that cures snake-bite with the *kherza*!' We took her, and he put the *kherza* on her, the poison came away, and she was cured.

" There was a man who made himself out to be a *shaikh*. He was not a *shaikh*, but he made himself out to be one. He came and he sat by the bridge by Shaikh Muhammad, and he called, and a snake came out towards him. It came to him and it bit him. He boasted, ' I am a *shaikh* ; it cannot harm me ! From my granddad I inherit this gift—snakes cannot poison me.' But he began to swell and presently he fell down senseless. We took him to the Arab, who placed his *kherza* on the bite. Presently the man came to, and cried, ' What is this ? What have you done ? ' They tried to persuade him to keep the *kherza* on him, but he refused and threw it from him and began to walk away. He had not gone far before he turned yellow and fell down. Yes ! He, this Arab, is a good man and asks no fee, but people send him a sheep, or some such gift, as *kheirāt* (bounty). He has a house and a garden."

Arrived at the mounds of Tell Billa, we climbed up and he showed me excavations of houses and the exploratory trenches, explained the plan of the dwellings, and pointed out the drain-holes from the houses into the narrow streets. Rashid is so unusually intelligent that I can well understand why the Americans gradually advanced him to the position of foreman and left all in his charge when they went away. We sat on a carpet of wild flowers to rest, and the old crone,

who had followed silent for the most part, pointed to the fortress on the hill which we had failed to reach.

"There is the *qal'a*," she said. "A ruined place like this. Treasure is buried there. One night two men of Baashika went forth with mattocks and basket to dig for it. But the Reshé Shivvé came out of the *qal'a* and leapt on them and hurled them out of the hole they had been digging, and they were half dead with fright. They never dared to return."

At lunchtime, back in our little house, I heard sounds of arrival, and, going out, found A. in the courtyard, surrounded by her luggage. Had I not had her letter, she asked, written three days before? I had not, but I had half-expected that she might turn up for the feast and was glad to see her, for A. is of a rare kind, indeed amongst all the women in 'Iraq I knew none that I would have asked to Baashika with less fear. I knew that she might be depended upon not to utter a tactless word or display tiresome inhibitions, nor would our picnic mode of life dismay her.

Sairey's talk about the *qal'a* made me determine to reach it. Its local name is Qal'at Asfar. Jiddan suggested that this time we should take a guide lest we miss the path again, so when A. had unpacked and set up her camp bed, we procured a dark, shaggy-looking lad as guide and making our way up the hills, clambered up the steep side of the ruined fortress. The rough masonry of blocks was fitted into the rock, so that at times it was difficult to tell the work of Nature and that of man apart; the whole had formed at some remote time a stronghold, and in the plateau above there was a deep well lined with masonry. Other openings on this flat surface, which looked like a terrace, were curved like the walls of a jar and looked as if they were airholes to a chamber long blocked by earth and debris. One opening was small and square. As we wandered about,

the shaggy-haired boy repeated the story about buried treasure and the spirits that guard it.

"We should fear," he said, "to come here at night." We returned by an easier route, and followed a rutted path in the rock which led us back by way of the shrine of Azrael to the aqueducts and the cistern above the olive-groves. Here our young guide, with another boy who had joined us on the way, left us unceremoniously, and shedding their clothes, they leapt into the water. The Pan-like creature did not even ask for a guide's fee. At the fair, some days later, he gave me a shy smile, and going to him I put some money into his hand, telling him to choose some sweetmeats.

"What shall I choose?" said he, looking at the stalls.

"Anything you like," I replied, and left him.

A little afterwards he was at my side, holding towards me a packet of *Rahat Lukūm* (Turkish Delight). He had hunted for me in the crowd. "But it is for you, not for me!" He was amazed, and went off with it wordless.

When we returned, the inevitable Sairey had arrived. I had already warned A. and apologized for our constant visitor. This afternoon, however, she was not alone: she had brought two daughters, one a married woman and the other a bride. We prepared tea for them and ourselves.

This afternoon Sairey had an excuse, one of her daughters was a tattooist and she knew I was interested in the art. But that was not all: she wheedled a little, she had seen the silk that I had given to Rashid's wife, and surely I had a roll for her—was not the feast approaching? Now Sairey had at various times received money, and I had already earmarked my limited store of gifts, some of which were reserved for the visit to Shaikh 'Adi. Regretfully, I refused, but A. immediately lightened the situation; she had brought with

her some charms in Hebron glass against the Evil Eye, a whole string of them in blue, black, white and yellow, each bead representing an Eye. These proved an immediate salve, and never failed to give delight whenever and wherever she bestowed them.

We talked of tattooing. The women never admit that tattooing has a magic purpose, and tell you that they submit to the process for *zīna* (decoration) or *hilwa* (beauty). Here and there, however, marks have been tattooed to keep off pain, and the floriated cross and cross with a dot in each arm, both common designs, are undoubtedly magical and health-preserving signs. The married daughter explained how she worked. The ingredients were sheep's gall, lamp-black (from an olive-oil lamp only) and milk fresh drawn from the breast of the mother of a girl-child. If the baby is a boy, she said, the punctures would fester. The consistency of this mixture must be that of dough. A pattern is traced on the skin with this paste and then pricked in with a needle or two needles tied together with thread. These must draw blood. At first the surface swells up, but later settles down and the design appears in a deep blue. Yazidi women rarely tattoo the entire body as do the women of southern 'Iraq, but content themselves with adorning the back of the hand, the wrist, forearm, chest, ankle and lower leg. The favourite designs are these :

(1) The *misht*, or "comb". By the way, there is no hesitation in pronouncing this word, although I had always heard that it is one of the words which Yazidis will not utter because it contains the consonants *sh* and *t*, and suggests the forbidden name Shaitan (Satan). The "comb" is often joined to a circle called the *qamr* (full moon), or finished by a cross, sometimes plain.

(2) The cross.

(3) The gazelle. This is a conventionalized representation of the animal and is a favourite design. Those

that I saw had above the back of the animal a spot, called *daqqayeh*.

(4) The *rijl al-qatai*, " sand-grouse foot ". This resembles the print left by a bird's foot in the sand.

(5) The moon, either full or crescent.

(6) The *lā'ibi*, or " doll ", a primitive outline of a human figure with extended arms and legs apart.

(7) The *dulab kaṭān*, or *kiūkh-kiūkh* : the spool or spindle.

(8) The *rés daqqa*, an inverted " V ".

(9) The *dimlich*, a figure which looks like a bag suspended by two strings.

Refreshment had been twice dispensed, and we reached the point when we wished that our visitors would go. But they sat on. I basely forsook A. and went to my room, and when I came back, still they sat.

A. spoke in English and said to me, " They are dying to see your typewriter and have said to me, ' Do you think the *khatūn* would work it for us ? ' "

So the typewriter was produced and the young women gazed at it with awe. I typed the name of each on a piece of paper, and gave the scraps to them : and they folded them carefully. One does not see one's name printed with a machine every day in Baashika. But they still gazed.

" Does it sew also ? " they asked, innocently.

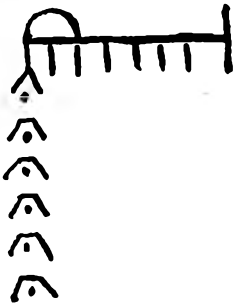
As soon as they had left, I took A. up to Ras al-'Ain, for I wanted to show her the cavern, the bas-reliefs and the spring. I was a little disappointed when we reached the pool to find a procession of schoolboys marching up the path, all wearing the khaki uniform of the Government schools, and singing patriotic songs, every verse of which ended *watani*—" my fatherland ". Very praiseworthy, no doubt, but a modern intrusion into the pagan sanctuary.

When we reached the rock, the schoolboys were perched all about it, and some had plunged into the

Daqqayeh

The "gazelle"
(*ghazāl*)

The "*rijl al-qatai*"
("sand-grouse foot")

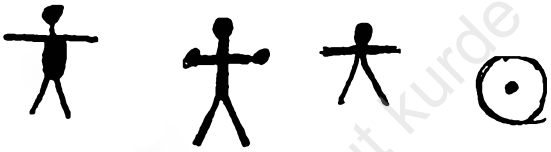


the *Darek*

rés daqqa

the *sāsi*

the Moon

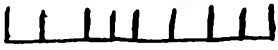


the *lā'ibi* ("doll")

the Sun

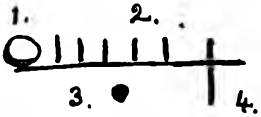
the "spindle, or spool"
(*dulab kaṭān*)

the *ṣalib* ("cross")



the *misht* ("comb")

the *dimlich*



Tattoo designs

(1) Moon
(2) Comb
(3) *Daqqayeh*
(4) Cross

} A common union of symbols

pool, but their politeness in moving away from the rock steps to let us pass and their friendly faces made me regret that I had wished them away.

After all, when we had reached the sacred cavern, it was empty. It was growing too dusk to see the panels clearly, but a smell of incense clung about the place, and when we crossed to the other side of the cave, stepping over the deep channel cut by the spring, we saw an olive-oil lamp, of the ancient shape, sending its thread of yellow flame upwards to illumine the gloom and add to the perfume of sanctity.

A schoolmaster followed us in and volunteered information about his own village, which he hoped that we would visit, offering to show us much there that would interest us. We thanked him, said good night to him and to the boys outside, and went out and down the valley in the twilight. Kids were skipping on the road, and in the village we passed women sitting at the thresholds of their courtyards, resting after the day's work, while their children played and sang.

"This is a lovely place," said A. She had fallen in love with it, just as I had.

Chapter IX

A JACOBITE SERVICE

" Always give altar-rites to the Gods. . . ."
THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XVI.*

NATURE jerks the bearing-rein occasionally to remind the body that an active habit should not outrun lessened strength, and I paid in a sleepless night for too energetic a day. I lay awake and heard the wind banging to and fro the door which led to the roof, and when I crossed the courtyard to fasten it, was aware of a night-sky thick with clouds. Then heavy rain fell, the rain for which the fields were thirsting.

After breakfast A. and I determined to attend Mass at the Jacobite church, and putting on mackintoshes and taking umbrellas in hand, we picked our way along the muddy road, passing the Latin church, where we fancied those passing in gazed at us reproachfully, and then through the little graveyard, where the dead sleep under long flat slabs, into the humbler Orthodox building.

As we went through the open doorway, which was of grey Mosul marble carven by local craftsmen, a puff of incense met us, for the service was well on its way. The church was full. In front, the men sat cross-legged on the brightly-coloured mats and grass matting which covered the floor. Their heads were turbaned, their sheepskin cloaks turned inside out. Their shoes had been left on the uncovered stone paving. The women in their peasant dress squatted behind. One of them rose and, coming towards us, led us to the north side of the church, and we picked our way

through pairs of muddy shoes and closely packed women towards a bench, the only one, and evidently a seat of honour. Two women wearing the black, enveloping head-veil of the towns, got up politely and offered us their places upon it.

The bright Kurdish dresses, the dimness of the sanctuary, partially hidden by a marble screen and faintly illumined by candles, the grey marble columns, the swallows flying hither and thither and keeping up their pagan twitter as they went backwards and forwards to nests somewhere in the roof of the church, the devout faces of the congregation who hung on every word of the eloquent sermon, all this formed a picture which made me feel like an intruder from another century.

The preacher, who stood at the door of the sanctuary, was none other than our friend the *mutrān* of Deir Matti. He held a silver cross before him as he preached, as if he were exorcising, by its magic as well as by his words, all evil from the hearts and lives of his simple congregation. He held the cross with a kerchief of magenta embroidered with silver, and his grey head was covered with the cowl embroidered with silver crosses which all monks wear. When, later on, he resumed his large bulbous black turban, this cowl hung down behind. Beneath his black robe appeared his episcopal cross, and the rose and violet of undervestments. The parish priest, elderly and bearded, wore plain black and, like his superior, the monkish cowl.

Although I could not follow all of it, the sermon was plain and homely, and, with his presence, his fine features and silvery beard, the *mutrān* looked more than ever the minor prophet. Whenever the audience was stirred, a murmur of assent or approval arose. At the end of the sermon the parish priest came to the chancel steps and, addressing the congregation, announced that the *mutrān* would pay a visit to every house and that each householder was to make him a gift

of olive-oil, soap or grain. Money was not mentioned, nor was there any begging or exhortation. It was an order.

Then there was chanting and prayers. The people do not kneel to pray, but turn the palms of the hands upwards, extending the arms slightly, and when they finish, stroke their faces downwards like Moslems at the conclusion of the *Fātiha*.[1] All chanting was in the major key, and at times it was loud, male and exultant.

When the *mutrān* advanced with the chalice and paten, both veiled, and placed the latter upon the former, all the men removed their headgear, but no member of the congregation communicated. Finally, Mass being ended, many went out, kissing the silver cover of the New Testament on the lectern before leaving, and laying an offering on its ledge.

The remainder stayed for the *dukhrāna*, that is, prayers for the benefit of the dead. These were read by the parish priest. Only a few men remained, presumably relatives of the deceased, and during the reading one man wiped his eyes repeatedly, whilst the many women who stopped at the back of the church wept and sobbed audibly, beating their knees as they squatted on the floor. Children had seated themselves on the ground by the first chancel step like a row of sparrows, and one, behaving badly, was pulled back by his father and held closely, while his companion in mischief grinned back at him.

At the conclusion of the *dukhrāna* all went out, including the *mutrān*, priest, deacons and acolytes, and all saluted the *mutrān* as he passed out. A. and I entered the presbytery to pay our respects to him, A., as wife of a dignitary of the Anglican church, receiving especial honour. We were assigned seats beside the great man, who regretted that A. had not accompanied me when I visited his monastery, and expatiated on the

[1] The first chapter of the Qur'an.

traditional hospitality of the *deir* extended to pilgrims of all races and faiths alike. Amongst his hearers was the young schoolmaster we had met at the cave the evening before, seated at the *mutrān's* right hand and beaming at the honour paid to himself and to us.

When we arrived at our house we found a great crowd gathered in the doorway. In its centre were a couple of swarthy gypsies with a pair of dancing bears and two baboons. These poor creatures performed their tricks amidst the laughter and delighted exclamations of the onlookers, amongst whom I saw the snub-nosed *qawwāl*, his eyes moist with merriment.

Later, I saw the black gypsy tents by Bahzané, for, in true Romany fashion, they had come for the feast and fair. Here in the Middle East, gypsies gain their living by showman-trades, by dancing, peddling, stealing and fortune-telling, but they are needier, filthier and darker than European gypsies and are despised by tribesmen and villagers alike. Here too they have their own language, but when I took down lists of words from a *kowli* (gypsies are known as Kowliyah), I found few which corresponded to the Romany spoken in England. The wandering tribes think it shame either to kill them or intermarry with them, though some of the gypsy girls are handsome. The *kowlis* own no nationality, speak the languages of the countries through which they travel, and are expert smugglers. In the desert they neither raid nor are raided, but are often given food in return for the dancing of the women and the music or antics of the men.

Sairey, who was rapidly becoming our cross, sat long with us that Sunday, and learning that A. was childless, she came very close to me, and touching my body familiarly with her dirty hands and speaking in my ear, gave me to understand that by her manipulations she had turned many a childless wife into a rejoicing mother. Finally she went purely eldritch, invoking all the saints

Gypsies, Baashika.

Sitt Gule at the shrine of Mus-as-Sor.

in turn to bestow children upon A., pointing to heaven as she did so; Shaikh 'Adi, Sitt 'Adra (who she was I never discovered), Mar Matti, Khatuna Fakhra, and particularly, since we were Christian, "Sitt Mariam, mother of seven children". This Mariam was the martyred queen whose apparition is seen at Karakosh.

We offered her tea and gave her biscuits, which she pouched for her grandchildren, and when at long last she departed, we held council. She was fast becoming unbearable. We hated to think what those grimy hands could do to wishful and barren wives, for infection and microbes are to Sairey as devoid of meaning as the English which, to her aggravation, we talked when her presence was indefinitely prolonged. She was so unsavoury, so obstetrical, so ghoulish, so witch-like, that we both agreed that a little of her at close quarters went a long, long way. It was decided that she must be discouraged a little, as gently as possible, for we did not wish to hurt her feelings, and Jiddan, called in and the problem put before him, promised to head her off as tactfully as he could.

In the evening, A. went with Jiddan to Shaikh Mand, and returning, told me she had encountered a group of women and girls returning with skins full of milk slung from their shoulders and small black kids in their arms. With their chequered red and orange *meyzars*, she said, they were as brilliant as a bed of zinnias. Talking with her, they had said that in spring-time their husbands and brothers stayed with the flocks on the hills day and night, and that they went up several times a day to take their men food and to get milk. They bore with them the kids and lambs, and these younglings are allowed to suck a little to start the flow before the milker presses the teats. Then they are taken back to the village, where they gambol about the house and courtyard and are as much part of the family as the children themselves.

The next day the roads were still wet, for during the night there had been thunder and rain. Hearing of the poor old *shaïkha's* fruitless visit, I thought out and wrote a better letter for her, and went to get the first from her that I might substitute the other.

We found Sitt Gulé lying outside, or rather, in the room without a third wall, like a stage, which was above the stone stairway from the courtyard, for she wanted air and peace and the living-room below was full of her sons' wives and their children. She was desperately ill. Journeying to Mosul with her fever still on her, she had become chilled, and the failure of her mission had robbed her of resistance. A quilt was spread over her restless thin body, but she was turbaned as usual, and lightly dressed in her white. She struggled up, but we persuaded her to lie and be covered. A., feeling her pulse, said that it beat fast and that her skin was dry and hot. She complained of pain between the shoulder-blades, and A., who has some experience of nursing, told me in an undertone that she feared pneumonia.

Sitt Gulé was pleased that I had written another letter, and spoke of her son upon whom her anxious mind ran unceasingly. A., practical as well as sympathetic, said that she would make her a pneumonia jacket, while I promised to try to get some quinine to combat the malaria in her blood. We were neither of us equipped with medical knowledge and there was no doctor, so we did what we could. There was a Government dispenser, we were told, in the village, but when we went to the dispensary, we found that the good man was out, visiting another village; neighbours promised, however, that they would find a lad who had charge of the key and might find the drug we required.

We then went to the *sūq*, the small market-place, where a few shops displayed cotton goods and groceries

and long paper-covered cones of cane-sugar were suspended. Here A. bought some unbleached calico of Japanese manufacture, as were most of the other materials. The next requirement was thread for sewing and cotton for the padding. The first was easily bought, but as for the cotton, it was like the vegetables, every one grew and carded their own, or else purchased it wholesale by the sack, and the retailer had none. Jiddan suggested that the *mukhtār* was sure to have some, so to the *mukhtār's* house we bent our way. On the road we passed the bishop, going in state with a train of followers on his house-to-house collection spoken of in the church the day before. He looked imposing with his pastoral staff and bulbous headdress.

The *mukhtār* had gone to Mosul to buy goods and fairings for the feast, but his women and children were at home, and bade us up to the reception-room, hooshing away the unkempt dog that leapt at us in the yard, barking and menacing. Up the steep, unprotected stairway we went, and our party upstairs was joined later after an immense mountaineering effort by a baby toddler about whose safety no one seemed anxious. A group of young black kids with long silky ears were playing hopscotch on the terrace.

In the guest-room mattresses were spread on the floor for us and a girl was despatched to bring some cotton. In a corner of the room stood the *mukhtār's* staff, a heavy crooked stick of fragrant *mahlab* wood which, said Jiddan, is considered sacred by Yazidis and forbidden as firewood. The seeds of the *mahlab* are used as spice, when pounded up, for cakes, bread and other foods. I asked to see some, and the housemistress, lifting a bundle hung on the wall, took out packets of various spices, such as cinnamon (Arabic *darsīn*, Kurdish *darchīn*), and a large, fronded grey lichen called *shahbat-al-'ajūz*, which, she said, had a pleasant flavour when crushed and put into all foods.

Amongst the spices were *mahlab* seeds, and these, when I tasted them, reminded me of cloves.

The cotton was brought in a large flat basket, and our hostess, sitting on the floor, began to beat and toss it with a stick until A. said that for her purpose it would do as it was. On the way down, I noticed human hair stuffed between the stones of the walls. I asked if this were done to protect the owner from witchcraft. "*Nakhair*," they replied. "Nay! That is only necessary on the first night of a bride. But it is our custom to treat hair so, lest, if it be cast out, it be trodden underfoot."

Chapter X

LEGEND AND DOCTRINE

" Always about his tomb the children gather in their companies, at the coming-in of the spring, and contend for the prize of kissing."
THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XII.*

AISHA, the pretty daughter-in-law of the Shaikha Gulé, had spoken to me several times of a shrine in the hills called Usivl Kaneri. She was the young wife of the man who had stabbed his sister, and mother of a baby son some twelve months old. To her little son she was passionately devoted, and her healthy rosy face and the baby's round one were never far apart.

The sun shone out after Sunday's rain, and we sent for Aisha, who had offered to guide us. The young woman appeared with her baby on her arm, its weight half-supported by her *meyzar*.

" If we are going into the hills," we said, " will not your arm ache ? "

She kissed the child and assured us that since she carried him always she never felt him heavy, so we started, Aisha, A., Jiddan, the baby and its small cousin, and myself. We took the road to Ras al-'Ain, bearing to the left of the winding stream and following a mule-track cut in the rock. In the valley sounded the care-free notes of a reed-pipe : a shepherd-lad sat piping by the wayside and smiled as we paused to listen to the bird-like fluting. His pipe he had cut himself on the hills as he herded his flock. As we set up the hill the baby crowed and chuckled, and the small girl cousin gave him flowers which he crushed in his hot little fist. All the way, despite the rockiness, it was flowers,

flowers, flowers. Below, long strips of calico had been spread to whiten. "It comes from Yapan," said Aisha, "and is bleached by washing at the spring. While it is wet, we spread horse-manure over it for the space of a night. The next day we wash and dry it, re-washing and re-drying it in the sun many times, until it becomes as white as snow."

We went past a rock tomb, and a little farther the mule-track branched left—"the road to Shaikh 'Adi", said Aisha. It was by this road that most pilgrims went before the days of cars to Shaikhan. Travelling by mule, a pilgrim might hope to arrive at the shrine in two days and a bit, unless stopped by brigands.

I was reminded of Acradina in Sicily at every step: by the tomb, the smell of herbs, the wild flowers and the ancient rocky road; and Aisha herself was like a comely Syracusan maid, though her dress was far more exotic than any seen in Sicily. She was crowned by no headdress of silver coins, but wore a white turban instead. When I asked if she had one, she said with the trace of a sigh that she had sold hers for a *dinār*, and I imagined that it had gone to help her husband and his family in their trouble.

At one point in the path the cone of Melké Miran below is framed by the rocks of the gorge; it stands milky fair against the far range of blue valleys, painted, as it were, in ever fainter washes until lost against the horizon. An hour's steady mounting brought us to the head of the gorge. On one side rose the spire of the *mazār* we had come to see; on the hill opposite across the gorge were ruined stone buildings. Aisha told us that they were very ancient—"perhaps two thousand years old. People (*awādim*) called Gowrastan lived there. But when Muhammad came there was a battle and they were all killed and their houses cast down. They say that their blood is still to be seen upon the stones."

She referred, I supposed, to the rusty-red lichen that grows on the rocks hereabout. She and I and Jiddan sat on a rock overhanging the gorge ; A., full of energy and accustomed to mountain-climbing in Switzerland, strode on upwards, anxious to reach the highest point. Jiddan looked after her admiringly.

" Like a gazelle ! " he murmured.

When the baby beat his mother on the chest, she readily gave him her breast, and he rested on her broad lap in perfect content, half-dreaming, half-smiling, too content to make more than a pretence of sucking. When we moved on he fell asleep, his small dimpled hand falling limp over his mother's shoulder. Wild thyme grew all about us, also a kind of sage with a balm-like fragrance, and another herb that gave out a pungent perfume like incense in the hot sun.

A. rejoined us, having had a far view from the watershed at the top, and Jiddan complimented her on her swiftness amongst the rocks. She told him that these hills were nothing compared to the Alps, to which even the snow mountains in high Kurdistan which she had seen from the top of the rock were younger sisters.

The *mazār* was of the usual pattern and, as far as I could see, contained no tomb. We climbed down to the olive-garden just below us. By the spring was a cavern, maidenhair fern growing thickly in its grateful dampness, and, just as I had expected, the sacred tree by the sacred spring, this time a fig-tree, adorned with votive rags. As we had none to add to them, we tied grasses to a bough instead. Stone gutters conducted the water down to a cistern. The olives looked neglected, but it was a little paradise of green, and flowering willow grew with the figs and other trees. The rocks in this narrow apex of the gorge look like masonry, and it was difficult to persuade oneself that they had not been hewn by man.

On the return journey, A. borrowed Aisha's baby, who was surprised but not displeased by the change of portress, but we could not persuade them to come in to drink tea with us. Mikhail had hardly brought it in when a guest arrived, the Assyrian Presbyterian missionary, a masculine figure in plus-fours. As he drank tea, he talked well, and informed us that not only had he made a study of the Yazidi people, but had written about them in American papers.

He told us that though the villages of Baashika and Bahzané were, in a manner of speaking, a mere stone's throw from each other, the former was more progressive than the latter, thanks to the school, and that in Bahzané ancient customs were preserved which had been discontinued in Baashika.

" Your visit causes much speculation," he said smiling. " I was told that you had asked to take the photograph of a woman having a baby as you had not seen such things in your country, English babies being taken from their mothers by operation and not in the natural way."

He was chatting thus, sipping his tea and looking very Western indeed, when a second visitor arrived, this time Qawwal Sivu, the chief *qawwāl.* He drank tea with us, and general subjects were being discussed when the *qawwāl* asked what A. was sewing. When he heard that it was a bed-jacket for Sitt Gulé, he smiled and commended the deed of charity.

Thereupon, our other friend remembered, perhaps, that he was a missionary. For the *qawwāl's* benefit, he enlarged upon the way in which Christian charity embraced peoples of all religions and kinds, such being the command of Christ, our prophet, making A. the slightly embarrassed text of his discourse. The *qawwāl*, always mild and polite, received it with equanimity, although we felt a little out of countenance—which was foolish, for of course a missionary must improve the

shining hour like the busy bee wherever he perceives pagan honey that might be gathered into the hive of Protestant certainty.

He left us anon, the *qawwāl* remaining alone. We had a liking for his gentle face and diffident manner and ventured to put some questions to him. His constant reply was "How should we know? We are men, and these things are in the hand of God." It may have veiled his reluctance to answer an outsider, but it was a very pleasant veil. I asked him about their traditions concerning creation. In *By Tigris and Euphrates* I related, third-hand, the story about the Pearl, the creation of Adam and the Bird, a childish fable which Siouffi relates as a Yazidi legend. He gave no such story, but answered simply that it was God who created the world, and not his angels. First there were light and darkness, then the earth, sky and stars, then the earth and its living creatures came into being, and lastly Adam and Hawa. He repeated the tale of the two jars. According to this, Hawa (Eve) claimed that children were her production and that Adam had no part in them. Adam suggested a test. He placed some of his spittle and Eve some of hers in two separate jars and kept these sealed for nine months. At the end of that period Adam opened his jar and found within a beautiful little boy and girl, whereas Eve's jar contained nothing but corruption.

He denied that Yazidis had a different descent from the rest of mankind. Asked about the fate of the soul after death, he said that the souls of the wicked go into the bodies of beasts or reptiles, that is their hell, but that for the obstinately wicked there is a hell of fire from which there is no emergence, "except," he added, "that none know what the mercy of Allah may do". The good reincarnate in human bodies after a sojourn in Paradise, but in the end of all things, if they are completely purified, they unite

with the supreme God, remain in bliss and return no more.

I asked why they paid such especial reverence to the Peacock Angel.

He answered, "We do not believe—like Islam," he interjected tactfully, "that He is the Lord of Evil (*Sharr*). He is the chief of the seven angels, and is one with Gabriel who removes the soul from the human body when Azrael comes for it. The evil in men's hearts is not from him, but from themselves."

I asked him about the reverence paid to springs and trees. He answered that they were *maskūn* (inhabited). We believe, he said, that there are beings, neither men nor *jann*. People say that they are seen occasionally, and they call them *rajul al-gheyb* (or *ghāib*). "But," he added quickly, "who sees them? One in a thousand! Why do you ask such things? You are English, and the English know better than we do!"

As for prayer, he told me that five prayers daily are ordered for the pious Yazidi, one at dawn, one at sunrise, one at noon, one in the afternoon and one at sunset. Each time the worshipper must face the sun. Before praying, hands and face should be washed; indeed, before all worship the Yazidi should wash himself, and before any feast the body should be cleansed completely in either hot or cold water and white garments should be put on. Prayer is necessary before eating. Before and at the festivals, he said, there are especial prayers.

The missionary had already told me that Yazidi prayers are rhymed, and a mixture of Kurdish and Persian. Prayers are learnt parrot-wise, and few, if any, understand them. He did not think that they would allow me to take down any of them, as they are regarded as extremely sacred. He also had warned me that on the Thursday night of the coming feast, when the Yazidis assembled in the courtyard of Shaikh

Muhammad, no Christian or Moslem is permitted to be present. What they did during that night of vigil, "no one knew".

I fancied I knew what he was reluctant to hint, for the insinuation has been made against every secret sect in turn. The Sabaeans, Christians, and Jews have all been variously accused in ignorance that on a certain night of vigil they assemble in the dark, men and women, and that shameful connection takes place in the name of religion, none knowing who is with him in the darkness. It is as hoary a lie as that other about the Jews, that they eat the flesh of Christian children at Passover.

* * * * * *

April the sixteenth was the eve of the feast. While we were at breakfast, a visitor was announced. He was a monk of the Jacobites, accompanied by a lay henchman, and was a sober-looking man with a suspicious eye. He told me that he knew very much about the Yazidis, and I think that his visit may have been prompted by a vague resentment, and partly by curiosity as to my real purpose in coming here, and my personal beliefs.

He began by talking of the Latin Catholics. Had I seen their grand new church? Had I visited it, attended a service, seen its pictures and images? The Pope had paid for it all. "As for images, we Orthodox have none!" The henchman, more loquacious than the monk, who spoke in short sentences, inserted here, "We live by the piety of our own people: all that we have is the free gift of our own people." He went on, "The great point of difference between the Latin church and our own is Purgatory." He asked me, "Where did the Bible mention Purgatory? A good man goes to Heaven and an evil to everlasting fire, and there is an end of the matter."

"But what," I asked, "of the majority, who are neither good nor bad?"

The henchman waved the irrelevant question aside, and related at length the story of Abraham's bosom and Lazarus, while the monk inquired furtively of A. if I were a Moslem?

Addressing me then, the monk informed me that he had written down many of the rhymed prayers of the Yazidis.

I praised his enterprise and said that I should be interested to see them, but he was unwilling to show them and I turned from the subject.

"You may find Yazidi priests who will answer your questions," he said, somewhat sourly, "but for money. They are not what they were formerly. There are schools and they are losing their people. Times are changed. But they are poor and will not give information for nothing."

I told him that the real purpose of my visit was merely to see the spring festival and that any other information I might gather was merely by the way.

"Humph!" said he. "Well, you will see nothing of what takes place within the shrine of Shaikh Muhammad on Thursday night. They will allow no Christian near them then. No one has seen what goes on."

He rose to go, not having eaten or drunk with us, for it was still their Lent.

After breakfast we went to Sitt Gulé's house and found her groaning in bed and still in the same comfortless spot. She was pleased with A.'s gift of the jacket, which was tied on with the help of her daughters-in-law, but the quinine, she said, had done her little good. She complained that they neglected her, and a neighbour whispered to me that there was little love lost between her and her sons' wives.

"Perhaps she will die," remarked Aisha philosophically, when we had gone below. I had been attracted

on a former visit by the industry of the *shaikha's* handmaiden, who span in a room adjoining the place where her mistress lay ill. Now they brought down the spinning-wheel and set it and the spinster in the sun, so that I might take a photograph. I gave Aisha a length of orange silk for the children's festival dresses, and this was extended to its length, and blessings called down on my head. On the previous day I had taken a similar gift to the *mukhtār's* wife, as a recognition of her kindness in furnishing cotton for the bedjacket.

A. went off with her sketching materials, and I followed her soon afterwards as far as the washing-pool at Ras al-'Ain, seating myself beside some Christian women who spread a garment for me on the grass beside them. One had her lap full of the daisy-head flowers of the camomile plant. She was picking off the stems and leaves and I helped her as we talked. An infusion of these heads, she said, is good for fever and constipation. The older woman beside her took up a handful and added, "When the flowers are dried, we put this much in a teapot and add hot water till it is as thick as honey. Then we drink it. We call this kind *beybūn al-leban*."

Some of the women washing clothes called out to inform me that A., "a tall woman", was farther up the valley. One said to me, "Why do you go about alone? Are you not afraid?"

"Why should I be afraid? You people of Baashika are good people."

They smiled approvingly at my answer and cried out, "Stay with us always!"

One woman was using, as well as her cake of home-made soap, the saponaceous herb called *shnān*.[1] For use it had been pounded to a powder, and she gave me a little so that I might wash my hands at the spring.

[1] *shnān* is the name given to various halophytic plants of the *chenopodiaceae* family.

There was an air of expectancy about the village. At Rashid's house his wife was busy stitching festival clothes, stretching the silk over a cushion as she sat on the matting to sew. His father, whose face was as open and intelligent as his son's, had returned from his visit to the Jebel Sinjar and brought with him Rashid's eldest boy, a pupil in his uncle's school, to spend the feast with his grandparents and parents. They made and gave me coffee, and then insisted that I should wait to drink tea with them, setting before me a plate of dried figs from their garden in the Sinjar. The old man spoke with pride of his schoolmaster son, who is regarded as an oracle in the village where he teaches. "People come to him in every kind of difficulty," he said. "Education is a fine thing: it opens up the world before a man! I cannot read or write myself, but my grandsons, please God, shall be able to read all books."

I could only reply with a platitude. "Books are not everything and no doubt your honour's experience and wisdom are as valuable to those about you as books to younger men."

Then I consulted him about making a gift to the Yazidi poor on the occasion of the feast. To which of the men of religion should it be handed?

A humorous smile lit up his eyes and he consulted Rashid. Perhaps, both hinted, the money would have as much chance of reaching the poor if it were entrusted to a responsible layman. I suggested that Rashid should accompany me when I made the modest offering, as a witness would ensure the distribution of the money. So eventually it was done, and the good Qawwal Sivu to whom I handed the money there and then divided it into smaller sums and despatched one of his children to some of his poorer neighbours.

Chapter XI

THE EVE OF THE FEAST

"Cease, Cytherea, from thy lamentations, to-day refrain from thy dirges. Thou must again bewail him, again must weep for him another year."

BION, *Idyll I.*

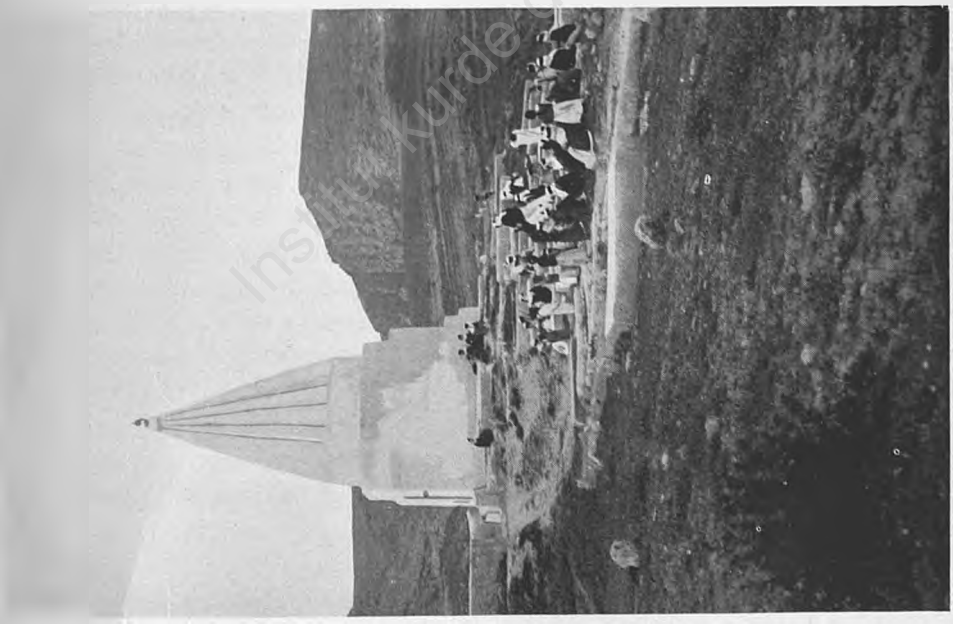
JIDDAN and I were moving down the path between the green hills when the wavering notes of a pipe reached us and the hollow thud of a drum, and we perceived several groups wandering amongst the graves. On the air of the late afternoon the spicy fragrance of incense was borne towards us, mingling with the perfume of the herbs we trod underfoot. We made our way towards the conical shrine of Melké Miran and, mounting the grassy slope, found a group of women standing round a grave, weeping noisily and beating their breasts or slapping their faces with flat palms to the measure of a plaintive lament played on a wooden pipe [1] by one of the *qawwāls*, whilst his partner beat a large circular tambour,[2] the rim of which was set with jingles. After a few minutes the music ceased, the *qawwāls* moved off, and the women sank down around the grave to continue their weeping and utter half-chanted lamentations broken by sobbing. At another grave the same melancholy little melody was being played over and over to the beating of the tambour and the simultaneous thud-thud of the women's hands on their breasts. At each grave that they visited the *qawwāls* played for about ten minutes, and when they had done, one of the weeping women slipped money

[1] *Shebāb.* [2] *Daff.*

into their hands. Here were no bright festival garments or shining headdresses. These were matrons, or old women, and all wore the white head-veil wound over the turban and clothes of sober hue. All about us were groups of mourning women sitting by the graves of their dead: only the women for whom the *qawwāls* were playing stood. At the head of one grave near us, a woman was chanting a dirge. On most of the graves bundles had been laid and opened and we saw that these contained crushed wheat (*burghul*) and eggs dyed bright orange. One of the mourning women put her hand into the bundle and handed an egg to a boy whom curiosity had drawn thither, and Jiddan told me that the food must be distributed to any that pass by, that they may eat and bless the soul of the dead. A pan of incense had been set by many of the graves, and thin spirals of smoke rose into the windless air. On the opposite hills we could see similar groups of mourners and *qawwāls* moving from grave to grave: the sad plaint of the pipe and throb of the tambour crossed the valley. The tune had a clinging intimacy: A. and I were haunted by it for hours.

On the way home we passed the lower washing-pool and saw women washing, not clothes, but freshly slaughtered meat, for each Yazidi household should sacrifice a lamb or a kid on the eve of the feast. If too poor, a fowl may be substituted, but few go meatless as the better-off distribute to their poorer neighbours.

Sairey awaited us at the house, and A. had come back from her sketching. The old woman was accompanied by a small girl and had brought us a gift for the feast, five coloured eggs, which she presented reproachfully. Had I no piece of silk for her, not even an old gown? or had I not "something for this my grandchild"? I explained once more that we had with us nothing save enough for our travelling needs, but, remembering a bright brooch on my pincushion, I



Sitt Gulé's handmaiden at her spinning-wheel.

Lamenting women at the tombs, Baashika.

fetched it and pinned it to the child's dirty dress. The smile of pure joy which lit up the small face was a reward which the trinket hardly deserved. A. gave her a bead against the Eye of Envy, and I supplemented that gift by writing out for Sairey a brief charm on a piece of paper in Mandaic characters, which she folded up carefully and placed in her dress. Not to be outdone in magic, she mumbled incantations in a hoarse voice over A., beseeching Mariam, Mother of Seven Children, to bestow upon her seventeen babes. Perhaps Jiddan had warned her not to prolong her stay, for soon after, when a second visitor arrived, she and her granddaughter departed.

It was the very *qawwāl* whom I had seen a little before playing by the tombs, Qawwal Reshu, the snub-nosed man who had taken me to the house of the missionary. He now made acquaintance with A. and drank tea with us. He had seen me take his photograph when he was beating his tambour and came to ask me whether I would send him the result. A cheerful and friendly person, he told us that as a younger man he had served in the Levies, a force officered by Englishmen and now disbanded, and he evidently considered this a bond between us. "When I went," he said, "they took me before an officer who asked my name and what I was and said to me, 'Reshu, you must cut off your beard, a soldier cannot wear a beard.' But I told him that I could not because our religion forbids us *qawwāls* to cut our hair and beard. So he took me to another Englishman, who asked me many questions about our people, and he allowed me to keep my beard."

"We *qawwāls* travel," he continued, "and meet people of all races and religions. We used to take the *sanjak* (bronze image of the sacred peacock) as far as Russia and India as well as about Turkey, Palestine and Syria. But those days are no more because all

these places now will not let one enter, and passports have become very difficult because of the war."

I said that I had not known that there were Yazidis in India. He replied that there were, and also people whose customs were very much like their own. I spoke of the sacred girdle of the Parsis which is tied at prayer with ablutions, and told him that when a Parsi soldier was in 'Iraq during the last war and had lost his girdle, he went to a Mandaean priest to weave him another in its place. "You Yazidis, too, have a girdle."

He replied that the Yazidis when making their prayer washed their hands and faces and fastened their girdles so that in this they resembled the Parsis. "But," he added, "our position in prayer is facing the sun, standing with our hands open and making one prostration to the ground."

After asking us to visit his house, he left.

Evening had come, the feast began on the morrow. The *qawwāls* and mourners had returned to their homes. A. and I wandered up the village street and met our player of the reed pipe, who greeted us roguishly. With his hazel eyes, clear as pools in a peat-bog, and his Puckish smile, he might have been Dorian Daphnis "that pipes on his fair flute", or, as A. suggested, the perfect Peter Pan. The sound of shepherd's pipes, his or another's, was constantly heard on the uplands. Close behind him walked a girl with a bunch of scarlet ranunculus in her hair, and a group of women returning, goat skins paunchy with fresh milk slung over their shoulders, and young kids tucked under their arms. They let us stroke the long-legged, soft-coated creatures, with their blunt noses and long silky ears.

Thus we came to the water-mill and, entering, talked to the miller. The grain was placed in a hopper, ground between two large stones turned by the stream which flowed down from Ras al-'Ain, and the flour

collected from the floor by the miller's wife, who scooped it up with her hands and placed it in a nearly-filled sack. We also yielded to the importunities of our neighbours, the police, who took us over their police station, showing with pride the well-kept stables and saddle-room, and photographs of local criminals and wanted men. Examining these carefully, A. and I decided that a number of these looked like apostles. It was probably the effect of the beard and headdress. I remember being horrified when I saw Dr. Henry Field's anthropological photographs of men who had looked saintly and patriarchal in their *keffiyehs* (headkerchiefs) and *agals* (fillets of twisted rope). Without the flattering headdress a Moses was suddenly transformed into a criminal lunatic, a St. John the Baptist into a Bowery crook.

Night had fallen, and when we had dined we strolled out to look with fresh interest at the shrine of Shaikh Muhammad and wondered what really went on there during the second night of the feast, regretting that we should never know, since all the wiseacres of the place had declared that it was impossible for any but Yazidis to be present.

And so, almost as expectant of the morrow as the Yazidis themselves, we returned to bed.

Chapter XII

THE FEAST: THE FIRST DAY

"Everywhere is spring, and pastures everywhere, and everywhere the cows' udders are swollen with milk, and the younglings are fostered."

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll VIII.*

IT was April the seventeenth, the fourth of Nisan. Early as we rose, the Yazidi girls had been out on the hills before us to gather bunches of scarlet ranunculus, for no other flower is used for the feast. Above every Yazidi house-door in the village, three bunches of these vivid flowers had been plastered on with wet mud, heads downwards, one above the entrance and one on each doorpost. Into the clay which held the blossoms in position, fragments of coloured eggshell had been pressed, and some householders had besmeared the lintel and doorposts with blood from the sheep or lamb slaughtered on the previous evening.

Everyone was making and receiving gifts of hard-boiled coloured eggs. The favourite colour was orange, the bright vegetable dye which the women use for their hand-woven *meyzārs*, but we saw also purple, green, and a madder colour produced by binding onion skins round the eggs when boiling them. None was blue, for blue is a forbidden colour to Yazidis as it is to Mandaeans, and no Yazidi woman will wear a blue garment although she may wear a blue bead or button against the Evil Eye.

We went to Sitt Gulé's house and found her in bed and very weak, though the fever had lessened. The quinine had made her deaf, and even the feast had

not roused her. In spite of the sadness that hung over the family, the entrance to their courtyard was decorated like the rest, and bunches of red had been fixed above the door of every living-room. The bees had not been forgotten, a few of the scarlet flowers had been plastered above the apertures through which the bees busily came and went. Their hive was a wonderful affair. It was simply a long reed basket, daubed over with clay and built into the wall of the living-room, the wide mouth, clayed over, being flush with the outer wall. In the living-room a sack had been thrown over it, lest some of the mud break away and the bees swarm into the room. Doors to the hive were pierced in the exterior of the wall, and it was above these that flowers had been placed.

Aisha pressed eggs upon us, as did almost everyone we met. In the square at the entrance to the village, where men and boys lounged, a game was in progress. One player held his egg in his fist with one end showing, and his opponent did the same. When the two eggs were knocked lightly together, the loser was he whose egg cracked first. There was a knack in it, and some players had acquired a number of eggs.

Rashid sought us out, with more eggs, and we went to call upon the chief *qawwāl* at his house, after which we returned to the village square. There a man with a peepshow was doing good business. It was a contraption like a hurdy-gurdy. Customers, two at a time, sat on a low bench and glued their eyes to eyeholes. A light inside illuminated gaudily coloured pictures, which unrolled jerkily as the showman turned a handle. He called out the subject of each as he turned. "Adam and Eve!" "Sitt Mariam and Eissa" (Lady Mary and Jesus), and so on. The pictures were like the sticky results obtained with a penny sheet of transfers in one's youth, just as crude, just as bright. There were views made in Germany, a Turkish battle scene

in which fezes were routing the infidels, the German Kaiser when a young man with his family, a St. Mary Magdalene ("the beautiful Laila"), St. George and the Dragon, a scene with a suspension bridge ("Stamboul!"), Nicholas II and the Czarina, a child with a kitten, "Londra!" (a scene in the Alps), and others. It was well worth a farthing. We rose, put down the fee for two small boys who eagerly took our places, and walked on to Bahzané to offer congratulations to our friends there.

At Qawwal Salman's house we were greeted by his little son, Khidhr, whose face was bright with joy, and coffee was served in the upper room. Upon the walls of this A. admired a decoration very fashionable in the villages, a large rosette of gold-tinsel fashioned like a flower: the girls had made it of the foil in which cigarettes are wrapped. All the young women were resplendent in festival clothing, but we were not to see the full glory of their feast-clothes until the third day. Every girl had a nosegay of red ranunculus in her turban, and they insisted merrily that A. should put a few in her hat.

Rain had fallen overnight, and had left the world clean and fresh, and to-day the spirit of spring was upon us all. Everywhere, very young creatures were about us. Newly born donkeys—and what attractive creatures they can be with their blunt noses and hides as softly fluffy as powder-puffs!—kept close to staid grazing mothers. There were half a dozen of them on the grassy slopes below the *qawwāl's* house. Kids, lambs, calves, foolish and innocent, hens fussing over broods of yellow chicks, everywhere there was new life. "It is the time for it!" said Jiddan, indulgent when we lured a foal a little nearer.

And yet the *qawwāl* had excused himself and left us to his son, hurrying off with his tambour to the tombs near Bahzané, where we saw him with another

qawwāl. We paused beside them on our way back to listen to the sad little tune they were playing over the dead. Some women who had been beating their breasts and faces the moment before came forward to us with food from the offerings on the graves. "Eat, eat!" they invited us, holding out crushed wheat and bread and meat.

Some gypsies sat in a dark group amongst the mourners, cadging grave-offerings, some fragments of which they tossed to their bear that rolled and lolled amongst the tombs. Indignant, the mourning women refused them more, and so, in revenge, some of the gypsy women, one or two of them handsome wenches though swarthy and dirty, their tangled hair hanging over their eyes, began to mock them, beating their faces and laughing, whereat the Yazidi women came at them angrily and they moved off, the bear shambling after them at the end of a length of chain.

The dead, too, had their feast. Not only had the food been set on the graves, but scarlet flowers had been plastered on the headstones. The women kissed these, and wept: some clawed at their hair and sobbed, whilst others chanted. All were elderly or old, for girls are not expected to come to the tombs. A boy pointed out several graves of murdered men. "Outlaws," he said, pointing to one, "killed this man. They met him in the hills and dragged him from his horse and stabbed him."

At Rashid's house we halted to return the visit of Sadiq, his father, but the old man, tired after the journey, was still sleeping. A visitor from Baghdad, however, came forward to greet us in the garden: it was the Mira Wansa's brother, on his way to the Sinjar. His sister, he said, was weary of the south and would soon return to her people.

When we reached our little house, we found Qawwal Reshu there talking to Jiddan. As I served tea, I told

them that Wansa was said to be returning to the mountains, " but," I added, " I fear she will be in danger there ! "

I was surprised at their reply. " Let her die ! " both said callously. " We do not accept that a Yazidi woman should go to Baghdad, Aleppo and other cities and see foreigners. Let her die : it would be a good thing ! "

I reasoned with them and asked what crime she had committed that she should die. " You yourself told me," I said to one of them, " that Said Beg, her husband, threatened her life, and that they were not happy together ; do you then blame her for leaving him ? "

" She should not have left him," the *qawwāl* answered quickly. " She was his wife, she had a room of her own, and clothes and all that she wanted."

Jiddan said, " He is our *mīr*," and that settled it as far as he was concerned.

The *qawwāl* told me how Said Beg had killed another wife. " They came and told him that his wife Mariam loved a *ghulām* " (a white slave). " He did nothing. They waited. One day, she and the *ghulām* sat talking together in the long grass and bushes. They saw them : they went and told Said Beg, ' Mariam is even now with the *ghulām* in the long grass.' He, our *mīr*, took his revolver, he came, he shot her three times in the belly and the man escaped. She was bleeding, her hands were torn, and they dragged her to the castle, and she was still living. Then they finished her with a dagger. After that, Said Beg went after the man, found him and shot him also."

As we were eating lunch, Aisha and her baby arrived, bringing us *burghul* and meat from the *shaikha's* house. She mentioned her mother-in-law. " She hates me," she sighed. " She has said to me, ' I do not wish to see your face ! Your husband killed my daughter ! ' "

Then she bewailed her loneliness in that tragic house. "I am an orphan," she told A., "and not of this village: my home is far away and of my own people there is none near but a sister married in Bahzané. My husband is in prison and I have no one left but this one——" and so saying, she caught him up and kissed him. They both sat on the floor while we finished our meal, the baby chuckling and crowing and dirtying the floor, and at times demanding his mother's never-refused breast.

I was tired and left A. with her. A. delighted her by letting her see her room, her dressing-gown, night-gown and toilet-things. "You have this," said Aisha, picking up the comb; "why then do you need that?" touching the brush.

We were invited to tea by Qawwal Reshu, who had given us instructions how to find his house. When we arrived, however, he was still out with his tambour making the tour of the graves: but his wife set mattresses and cushions for us on the well-swept floor. It was a two-roomed house, and in the living-room where he, his wife and babies and a fat puppy lived and slept, there was a fireplace. The other room, reached through a doorless entrance, was given over to cocks and hens. Before long he returned and set about his duties as host in a very cheerful manner, chatting the while of his travels and his experiences with the English. He heated the water for tea on a Primus stove, burnished till it shone like the sun, and his kettle was no less brightly polished. "I use Brasso," he explained with pardonable pride. "We used to polish with it when I was in the Levies."

More visitors awaited us when we got back. Rashid and his father were there with an offering of multi-coloured eggs, some *kleycha* (festival mince-pies) and a large plateful of dried figs from their estate in the Sinjar. We told Rashid how charmed we had been

that morning to see the beehive decorated, and I mentioned that in England we too once used skips or baskets for our bees, but that now we used wooden hives in sections. His eyes lit up at once, as they always did when he heard of anything of practical good. "*Khatūn*," he said to me one day, "you ask us many questions: what do we do for this and that. And we want to ask *you* many questions: what do you do in your country for this and that—we want to learn." And now he wanted to know all about this modern way of housing the *dabbās*, as the bee is called here—the word means "the honey-maker". How was this hive made? How were the sections fitted together and how removed? When we got back, could we send him a picture and tell him exactly how it was shaped, so that he could begin this better way of bee-keeping here in Baashika. We kept our promise as far as we could. A. sent him a book on bee-keeping in the belief that his brother would be able to read and translate it for him: I spoke to the Education authorities in Baghdad and communicated with the Ministry of Agriculture, asking them to send a sample hive. I left Baghdad before I heard that they had done so, but a high authority in education assured me that he would press the matter. I can only hope that he did.

They left us, and I was just settling to letters when three Christian schoolmasters arrived to pay us a call, and fresh tea was brought. They took their calling seriously and talked with enthusiasm, although they were without original ideas on the subject and poured out the platitudes they had been taught: a Government schoolmaster is not required to think independently. However, they were, I feel sure, doing good work.

When they left us, and that was late, A. and I ate our supper and then escaped to the roof and drank in the pure, fresh air, all aromatic with herbs. The moon was misty, but Venus sailed large in the sky. And so,

our minds washed free of educational theories by the lovely moon-drenched expanse of silent hills, we went to bed, knowing that in every Yazidi house that night water was being heated. For, after the Great Sacrifice of lambs and kids, comes the Big Wash, which is none other than the familiar purification of the spring feast. Throughout, the feast ran true to the immemorial type. Therefore, in every house, Yazidis cleansed their bodies from head to foot in preparation for the morrow. Mourning, sacrifice, symbols of resurrection, purification by water—all the ancient threads were present in a pattern I knew well.

Chapter XIII

THE FEAST: THE SECOND DAY

"Choose with me to go shepherding, with me to milk the flocks, and to pour the sharp rennet in, and to fix the cheeses."

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XI.*

DURING the night there were thunderstorms and heavy rain, and when we rose we found the hill-tops veiled by clouds and the sky grey and sunless. As we sat at breakfast a woman arrived with a dish of curded milk—good sheep's-milk *laban*. We did not see her, but Mikhail said that she had brought it from "the deacon's house" (*beit ash-shammās*). There are two Jacobite deacons, so a little later we sought the advice of our neighbours as to which *shammās* it could be. "It would not be Deacon Ayub," they said, considering, "as he has no sheep. It must be Deacon Hanna."

Accordingly we sought out Deacon Hanna's house. We were warmly welcomed at the door to the court-yard, and within, a bench was placed for us on the raised platform upon which sat the mistress of the house, some of her daughters-in-law and their children. The house-mistress was engaged in sewing bright green silk and fitting it on to the ends of tightly stuffed pillows. These, hard and solid, are used either as head-pillows in bed, or as supports when sitting on the floor during the day. The silk covers the ends: the centre part is fitted with a white calico slip which can be removed and washed.

It was a large house and the several families of married sons lived in the compound. Not only was it

a patriarchal dwelling, but, as A. remarked, it was a village in itself, for the various activities of milling, soap-boiling, olive-pressing, baking, and so on, took place in various chambers either above or below ground. The sheep, goats and donkeys had their quarters beneath the ground level, and underground, too, were the tall earthenware bins, oblong in shape, with a decoration of clay ribbon round the tops. In these were stored wheat, lentils, beans, chopped straw, and grains of all kinds. Sharing the same subterranean chamber was a mill for grinding sesame, previously crushed in the open courtyard above by the *daqqāqa*, a heavy stone roller attached to a centre pin on a raised round platform. A long rod from the centre connected with a mule or donkey who trod round and round till the seed was ready. The sesame-mill below was simply two round, pitted black millstones that looked as if they were made of lava. The mill is variously called *rāha*, *madār* or *jeghārah*. The sesame is then roasted a little and becomes thick and oily. Mixed with honey or fruit syrup it is used like jam, scooped up on the thin bread.

If sesame oil is required, they pour water upon the crushed seed to separate the heavy elements from the oil which floats to the surface. The residue (*tilf*) is sold, or used in a variety of dishes; for instance, it may be prepared with raisins as a sweetmeat.

In the upper rooms were stores: home-made cheeses, jars of amphora shape filled with dried fruits, dates, nuts, lentils and other good things; petroleum tins containing olive-oil and piles of maturing olive-oil soap. The soap was of two kinds, one for toilet use and for clothes, the other for rougher purposes. Vine-leaves, dried and threaded on string, were festooned on the walls: these are used for *dolma*.[1] Wheat is crushed

[1] Small rissoles; vine-leaves, egg-plant, or gherkins stuffed with savoury rice, meat, and spices.

by the mill in the yard to make the *burghul*,[1] eaten like rice with meat, or mixed into a kind of porridge. Opposite the living-rooms was the bakehouse, and we went thither to watch women making and baking the *kleycha* for the feast. These look and taste like mince-pies. The filling is of dates, raisins, nuts, sugar, pepper, *kebāba*, cinnamon and cooking-butter.[2] The pastry, which is heavy, is folded about this mixture, and the women dip their bare hands into a basin of egg set before them, and then rub the yolk on the pies to make the crust yellow: the egg also serves to glue the cakes to the hot wall of the oven. This is a large, concave earthen affair previously heated by burning straw mixed with dung. We looked into it and saw the half-baked *kleycha* adhering to the wall.

I asked how they made bread.

"It is of wheaten flour," they said, "and unleavened. We add some salt and a little sesame flour." The dough is mixed and rolled out on a smooth round stone table, the *fursha*, standing upon three stone feet (*karāsi*). This stone table is about a foot and a half across. The wooden roller, not unlike our own domestic rolling-pin, is called the *shŏbak*. When the dough has been rolled out thin, a long, thickish rod called the *neshābi* completes the shaping. The dough is lifted carefully, for it is as thin as paper, and placed on a leather cushion, and with this it is dexterously slapped against the oven-wall. The result is the local *khubz* or *kāk*; the Kurdish word is *nān*. It is white, wholesome to the taste, and can be easily folded. People wrap their meat in it to save their fingers from grease, and use it like a spoon or scoop as well.

While thus prying into household secrets we had consumed numerous glasses of sweet tea, eaten some bread dipped into sesame, and smoked cigarettes with our hostess, also bestowed Evil Eye beads and chocolates

[1] Or *'aisha*. [2] *Dihn*.

A Yazidi girl in her festival clothes.

Beginning the dance outside the shrine.

on the children. Now we went on our way, followed by cordial leave-takings and smiles.

I sat awhile on our roof, which overlooked a neighbour's houseyard. Five or six children in stages up from a baby that crawled on all fours over dirt, manure and mess, shared the yard with cocks and hens, a grimy and partially hairless white donkey, and several large shaggy dogs eternally scratching at ticks and fleas. The yard included a half-built room, a heap of stones and a pit. Two or three living-rooms opened out of it, and a stone stair led on to the roof and the reception-room.

Presently another donkey arrived, with wet pitchers of water slung two a side on its back, led by a barefoot maiden. She wore a blue cotton skirt, a loose faded red coat and the usual headdress of turban, kerchiefs and coins. Her pigtails, prolonged by black wool, were fastened by silver pendants, and she wore a large necklace of amber beads.

The mother once wiped the baby clean with its own soiled garment, turning its clothes above its head to do so, and later poured a little water from one of the jars over the said garment, rubbed it a little, and put it with other drying clothes on the heap of stones. The dirty water fell to the ground, which was the baby's playpen, but that did not trouble her, nor the cloud of flies. Bedding was spread on the terrace roof, and a sleeping dog lay with it in the fitful sun. Sometimes black kids appeared from nowhere, and skipped up the stairs or gambolled in the yard. Behind were the green hills, aromatic with a thousand herbs, and in the noonday silence the inconsequent music of a Pan-pipe was heard.

By the afternoon the sun had conquered, and we were invited to the house of the Kurdish sergeant of police, near the entrance to the village and the square where gambling for coloured eggs was still in progress.

His wife, a matron wearing a purple velvet jacket, came out with words of welcome to receive us, a smile of welcome on her comely face, and took us into their reception-room, spotlessly clean and well kept. Upon the walls were ornaments made of folded cigarette tinsel in various colours—I referred to this form of domestic decoration above—as well as framed pictures. There was the usual coloured picture of the Kaaba, for our host was a Moslem, and there were spirited delineations of the warrior Antar and the wise king Solomon. Antar, a black warrior, was cleaving the head of an enemy horseman from whose skull large drops of blood spurted, the sword having cleft the head as far as the mouth. The victim wore a dolorous expression but still bestrode his steed. Behind the swordsman a damsel, perhaps Abla, sat in a howdah on her camel, extending a branch, perhaps laurels of victory, towards her hero. The other picture appeared to be by the same artist. It showed Solomon on his throne, his courtiers about him and a group of animals standing before him: perhaps, as he is said to have understood their language, he was listening to what they said. A hoopoe hovered near his head, and to the left of the group stood a tall jinni looking with his horns, hoof and tail for all the world like the personage whose name the Yazidis will not utter. Photographs of the sergeant and his children were also about the room, but not one of his handsome wife. I offered to take her picture, but he refused politely: it was not the custom of the Kurds, he said.

Melancholy lay on the household in spite of our hostess's smiles, for the sergeant had only held temporary rank and had that day, through no fault, been deprived of a stripe. It was, it seemed, a question of pay. An order had come from Baghdad that the numbers of those holding temporary rank were to be

reduced, and the sergeant was not alone in his disappointment.

* * * * *

In the square they were still gambling for eggs. Towards evening we wandered out towards the forbidden ground, the shrine of Shaikh Muhammad. The door stood open and the green courtyard and shrine behind it looked inviting. We lingered by the threshold and looked in. Men were ranged round the square courtyard, sitting with their backs to the wall, and seeing us at the door, they cried to us hospitably, "Enter, enter!" The aged *kochek* in his white robes came forward to greet us with the utmost courtesy, smiling benignly. He moved as the host about the place. Part of the courtyard was in shade, but evening sunshine bathed the part that adjoined the low wall separating the flags and lawn from the shrine garden, with its olive- and fig-trees in young leaf.

We were bidden sit, and took a place on a felt mat beside the *mukhtār*, who with other Yazidi elders and notables, had gathered here for the night's vigil. One of the *qawwāls* brought us coffee, the usual bitter mouthful at the bottom of a handleless cup. In serving, the practice is to hold the cups packed one into the other in one hand and to hold the brass coffee-pot (*della*) in the other.

So here we sat, in the forbidden place, at the forbidden hour, and no one had said us nay! I took note of our surroundings. The charm and peace of the scene passed description On the green grass in the centre of the courtyard stood an earthenware jar in a wooden stand, two amphorae beside it and a bowl for dipping out the cooled water. Also, there was an iron standard supporting an iron lamp, which stood on the grass upon the farther side of the paved path which led direct from the entrance to the door of the shrine.

This lamp was of the pattern of the lamps in the temple of Shaikh 'Adi, that is, it was a square shallow dish with four lips in each of which a long wick is laid. I asked Rashid if this peculiar shape had not a meaning, and, after a little hesitation, he admitted that it had. It represents, he said, " the four corners of the earth, the north, south, east and west, and the road of the sun ".

His answer interested me, for the Parsis when making the sign of the cross of their sacred foods, make the same explanation, and the Nestorian priest, making the sign of the cross over the sacramental wafers, murmurs, " From east to west, from north to south ". In fact, it was yet another small piece of evidence that the cross in ritual is purely a sun-symbol.

Grass grew on either side of the central path, as in a college quadrangle, but a paving ran round the court-yard, and it was upon this that mats had been spread for the men who sat round the walls. These wore red turbans and multi-coloured belts, the dresses were mostly white and wholly Oriental, indeed, Jiddan and ourselves, he in his uniform and we in our Western dress, were the only intrusions from modern 'Iraq and the twentieth century.

We entered the ante-chamber of the tomb, removing our shoes to do so, and there laid an offering, but did not attempt to enter the inner chamber lest it might grate upon their feelings, although they showed not the slightest sign of objection. It had been easy, however, to glance inside, and the sarcophagus tomb within resembled that of any Moslem saint. It was covered with green and red silk drapings. In the ante-chamber lamps for the sacred olive-oil lay about the floor, one or two of them silvered over and fluted for wicks, the others all of the Yazidi four-wick shape. The entrance to the shrine was constructed of carved grey Mosul marble, and bore an inscription in Arabic which said

that Sadiq ibn Rashid, that is Rashid's father, he having been named after his grandfather, had rebuilt the shrine in piety. We were careful on entering and leaving not to touch with our feet the threshold stone, high and broad as in all Yazidi shrines, for this would have been a pollution.

We resumed our seats beside the *mukhtār*, and beside us a chamber was attached to the courtyard where women sat and later busied themselves with the preparation of food. The *kochek*, presiding over all, wore a tranquil and happy expression: it was the old man's day of days in the year, for the tomb is permanently in his charge and all were his guests.

Yazidis arrived constantly, and at their entrance looked neither to right nor left, but walked straight up the paved way to the shrine. About halfway they touched the breast with both hands, swept both hands upwards with a brushing movement, and then brought them down strokingly on either side of the face and beard. At the entrance to the shrine they stooped, bent or knelt, kissed the threshold stone and both doorposts, also the stones by and inside the doorway, then went in. On emerging, they kissed the wall to the right of the shrine, in a niche of which a lamp was burning.

Presently there was a slight stir by the outer doorway and a little procession entered and moved silently forward, while every one present rose to their feet. It was headed by the *kochek*, looking like the prophet Eli, a *qawwāl* with a large tambour and another with a flute, and consisted of a man and two women, one of whom bore a child in her arms. At least this is what the mysterious object veiled with green silk proved to be when they all emerged from the shrine, where the green silk had been left on the tomb. The *mukhtār* explained that the child had been sick and had vowed the green silk to Shaikh Muhammad if he recovered.

We had just seen the fulfilment of the vow, and on the morrow a man would climb up the white fluted spire and fasten the green silk to the golden ball at the top so that all the world might know the saint's clemency. As soon as the procession had issued, we all sat down again. From time to time others arrived with votive gifts for the shrine, and whenever this happened, there was the same ceremonious entrance and general rising. Once it was an old man hugging a cone of sugar wrapped in its commercial blue wrapper. This would sweeten tea dispensed in hospitality at the holy place.

From time to time coffee was brought round to those sitting round the walls, ourselves included. After a while there was another stir: large objects wrapped in brown cloth were brought in and given to the *qawwāls* who sat in the southern corner of the courtyard, and again every one rose to honour the sacred objects. The braziers by the *qawwāls* were lit, and then they drew from the brown bags the large tambours of their calling, and warmed these by the braziers to tighten the skins. There were three *qawwāls* with tambours, and two younger *qawwāls* with pipes.

Again we resumed our seats and the *qawwāls* then began to chant to the tambours and pipes. The melody was very different from that we had heard at the tombs. It was less folk-like, and difficult to follow both as regards rhythm and motif. The beating of the tambours was led by the senior *qawwāl*. They were not always held still, but at an unseen sign from the leader were swept upwards, or thrust outwards and sideways, as if by a single impulse, like a wheeling flight of birds, always precisely together.

The chanting was low and in a major key. All present listened with reverent attentive faces and in the prayer in Kurdish which followed the chant we heard the name "Shaikh 'Adi". During the prayer the men in the courtyard did not rise, but sat with

The scene at Shaikh Muhammad on the eve of the vigil.
[*The* kōchek *is the standing figure in white.*]

The village washing-pool, Baashika.

open hands laid on their knees, palm upwards, finishing by stroking down their faces, like Moslems when reciting the *Fātiha*. When the prayer was ended, all rose to their feet a second and then sat again.

A second chant followed, louder than the first and more vigorous in measure. I transcribe A.'s note about it:

"The rhythm of the Kurdish drums in the second chant was in eight time, slightly syncopated. One phrase was repeated sixteen or twenty times: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, 6 and 7 and 8 tied together (one note to four beats), i.e. ♩♩♩♩–♩♩. It then changed to a chorus four times repeated of >♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩ with the accent on the first beat, the whole slightly faster than the first phrase and quickening steadily to a final crash. This appeared to be one verse. There were four or five verses, after which the rhythm changed abruptly to 'and–1, and–2, and–1, and–2', i.e. –♩–♩–♩–♩ then suddenly reverted quickly to >♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩ four times repeated and getting quicker and louder until it ended in the biggest crash of all. This was accompanied by a flageolet descant played on two pipes like flageolets but larger, and by low chanting from the *qawwāls* in Kurdish."

Adding to her description, the movement of the tambours was carried out vehemently and dramatically, first the swing upwards and then the thrust forwards accompanied by intensified drumming of the fingers, which must be very strong to produce so loud a note. The simultaneous crashing of the surrounding jingles, inserted round the rim as in a tambourine, added a passion and excitement to the music which it is difficult to convey by any imagery.

The sun was setting, the swallows circled backwards and forwards catching evening flies; moreover, we could hear the agitated twitter of the bee-eaters, sure tokens that spring was with us—we had seen none of these lovely birds until that very morning. In the

dusk the old *kochek*, a venerable figure in his white vestments, arose, and poured olive-oil into the standard lamp on the grass, then lit it with a piece of flaming wood, first arranging the four wicks carefully into their grooves. His actions were hieratic and grave ; it was a priestly office.

Rashid, who now came to sit by us, told us that the oil had been pressed from the olives within the precincts, and he indicated the shrine garden beyond the courtyard, the whole being enclosed by a high outer wall.

We began to wonder whether we should stay. We did not wish to impose ourselves, I told Rashid, and as the sun had now set, the ceremonies of the night would begin, therefore we excused ourselves and would leave.

He made a little speech to us, said so that all could hear. The devotions that went on this night, he said, were prayer and chanting, such as that we had just heard, and which no one not a Yazidi had ever been privileged to hear in this holy place. Never before, he went on, had the Yazidis of Baashika admitted anyone to their shrine on this evening, and they would never do so again. They had invited us inside in order to show us especial honour, and to express to us their appreciation of our presence and friendship. This was their return. Had we been men, we could not have been admitted, but as women, and as their friends, we were welcome to stay. They begged us, however, not to tell others that we had been present, lest they claimed a right to enter on precedent.

We replied that we were deeply and truly touched by the honour shown to us, and would never forget it. Neither would we publish abroad the privilege we had received.

It may seem to those who read this, that this very chapter violates our promise, but I think that the promise extracted referred to the people of the neigh-

bourhood, rather than to the world at large, and to these we said nothing. I write this, therefore, in the conviction that no one will ever force themselves uninvited upon these gentle and courteous people, or distress them by importuning them for privileges which they will only yield unasked. I work upon the system of waiting until I am freely invited behind forbidden doors, and find that it is both the wisest and infinitely the surest method of getting information.

Sitting confidentially beside us, Rashid indicated a gravestone in the paving and told me that his eldest brother was buried there, basely murdered by Turkish officials just before their retreat during the last war. He was then in a garden near Tell Billa which belonged to the family. The Turks came at night, and beating at the gate asked for hospitality, which was given them.

"My uncle received them, and then they asked for my brother by name. My uncle took them to where my brother lay asleep, and they emptied their revolvers into his sleeping body. He never knew of their treachery. By God, you have seen my mother, and how old and frail she looks? Her old age dates from that time. For five years we wept and hardly ate. He was the best of all of us, and my father has not been the same man since that day."

There was a hum and stir outside, and we were told that the *Baba Shaikh*, the religious head of all the Yazidis, had arrived. All rose, the women trilled their shrill *helhela*, and a train of people entered. The *Baba Shaikh* is a tall, upright and aged man, and wears his high white turban low over his eyes. He wore pure white, and a black sash round his waist: his woollen cloak was of white home-spun. A pace behind him walked his son, a swarthy and elderly man. My eye caught him for a moment near a lay Yazidi with a shock of blonde hair bushing out beneath his cap and a long fair moustache, recalling a figure in a mediaeval German

painting, and I realized how far removed the *shaikhly* class is in racial type. The *Baba Shaikh's* son, like many of his caste, was dark, and not unlike an Afghan.

The *shaikh* advanced with stateliness. The notables greeted him respectfully, standing. He went round the courtyard, kissing the walls in several places, and when he reached the shrine, he saluted the doorposts in the same way. Passing round the assembly, he addressed a few words here and there, offering his hand to each man in turn to be kissed. The hand-kissing was thus: the layman kissed the *shaikh's* hand and lifted it to his forehead, then the *shaikh* raised the hand the layman had saluted towards his own mouth as if to convey the kiss thither. When he came upon us, in our corner, he checked, and then, passing us over as if we had not existed, he proceeded to our left-hand neighbour. When he returned to his place above us, nearer the shrine, we saw Rashid and his father approach him and make evident explanations. A message was brought us that we might approach him.

Feeling somewhat like wasps in a beehive, we did so, and I said in a low voice some words of welcome, expressed our sense of the honour done to us by the permission to remain, and our hope that his journey had not wearied him. My words were translated, as the *shaikh* knows no Arabic. He was gracious, and again we retired to our corner.

Presently we saw the women in the serving-chamber busy preparing large bowls of *harīsa*. In lower 'Iraq *harīsa* is pilgrim-diet and I knew it for what it was, a rich broth-porridge, nourishing and palatable, easily heated on or after a journey. A huge wooden spoon stood against the wall; it had been used to ladle the pottage into the bowls. A leather-covered cushion was placed before the *shaikh*, and upon this were piled many flat thin loaves of Kurdish bread, together with meat and a bowl of *harīsa*. Bowls of *harīsa*, in which several

wooden spoons were laid, and bowls of hot meat were then put at intervals all round the courtyard so that all might eat, several from each bowl. We ate like the rest, and then more coffee was served round by the coffee-maker. It was growing late.

The *shaikh*, enthroned on a sheepskin, had finished his meal, and his pipe was produced, of prodigious length, certainly four feet from the small bowl to the magnificent round amber mouthpiece. His son, standing respectfully before him, lit it, but in so doing managed to break the earthenware bowl. Another was quickly produced and fitted, then the lit pipe was handed to his holiness. The *shaikh* had a large square embroidered tobacco-bag, and from time to time he honoured someone in the courtyard by passing it to him and inviting him to help himself. Jiddan, to whom the *shaikh* had addressed a few words, was gratified when asked to roll himself a cigarette—he had no *qaliūn*—from the great man's pouch. A. and I coveted these Kurdish tobacco bags. They were of home-woven cloth, often dipped in some gay dye, and stitched with orange or green, and sometimes, as was this of the *Baba Shaikh*, they were embroidered.

All told us that the night's vigil would be spent in chanting and prayer, "like the chanting and prayer you have seen", Rashid told us, "and they bring refreshments and coffee from time to time. *Khatūn*, now you have seen and know what we do here. Stay if you like, but I fear you will become tired needlessly."

I took the hint and rose to go, taking leave of the *shaikh* and saluting the *mukhtār*. We passed out through the forbidden portal, and went back in the silent moonlight.

Chapter XIV

THE FEAST: THE THIRD DAY

"Was it nectar like this that beguiled the shepherd to dance and foot it about his folds . . . ?"

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll VII.*

WHEN we rose, we reminded ourselves that this was the day to which every man, woman and child here had looked forward for a whole year, the lovely, joyful day of days, the day for which every woman for miles round had been sewing and contriving, seeing to it that each child had a new garment, getting out the family heirlooms of jewellery and embroidery, baking festival cakes and sweetmeats, and setting out their men's gala clothes; the day which was the apogee of all the gladness of spring, "the thrice desirable".

We hurried to the roof as soon as we were dressed and there, on the green hills without the village where graves are clustered about the white *mazārs*, we saw Yazidi women standing by their dead, beating their breasts and faces to the rhythm of the flute and tambour. Adonis, then, still slept. The day of joy had dawned, but the dead were remembered and festival cates laid on the earth which covered them.

The day, as I look back upon it, started on this sober note and mounted in a crescendo; first religious in tone, then more and more irrepressibly gay; the spirit of fair and festivity running higher every hour until all was the maddest of Bacchanals.

We wandered out early and encountered one or two of the men we had seen within the shrine of Shaikh Muhammad on the previous night. The prayers and

chanting had been kept up till past midnight and would have continued till dawn, they said, had not a sudden tempestuous wind and heavy spring rain driven the worshippers to shelter. The rooms about the shrine are small, so that it was left to only a few to continue the vigil, including the reverend *Baba Shaikh*, the *qawwāls* and the white-robed *kochek*.

On the broad undulating stretch of sward which lies before the shrine, two shelters of goats'-hair cloth provided with benches had been erected for protection against possible downpour. The rain-clouds, however, had fled, and the sky was as blue and clear as if Shaikh Shems himself had ordered the weather. On the grassy plain, and the roads along the foothills, crowds streamed to the spot. Pedlars squatted in a long double row on the way to the shrine. Before some were heaps of sweets, gaudy of hue and suggesting aniline dye. Others were vendors of nuts and dried fruits. The dried green berry of the *gazwān* tree (the terebinth),[1] called by the Arabs *baṭni*, made brave heaps of jade. There were cheap fairings, paper masks, paper animals, toy windmills and other small toys. There was a large round tray over which a wand like the hand of a clock swung round when lightly pushed. If it came to rest over a compartment wherein was some small cheap object, the investor of a *fils* or two got away with a prize. Its presiding genius kept up a call of "*Neṣīb, neṣīb!*" the equivalent of "Try your luck!"

Gypsies, always clannish and working in groups, hovered about the fast-growing crowd. And what a crowd! Foolishly, I took some photographs, only to regret it later, for, as the day wore on, the fair grew fuller and the dresses richer.

We left the hurly-burly and went into the shrine itself. The *kochek*, a little paler and frailer because of

[1] Mr. Evan Guest has given me its botanical name: *Pistaccio mutica*. The seeds are used for dye.

his lack of sleep, was still the gentle host, but to-day the door was open to all, even to those of another faith. One or two benches had been placed for the *effendīa*, as clerks and officials are called, for such were expected to-day from the city of Mosul. These seats were ranged along the low wall which skirted the olive-garden, and filled the place which on the previous night had been occupied by the *qawwāls* with their pipes and tambours.

But what pagan spirit had usurped the shrine of the saint? The night's vigil with its turbanned worshippers, its chants, and its prayers might indeed have passed as the devotions of a Sufi sect, mystical and eclectic indeed, but still Moslem in outward appearance. To-day the mask was awry and I seemed to see a laughing face peering from behind it. It was a glad god, an ancient god, a young god, that would dance in before long, naked and unashamed.

We took a seat on one of the benches and watched the visitors who poured into the shrine. Amongst them were Moslems and Christians, and most of them were women. Many of them kissed the walls reverently like the Yazidis, for blessing comes thereby, and a saint is a saint, whatever his labelled religion. The women streamed in and went up the stairway to the flat roof of the shrine. Here they sat so as to have a good view of all subsequent proceedings. The Yazidi women, with their skull-caps of shining coins, turban head-dresses, silver belt-clasps, chains, amulets and beads were brilliant enough, but the Kurdish women from the villages outdazzled them. The first that we saw, a veritable Queen of Sheba, took away our breath, bedizened as she was with precious metals, beads, and more colours in her numerous draperies than one could conceive possible. But others, and more and more arrived, and even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these. They were all glitter and

colour, as they enthroned themselves on the roof, their headdresses flashing in the sun. "How they must have enjoyed themselves," said A., "in heaping colour on colour!" Magenta and purple with scarlet, orange or primrose, with vivid green, yellows, mauves, pinks; all these colours were hurled together with a splendid audacity, with always enough black added to make the rainbow brighter by contrast. They were hung all over with large amber and coloured beads, silver chains, ornaments and amulets, their heads were weighted with gold and silver and the green and red kerchiefs which composed the turban were secured by large silver pins.

A. and I had hard work to preserve our good manners. We breathed to each other, "Oh look, *look*!" as each new arrival passed us, for in this kaleidoscope of women each newcomer seemed more gorgeous than her sisters. As usual, many of the village women surprised us by their fairness. I noted one comely little maiden whose blonde plaits had been dyed red with henna. She wore orange garments of every shade, some light, some deep and tawny. These, together with her sun-gilded cheeks, gave her a golden look.

The children were almost as gay as their elders. The Yazidi boys, the ends of their long white sleeves knotted behind their necks, wore embroidered jackets, or, if they were too poor, their mothers had sewn gay fronts to old waistcoats worn above their baggy trousers. Little girls had huge silver buckles to their belts.

We went up to the roof which was getting more crowded every moment. Some Moslem women from Mosul, all in black, like crows among birds of brilliant plumage, were perched there with the rest. I noticed that many of the Kurdish women had secured large square amulet cases to their left arms, and that silver pendants, gold coins and tassels of many vivid colours were worn, not only on their heads, but all over their

persons. Their hair was plaited and the plaits were artificially lengthened with black sheep's wool and terminated by filigree balls on chains that reached their ankles. One or two of the prettiest girls had pinned red roses to their turbans. One handsome young creature had attired herself in canary yellow: her *meyzār*, or home-spun toga, was dyed a deeper shade, and her other garments had stitchings and pieces of brilliant green. The *meyzārs* of many of the women —and the favourite colours for these were orange and red—were embroidered with stars and triangles. As one stood above the sitting women, the coin-caps and silver ornaments on the sunny roof shone like helmets and coats of mail.

We returned to the courtyard once more, the only women there, and found that a few officials and notables from Mosul had arrived, bringing with them police "to keep order". There were introductions and politenesses. With their *sidāras* (the modern 'Iraqi wears a forage-cap of this name) and their smart uniforms the officials looked very impressive as they took their seats on the benches. One, who talked English, sat beside me and aired his proficiency in that tongue. "These people," he said, in a superior manner, "use the Qur'an, but everywhere that the word Shaitan occurs, they have burnt it out of their texts."

The remark was made in no specially low voice. This man, guest of the Yazidis here, must have known that it was the bounden duty of every Yazidi who heard the forbidden word pronounced to slay him.

"Oh, hush!" I entreated him, horrified. "Please do not say that name here!" If any of our hosts heard, they were diplomatically deaf, but I no longer wondered why they excluded strangers from their ceremonies.

The great man called to one or two of the little girls and asked in a benevolent manner what their names were, if they went to school and in what class they were.

One pretty Yazidi child, who admitted after immense effort that her name was Hamasi, wore an unusual ornament upon her head, a cup-shaped gold boss as big as an egg-cup, within which were turquoises and a ruby, the outside being decorated with filigree and inset turquoises. It was, no doubt, an heirloom.

Presently there was a prolonged shrill trilling from the women outside, on the roof, and around the building. Something was about to happen. We knew what to expect, for Jiddan had warned us; indeed, while wandering about outside the two masters of to-day's ceremonies had been pointed out to us as they moved about in the centre of a crowd, and soliciting gratuities from their admirers. These two were laymen, and their instruments were unlike those of the *qawwāls*. The drummer carried a large drum, the *ṭabal*: the piper a wide-mouthed wooden pipe called the *zurnaya*, or *zurna*.

The moment for their ceremonious entry had come, and the Yazidi villagers, with their baggy trousers, red turbans and fair, sunburnt faces, ranged themselves in ranks on the farther side of the small forecourt to the shrine, every inch of which was now thronged with onlookers, except the patch of sward and the paved way to the tomb, which bisected it. The cries increased in intensity, and in came the pair.

As soon as they had entered, they fell to their knees dramatically, looking at the tomb-shrine, and silence fell, except for the high-pitched fluttering cry from the women above. The piper raised his pipe to his lips and blew one piercing, continuous trill, the drummer sustained a long roll. As he knelt, his cheeks puffed out like Boreas, the piper swayed his body and pipe this way and that, as if in a supreme incantation. This lasted for a full ten minutes, a stirring, uncannily emotional ten minutes. I was reminded, somehow, of the scene in the ballet Petrouchka in which the magician

calls his puppets to life. Like the magicians was the swaying body, the pipe held to the lips and the intent, commanding look. But this was no mumming. What we were witnessing here was an actual religious or magical ceremony. The spirit called up had little to do with Muhammad the Arab, or that other reverend and deceased Shaikh Muhammad whose dust lay in the tomb. This call was addressed to the very spirit of spring. It sounded an alarum to the dead that slept in their graves, bidding them live. It summoned the land to wake and be fruitful. The rise of sap in the trees, the urge of procreation in beast and man inspired its urgency, its vehemence.

At last the tense moments ended. The piper and drummer ceased, rose to their feet and, going to the shrine, kissed the outer walls, doorposts and threshold-stone before disappearing inside with the *kochek*.

As they emerged again, a circle of men with linked arms and hands formed in the courtyard. The honour of dancing in this *debka*, first of all the *debkas* danced in this month of spring, is auctioned and sold to the highest bidders.

Pipe and drum took their stand, and the traditional music, played every year at the spring festival for perhaps centuries, was heard once again.

The *debka* began. It is, perhaps, the most exciting of all folk-dances, certainly of those which I have seen. Its rhythm of stamping feet and bending bodies is irresistible. It starts staidly, with steps backwards and forwards and stamping here and there, but, as it continues, the leaping and swaying become more and more unrestrained. Up on the roof the women trilled incessantly, craning forward to see, and thronging the steps. Round and round the men shuffled in the small space.

At last this first, semi-religious dance was ended, and the people within the shrine area swarmed out

Villagers streaming in for the feast.

"As soon as they had entered they fell to their knees."

pell-mell through the narrow entrance to the sunshine outside, where the crowds had now swelled into a great host of people. Immediately a new circle was formed on the sward before the shrine, the piper and drummer playing their infectious music in its centre. The circle widened continually. New dancers broke the circle and linked themselves on. Groups of girls joined in as well, only the endmost linking arms with the men. They were more restrained in their movements than the men, who flung their long sleeves over their shoulders as they bent and leapt backwards, for in the Syrian *debka* a kerchief is flourished in the air by one of the dancers; here, long sleeves waved aloft took the place of the fluttering handkerchief.

Meanwhile, pipe and drum never flagged, but kept on, insistent and gay, and reaching some occult nerve in body or soul that vibrated in answer. Here was the magic of the Pied Piper. I feel sure that the Pied Piper must have been followed by his partner with a drum, or the children would not have danced out behind him. The rhythm of the drum was the natural complement to his music. Fife and drum, pipe and tabor, *zurna* and *tabal*, these are twins, natural mates, bound together by ancient canon, as inseparable the one from the other as a well-wed pair. The one attunes and excites the spirit, the other impels the feet. Both must be under Taurus. "Taurus," quoth Sir Andrew Aguecheek—"that's legs and thighs!" said Sir Toby. So caper, bend, linked together and round and round, feet beating the ground to the music of the pipe and drum!

There was a respite at noon. Perhaps some fetched a little sleep after a night spent in vigil, and all ate plentifully of the meat and *burghul* and mince-pies which every good housewife had ready for the feast. In the earlier morning we had encountered the *Baba Shaikh*, with his beautiful long pipe, accompanied by

his son and a number of respectful followers, going to the house of our friend Sadiq to repose. He did not preside at the merrymakings and dancings, called locally the *ṭawwāfi*.

We met him again in the afternoon at his host's house, where all the household worked untiringly to entertain a crowd of guests. On the space before the housedoor there were dancers, round the piper and drummer, who were hard at it again. The door stood hospitably open. On the clay seats within the shadow of the archway, and round the courtyard and its garden, mats and cushions were spread and guests took their ease, while Rashid, a tired but attentive son of the house, saw to it that all who entered were offered sweet tea in glasses or the aromatic bitter coffee, roasted, ground and made by his own hand. His father, smoking a *qaliūn*, and the *Baba Shaikh* sat together on mats a little apart as befitted the chief guest's status, the *Baba Shaikh* drawing at his prodigious pipe and discussing with his grave host matters affecting the welfare of the Yazidi world. Again the *Baba Shaikh* wore his large white turban over his bushy eyebrows, but little grey hair showing beneath. I requested the honour of taking the photograph of both old men and consent was graciously given. The *Baba Shaikh* took the opportunity to ask my advocacy in a matter which concerned the community. I had to tell him that I had no influence in such matters, but that, should it come my way to express an opinion, he would not find me slow to express my partisanship, whereat he made a courtly gesture of comprehension. After all, I was only a woman, it seemed to say. I longed to ask him to let me photograph him with that monumental pipe, but it would not have been diplomatic.

Language, moreover, was an insurmountable barrier between us.

A. and I withdrew after a little conversation with

Dancing the debka *in the courtyard of Shaikh Muhammad.*

Exterior of the shrine of Shaikh Muhammad on the feast day.

Rashid, a conversation which threw light upon the Yazidis to their spiritual and temporal princes respectively. To repeat it would be a breach of confidence, but it proved to me how strong are the dual loyalties with this honourable and proud people.

We left the dancing and din and the busy hospitality of Sadiq's house, and wandered up the valley of Ras al-'Ain, to-day emptied for the fair. Here we mounted the hill of Shaikh Melké Miran and sat on the short grass, watching the *debka* dancers like capering dolls below, and then gazing at the long serenity of the wide valleys, at the green, tomb-sown hills with their white cones towards Bahzané, and at the rocky mountain on our right which hid the sacred cave. A brown-faced boy saw us, and perched himself ever closer and closer, watching, like a park sparrow hopeful for crumbs. He wanted to see us nearto, these women with the strange customs, whose children, it was said, were cut from their bodies by magic surgery, who had machines that wrote and sewed, who were at once so friendly and so remote.

We talked to him: he told us that he was the son of Deacon Ayub and went to school, and about his family and himself.

Our consciences pricked us about Sitt Gulé, so we struck out across the hills to avoid returning by the village, and called at her house. She was still lying where we had left her, sick and helpless, her white turban soiled and awry on her grey head, the flies thick about her and her bedding. As usual, the family gathered on the open mud stairway that led to the platform on which she lay. It was plain that they did not consider that she was long for this world.

One of her daughters-in-law said to me, "If it please the Lord to call her, well! If it does not please Him to call her, well also!"

The old lady was groaning, but roused herself and

sat up and fetched out a letter which her son Murad had sent her from his prison. Again I promised I would do what I could to bring his hard case before the authorities. This I did. In Mosul, I talked the matter over with the *Mutesarrif*, who said the affair had passed out of his hands: in Baghdad, I tried to bring the question before the Ministry of the Interior. I could do no more, for as war-clouds became blacker, I flew quickly to England to catch a glimpse, if possible, of two sons in the British Army. Jiddan implored me to do my best for his *shaikha*, and I heard later that he had given money from his own slender store to aid his hereditary mistress.

* * * * *

It was our last evening in Baashika. On the morrow A. would return to Kirkuk and I would set out for the Hakkari mountains. After supper we went up to our roof. The moon was bright, a soft scented wind blew from the hills, and a torrent of black goats scuttered up the village street. In a courtyard not far off girls were dancing and shrilling cries of joy, dancing in the mad happy circle of the *debka*, their silver ornaments shining in the moonlight. They were stepping to the rhythmic clapping of the onlookers, for the piper and drummer were resting in preparation for a renewal of the revels the next day at the village of Bahzané.

At midnight I woke and heard, faint but clear, the sound of distant chanting accompanied by the sacred flute and tambour of the *qawwāls*. It came from the shrine. The next morning I learnt that at that hour a man had climbed the cone and attached to the golden ball at its summit scraps of votive silk, to flutter there like tongues of gratitude for favours obtained of the saint. Amongst them, doubtless, was that green silk which told of the recovery of a sick child. Prayer, dancing and singing had lasted all night, a somewhat

jaded Rashid told us when he came early to bid us farewell and make excuses for his father, who was still sleeping. He himself had not gone to bed for three nights, but he could not let us go without wishing us godspeed.

We were packing. A. was loading her bedding and case on to a car bound for Kirkuk, whilst for me the police had sought out 'Aziz that he might convey us to Shaikhan, where I expected pack-animals to take us on to Shaikh 'Adi. Aisha and her baby watched us as we packed and strapped, and Sairey appeared to bestow a last incoherent incantation. The *qawwāl* Reshu bade us good-bye, and other friends including all the police and Mustafa the sergeant, who put in a last word about his stripe.

A. left first; I got under way a little later, leaving the car by the mill, picking my way over the stream beside the washerwomen, and walking up a grassy slope upon which blue pimpernels, wide open, proclaimed another fine day. At the top was the *rais's* house protected by fine iron gates as beseemed the mayor of the place. Here more good-byes were said and thanks offered for all the kindnesses received during our stay. The valedictory coffee was swallowed: I rejoined the car in which Jiddan, Mikhail and the melancholy 'Aziz awaited me, and away we went.

Chapter XV

PILGRIMS' PROGRESS

"Come, and with kindly gifts return homeward again!"
THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XXII.*

THE first stage of our journey was a short one. We halted at Bahzané where the *mīr*, Said Beg, accompanied by *qawwāls* and the sacred peacock, were staying for the day. The sacred peacock, the *sanjak*, is an image in bronze, the symbol of the Peacock Angel. There are several of these images, each of which is taken round by the *qawwāls* at certain seasons of the year and exhibited to the faithful, who bring offerings in money or kind.[1] These offerings are given to the *mīr* and represent a considerable yearly revenue, now diminished because, owing to difficulties and restrictions brought about through war-conditions, the *qawwāls* cannot cross the frontiers into other countries. The *sanjak* (lit. "standard") is shown in secret. Years ago, knowing that at least one such image is kept at Ba'idri where the *mīr* lives, I asked, while paying him a visit at his castle, whether I might be permitted to see the sacred bird. I got the answer I deserved, "It is not here."

According to various accounts, the image varies in shape from the crude representation of something which looks like a dove or fowl, to the conventionalized bird with a fantail actually to be seen in the South Kensington Museum. How this was obtained I do not know.

The reason why the peacock was chosen as the earthly symbol of the Prince of Angels has been discussed many times by the pundits, and M. Lescot, in his book recently

[1] See p. 99.

published about the Yazidis in the Jebel Sinjar, has summed up the somewhat negative result of their deliberations.

Here I was, within stone's throw of a sacred peacock, and yet I decided not to appear conscious of its presence. A *qawwāl* led us up a narrow street and took us into the crowded courtyard of one of the larger houses of the village. Chickens scratched about the feet of the men standing in the courtyard, some of which, no doubt, were awaiting their turn to visit the sacred bird. The peacock was in a room off the courtyard: I saw arrivals conducted to the door by a *qawwāl*.

Upon the *iwān*, or open dais room, sat the *mīr*, and on benches spread with carpets round the three walls were a number of visitors, two of whom got up to give place to myself and Jiddan. Amongst these one or two wore European coats and the 'Iraqi *sidāra*, tokens of the townsman and official, and opposite to the *mīr* sat the local Jacobite priest in his black robes. The *Baba Shaikh* and his son were also present, so that both spiritual and temporal lords of the Yazidis were met under one roof.

Said Beg, Prince of the Yazidis, Wansa's husband, is a tall and not ill-favoured man of under forty, who wears his very long black beard curled into a lovelock. He gave me a courteous reception, telling me that I had been awaited for some time at Shaikh 'Adi. I explained the reason of my delay and thanked him for his offer of hospitality there, for he had most kindly placed a guest-room there at my disposal. He said that he had given orders that I was to be shown all that was to be seen there (my heart leapt joyfully at this), and that all should be done to make my stay comfortable, and again I thanked him for his hospitality and forethought. Conversation lapsed into polite banalities, and was punctuated by questions about our stay at Baashika by the priest who sat beside me. The coffee ordained by

laws of politeness was brought and swallowed, and then, as the morning was already wearing on, I asked permission to take my leave. The *mīr* wished to send two men with me as escort, but as there was no room for them in the Ford, a compromise was arrived at. A *feqīr* sent his son, a handsome lad with clear brown eyes called Hajji, who contrived to squeeze himself in between Jiddan and Mikhail at the back amongst the luggage, while I surrounded myself with smaller objects in the seat by the driver, 'Aziz.

The road follows the foothills, and tall yellow flowers stood like candelabra above the young corn. Some of the fields were brown and unsown, left fallow till another year. Storks were searching amongst the furrows. In the cornfields I saw plenty of the gay flower called *getgetek*, which has a flax-like leaf and a pink flower not unlike campion. After passing the mounds of Tepe Gaura and Khorsabad, names familiar from objects in museum cases, we came to the village of Fadhiliyah set in olive-groves to the right of the track. Here a horse and ass yoked together were ploughing the rich brown soil, the plough being of course the simple Virgilian ploughshare which can be shouldered at the day's end by the ploughman and carried home. We continued to follow the line of the foothills, just below them being a flaming yellow carpet of flowers, perhaps hawkweed.

The next village was Nowera, set on low hills to the left, a heap of mud houses with flat roofs rising one above the other like steps and topped by a large prosperous-looking white house at the summit of the mound. It was just here that the road from Baashika met that from Mosul to Shaikhan (or 'Ain Sifni : the town has two names). Cultivation stopped at this point and the ground on either side of the road was brilliant with wild flowers. It climbed upwards, and at the top of the ridge we beheld blue hills, and behind these a

mountain-range tipped with snow. The road now switchbacked up and down, and at each rise the hills were closer. Always there were flowers: hawkweed, ranunculus, grape-hyacinth, and a handsome lavender-coloured bindweed, the folk-name of which is *liflāf*.

The telegraph poles marched with us, for 'Ain Sifni is linked now with the outer world, and on the wires the bee-eaters perched, or swooped in flocks overhead uttering high, gossiping, chirruping calls. These jewel-like birds, all emerald and flame, arrive later than the storks and swallows. In these parts the bee-eater is called *ṭīr gulé*, the "flower-bird", because it comes with the flowers.

We passed a village on the right set on a hill all sealing-wax red with ranunculus. I noted many wild flowers here, and saw again that beautiful yellow flower like a rock-rose, the fragrance of which had delighted us in Baashika. Amongst old friends were the lovely hyacinth-blue gladiolus and the white clusters of the Star of Bethlehem, while the iris flourished everywhere. We were mounting higher, and presently, above a stretch of narcissus, now withered, we saw the road winding away to Ba'idri clinging to foothills on our left, and near it but still farther off, would be Al-Kosh, where the prophet Nahum is buried and the monastery of Rabban Hormuzd is cut into the rocky face of the mountain. A man of Tel Keyf told me that in the days before the church on that precipitous rock was rebuilt, it was whitewashed by the monks with lime and milk "and", said he, "the shining light of it was like a diamond, it could be seen as far as Mosul".

The car was now approaching 'Ain Sifni, also set on a hill, and above it like a beacon stood the tall white cone of a Yazidi *mazār*. The townlet contains a mixed population of Moslems, Christians and Yazidis. Below the houses were groves of trees, grassy slopes and masses of buttercups.

Up the steep slope we rattled. Workmen were busy on the road, which they were transforming into a tarmac highway, so as to link 'Ain Sifni permanently with Mosul, for at present it is often isolated for weeks during the winter rains.

We drew up before the *Serai*, the Government offices. Here my instructions were to ask for one Sa'adat Effendi, and to call upon the *qaimaqām*. I found the latter dignitary sitting in state and coolness in the shade of a great mulberry-tree, smoking and conversing with friends. He had been informed of my coming and received me with dignity, introducing me to several local functionaries, including the schoolmaster, whose intelligent face and charming manners augured well for 'Ain Sifni.

When I asked if the pack-animals ordered for me had arrived, it seemed that the matter, which was not pressing, could be settled later. We drank coffee under the mulberry-tree while I sought news about the war, for the *qaimaqām* has a radio : in fact, the place, compared to Baashika, was a very metropolis.

After coffee (" No hurry, no hurry ! you have plenty of time ! ") tea was brought in glasses, and then the schoolmaster, whose two children, a son, Wisam, and a shy little daughter, peeped at me from the protection of their father's knee or arm, took me to the small schoolhouse. Here he and two assistants teach the youth of 'Ain Sifni the three R's, and the classes, though not yet the class-rooms, constantly grow bigger. The Yazidis, he said, here as at Baashika, were at first averse to sending their boys to school, for the Tree of Knowledge bears forbidden fruit, and only *shaikhs* may read and write. But this prejudice is weakening, and the number of Yazidi pupils increases.

We got back to the mulberry-tree and I asked if the mules had arrived. The inspector and *qaimaqām* replied that, unfortunately, they were out in the fields,

working. Had they not had word from Mosul of my coming that day? Yes, indeed, but nothing so very definite.

"However," said they, "why do you not go on by car? *Everyone* goes there by car."

Now years before I had twice been to Shaikh 'Adi by car, without luggage, in dry weather, and each time I had marvelled at the arrival of the car more or less intact. The road is unsuitable for cars even in a country where cars, especially Fords, will set out gaily over roads which can only be so called by a robust effort of imagination.

I replied that 'Aziz, our driver, who knew that the road from 'Ain Sifni was evil, had only consented to take us this far on the express condition that he went no farther, the said 'Aziz having newly paid, or borrowed to pay, sixty pounds for his second-hand Ford, and cherishing it like his paternal uncle's daughter.

Perhaps, they said, hopefully, another car will turn up.

It did not seem likely; moreover, I wondered if, even now, pack-animals might not be procured.

They played another card. "*We* will speak to your driver," they said. 'Aziz was summoned, and he stated that he knew that the road was very bad, and that he would not take his car over it.

"But it is not so bad," they reasoned with him mildly. "It has been improved; much improved: work has been done on it and indeed cars go thither very often."

To prove their words, a Yazidi car-driver was produced. He introduced himself as a driver of cars and also as owner of the pack-animals which had not appeared. He added his persuasions to those of authority. Smiling and confident, he assured that doubting Thomas, 'Aziz, that the road was perfect. *One*, or at most *two*, difficult places there might be, but it was easy to get a car over or round them, and he himself had often driven to Shaikh 'Adi.

Unwillingly, gloomily, 'Aziz allowed himself to be persuaded.

"I will accompany you and show you," said the Yazidi driver, and when we said there was not a spare centimetre in a car which already contained five people with their bedding and household gear, he said cheerfully that that was nothing, he could hold on outside.

So, amidst sighs of relief from authority, we set off down the track.

"Not so bad," we said to ourselves hopefully, for the first half-mile was certainly not much worse than the track which leads from Baashika. But it soon deteriorated—in fact, it became indescribably bad. We got out and walked, whilst we heard the car labouring, grinding and bumping, appearing at nightmare angles as it negotiated rocks, or landing with a bump or scrape from a crag. I decided as I walked that, firstly, were a Society founded for Prevention of Cruelty to Cars I would join it, and secondly, that I would greatly increase the price for which 'Aziz had consented reluctantly to bear us farther.

It was a Pilgrims' Progress indeed for 'Aziz, with Sloughs of Despond and Apollyons of boulders, but we enjoyed walking. We approached nearer and nearer to the mountains. Occasionally, when the road became unexpectedly better, we mounted again, but regretted it, as 'Aziz, in his bitterness, set his teeth and drove recklessly at bumps and furrows, muttering curses while we held on and murmured, "We will walk, 'Aziz! Let us walk!" or more urgently, "*Yawāsh, yawāsh!*" "Softly, softly!" just as John Gilpin besought his steed. But 'Aziz's blood was up and he took no notice. "If my car is smashed," he seemed to imply, "you shall be in it."

We came to streams which we crossed by stepping-stones whilst the car laboured through. The valley became increasingly beautiful. Wild flowers we now

took for granted, but as well, may-bushes were in blossom, and the oaks on the hillsides were in tender new leaf. On the floor of the valley were paddy-fields, flooded for rice. Beside one stream which we forded a shepherd wearing a small, round felt cap sat taking his ease beneath an oak-tree, a double reed pipe in his hand.

The way now followed this stream and the valley narrowed. Oleanders, not yet in blossom, grew there in profusion. Then the road crossed the stream once more and our faces were turned up-mountain. It was just after this that the car stopped, bogged in a patch of mud. We had just passed the little hamlet of Lalish, and from this point it is barely a quarter of a mile's walk to the shrine, and in any case, the car could have gone little farther. So I left them to unload, then set off alone, Jiddan promising to secure people from Lalish to bring up our gear.

It was delightful to walk up that shaded pilgrims' way to Shaikh 'Adi. The path follows the stream which rushes noisily down over its stony bed. On either side rise mountains, rocky and overgrown with trees. Half-way up I seated myself on a boulder to listen to the water, breathe in the perfume of the herbs and wet earth and revel in the greenness and swaying shadows of the lovely place. There was a sound, and a Kurdish woman and her daughter appeared who picked their way over the stepping-stones to rejoin the path to the hamlet below, gazing at me with smiles of surprise and answering my greeting in Kurdish. On their shoulders they bore large embroidered pokes filled with loaves of bread.

I got up and went on and upwards, the sound of rushing waters growing ever louder and the green foliage and fresh spring leafage denser. Many are the trees in the holy valley, figs grow there freely beside the sturdy little oaks, spreading mulberries, and kingly

terebinth trees [1] which produce jade-coloured berries and are so sacred that their wood must not be burnt.

Suddenly, at a twist in the path, I turned a corner and came face to face with the last apparition I had expected, two 'Iraqi policemen, who greeted me with equal astonishment. "We heard that you were coming, but we expected you days ago," said one of them. I was not pleased when I thought that they might have been sent on my account, but it turned out that their presence had nothing to do with mine. Murder had recently been done in the valley on a large scale, and a small post of police had been established at Lalish and at the shrine, for the keeping of peace.

The man who had spoken to me was a lean little man with a brown face. He told me that, being of mountain blood, he had begged to be sent to mountains; not necessarily *his* mountains, but any mountains. His superiors were suspicious, but finally offered him a post here with the loss of a stripe and diminution of pay. He accepted gladly and, he told me, gained by it, "for, *khatūn*, in a town all one's money goes quickly on food and clothes and cigarettes. Here I live almost for nothing and have no needs and save money. The mountains are my home and better than coffee-houses and cinemas and *kalabalagh* (commotion). I never wish to see the city again." The second policeman, his superior officer, was a genial soul, and, although himself a Moslem, his tact and kindliness have won respect and affection from the Yazidis who live at the shrine.

Talking together, we walked on and came suddenly upon an archway of grey stone and, standing beneath it, two of the white-clad, nun-like attendants of the shrine.

The elder was a woman of late middle age, with an expression of singular sweetness and dignity, whose

[1] *gazwān*. See note, p. 125. The tree yields a resin and fruit; the leaves are used as fodder for stock and for tanning and dyeing.

name I learned later was Daya Qoteh. A widow of good family, she had renounced the world and come here, becoming the abbess, or *kabāneh*, of this small community of white ladies. The other, a girl, was a novice vowed to spend her life unmarried in the service of the holy place. Over their white robes they wore a *meyzār* of white homespun wool, and a wimple was wound over their spotless white turbans and brought over the lower part of the face, sometimes covering the mouth. They walked barefoot, as do all Yazidis when in the sacred precincts.

When, later, I sat with them in the forecourt of the temple of Shaikh 'Adi, I saw the third of the white trio, sitting on the wall by their private apartments. I faintly remembered having seen her on a previous visit to Shaikh 'Adi some seventeen years before. Now she was an old, old woman, and her face wrinkled and seamed. Her aquiline nose that curved to meet her chin showed in profile as she sat on the grey wall, her back bent, and twirled unceasingly her spindle as her old fingers detached threads of the white cotton wound round her left arm.

"She is spinning wicks," they said, for spinning wicks for the temple lights is one of the occupations of the holy women.

To me, as she sat there, old and absorbed, she looked like Clotho, spinning the threads of human destiny. Not once did she glance below, though she must have heard our voices unless she had become deaf, nor, during all my stay, did she once approach me or speak. Once I came face to face with her, but she turned back immediately. The fine old face was empty and the old eyes unseeing. They told me that in her age she has become silent and lost of spirit, and does nothing the day long but ply her spindle.

I have gone sadly ahead of events. I was taken by these white ladies and the police by winding ways,

under archways and across ancient paved courtyards across which mountain water rushed in paved beds, and past the temple of Shaikh 'Adi itself, where the famous black snake is carved on the long stone by the doorway, down steps and under more archways, until we arrived at the courtyard where on my first visit I had been entertained by guardians of the shrine.

It lies to the south of the temple, and off it are the living-rooms of Faqir Reshu, the *kannās* (Sweeper) or Servitor of the shrine. He came forward to meet me, and cushions were laid on a stone platform beneath a pergola of boughs, so that I might rest in its shade while tea was prepared, sweetened tea in small waisted glasses, fresh made over an open fire of mountain wood. His family lived here with him, for, unlike the white ladies and the *shawīsh*, *faqīrs*, in spite of their ascetic life, may marry. The *kannās*, or *ferrāsh* as he is sometimes called, acts as Servitor of the shrine for one year only, and pays for the privilege, which is accorded to the highest bidder. Faqir Reshu had paid the *mīr* three hundred and fifty dinars (£350) for his year's tenancy, and in normal years he might hope to make this and far more out of the offerings of pilgrims who visit the shrine, especially at the great Feast of Assembly in the autumn, when thousands travel to the valley and camp out on the hillsides and in the stone huts dotted over the sides of the valley. Pilgrims give not only money but jewels, gold and silver ornaments, so that the custodian usually leaves the valley a richer man than he went in. But prospects this year of war were gloomy.

His duties are to receive the pilgrims—and their fees—to show them the shrines and particularly the temple and tomb of Shaikh 'Adi, to keep the holy places swept and clean, and, at every sunset, to kindle the sacred lamps and lights. This is by no means a light task. Every evening he uses two *māns* of olive-oil in

his pilgrimage of illumination, that is to say, thirteen large *huqqas*, he told me. A *mān* meant nothing to me, and a *huqqa* is the vaguest of measures, so I asked Faqir Reshu if he could give me an idea of what a *mān* was. "A petrol tin", he answered, "contains about a *mān* and a half."

Faqir Reshu, the Servitor of the year, was a small, lean, sallow little man in type very different from the fair, healthy, open-faced villagers of Baashika. He looked darker, meaner: his pinched face was pale and pock-marked, his eyes were dark and opaque and he rarely smiled. He was a native of Ba'idri, where the *mīr* lives, but his wife, a buxom, good-tempered girl who had borne him a boy and was now suckling a baby daughter, came from Bahzané. They shared the couple of rooms with another woman, wife of his brother, a *faqīr* whom I had seen in Bahzané, now touring with the *qawwāls* and sacred peacock. This woman was stepmother to Hajji, the Yazidi lad who had accompanied us from Bahzané. She, too, had a baby girl. The pair of families ate, cooked and sat in the paved court before their rooms, washing their dishes in a stream which courses down a paved channel near the shrine.

I had hoped much from the letter which Rashid had given me to the *shawīsh*, the permanent Guardian of the shrine, for he, Rashid told me, spoke Arabic as well as Kurdish, and I was disappointed to find that he, too, was absent touring the villages. It was said that he was a man of knowledge, not only of the faith, but also of the world, and I had hoped to learn much from him. As soon as I saw Faqir Reshu, whose Arabic was halting, I realized that here I should find it difficult to strike a responsive spark, and it did not take me long to find out that he was jealously fanatical by temperament. He was, however, scrupulous about his duties as host, and the scrappy lunch we had swallowed

as we went from 'Ain Sifni was supplemented later by a meal they offered us in their quarters. It consisted of chicken and rice washed down by *shenīna* and scooped into our mouths by pieces of thin Kurdish bread.

The guest-room, to which I was conducted by the *faqīr*, was a light structure built above a stone chamber, a few yards from the baptism tank and a swift stream which moved over a paved channel. To reach my eyrie, which was surrounded entirely by windows—I was glad of Captain C.'s curtains—one ascended steps from the paved way which leads uphill by the baptism cisterns, and came into the large stone court where arches on either side shelter pedlars and their wares at the time of the autumn feast. Then more steps led to an earthen platform shaded by an enormous and very ancient tree, and from this more steps ascended to a small new terrace and the guest-room. This was shaded by a big mulberry-tree. The guest-room was the least seemly thing in the whole warren of buildings and courts, for it had an iron roof, and looked the afterthought that it was. Inside, the rain had stained the walls a little, but there were benches on which one could sit or sleep, plenty of pegs for clothes, and a somewhat dilapidated cupboard with shelves and a glass front of which only a pane or so remained. It was an excellent and unexpectedly comfortable shelter for the traveller, and a palace compared to the ordinary Kurdish dwelling-room, shared with domestic animals.

To have so many windows was delightful. On one side I had rocks and trees, and a rocky path leading to some upper sanctuaries, and from the other windows a view over the complex of ancient courtyards, archways and rushing water, while my few curtains sufficed to screen one side of the room from the men who sat all day on the platform below. Here they played chess on a board traced on the ground with a pointed stick, with acorns, peas, and stones for chessmen: here the

police with Jiddan and Mikhail ate the food sent them daily from the *faqīr's* house, and here, after sunset, they brought large oak boughs and kindled a leaping fire, around which they sat and talked till sleep overtook them. Then they lay down on rugs and quilts and slept round the fire. From one unscreened window I could see the *faqīr* every evening going his rounds with the sacred fire, and watch little flames leap up as he placed burning wicks here and there on his way. He bore a large bowl of the oil in his left hand. To this bowl a wide lip had been soldered, and laid on this lip, their ends hanging down in the oil, were a bunch of burning wicks. Just before dusk (and light went early because the westerly sun was soon hidden behind the mountains), he set off barefoot on his rounds, carrying his bowl and ladle. Here and there, on jutting corners of masonry or of rock, he laid a wick to burn itself out, and wherever a lamp stood in a niche, he poured in oil and set a fresh wick alight in its lip. At Shakih 'Adi, except in the temple, where square lamps similar to those I had seen at Shaikh Muhammad were used, lamps were of the ancient classical shape, and made of iron. As the Servitor approached with his lights, all stood up and did not resume their seats till he had disappeared up a passage-way or under an arch, to reappear later higher up, either amongst the buildings or rocks.

Again I run ahead of my narrative. My first task, when my new abode had been swept out, was to dispose of the baggage and set up the camp-bed. These had arrived by way of the steep path from Lalish on the backs of villagers, headed by the chauffeur-driver himself, who had the grace to be a little ashamed of having told 'Aziz that the road was so good. 'Aziz himself appeared later on, having pulled his car out of the mud with the help of villagers. He was both surprised and pleased when I paid him a quarter of a dinar more than the agreed price, and we said good-bye on excellent

terms, he promising to tell the authorities in 'Ain Sifni that for the return journey I preferred pack-animals, and would not require a car until I reached 'Ain Sifni.

A table had been provided in the guest-chamber and on this I set my wash-basin, but the *faqīr* looked troubled when he saw our two hurricane petroleum lanterns. "These cannot be used here," he said, "for we may only burn olive-oil." He indicated two tiny lamps like the dim red lights which burn before altars in Christian churches. They contained a spoonful or so of olive-oil and a single wick. Mikhail and I looked at each other in some consternation.

"May wax candles be used?" I asked humbly, and did not mention that the wax was petroleum wax.

After some thought, the *faqīr* gave permission. We wondered if he would ban the Primus which we used as cooking-stove, for that certainly would not flourish on an olive-oil diet. However, it was never brought into question. Mikhail erected the Primus in the stone chamber below and the *faqīr* turned a discreetly blind eye in its direction. There was one other inconvenience. Sanitary arrangements were non-existent, for none may pollute the holy valley. For necessities of Nature, the pilgrim must climb out to the pagan hospitality of the mountain. Nevertheless, I noticed huts used for stabling in the precincts for mules and horses, and that no objection was offered if a beast staled or vented droppings. Cats, too, roamed about the place, as soft-footed as the nuns, but dogs were chased off as soon as they appeared. Sometimes they managed to slink up from the village below, in search of food.

Chapter XVI

SHAIKH 'ADI: THE TEMPLE PRECINCTS

"A right holy precinct runs round it, and a ceaseless stream that falleth from the rocks on every side is green with laurels and myrtles and fragrant cypress."

THEOCRITUS, *Epigram IV.*

ACCORDING to a Moslem tradition, Shaikh 'Adi bin Musafir, who died in the odour of sanctity at a great age somewhere about the year 1163 A.D., adopted as a retreat for himself and his disciples a Christian monastery at Lalesh in the Hakkari mountains, that is to say, in the valley where his reputed tomb is shown to-day, and indeed the place suggests a mediaeval abbey and the atmosphere is wholly cloistral. The three white nuns, turbaned and wimpled, and spotless from head to foot, complete the illusion. They move silently as disembodied spirits, visiting the shrines or else sit plying their spindles, twisting either white lambs' wool into yarn for their mantles, or white cotton into lamp-wicks. Every morning I saw the abbess and her novice setting out in single file on a pilgrimage round the many shrines, devoutly kissing the stones as they passed on their barefoot way. As they returned one day in the early sunlight I noticed that the young novice had gathered a bunch of scarlet ranunculus and set it in her white turban as though she still thought of the spring feast, the wild dance of the *debka* and the delights she had forsworn for ever.

The programme of their day was governed by the sun: to the sun they turned to pray, and the image of the life-giving orb is graven everywhere on the

shrines. Shaikh 'Adi was born towards the end of the eleventh century at Baalbek in Syria, within sight of the mighty ruins which had once held a shrine to the Sungod. He probably visited the vast temple of the Sungod at Tadmor, then still almost intact. Often must he have passed beneath the portal of the temple of Bacchus at Baalbek, upon which poppies and wheat are sculptured with such tender and gracious skill, preaching the silent text that death is but a sleep and a forgetting, and that the life that is dormant must again, like the corn, press forward to the light. Such memories did the mystic bring with him when he came to this sheltered place of peace where the rigours of winter are softened and spring lingers long.

Nothing that is known about him speaks of anything but orthodoxy, but he was a Sufi, and the secret doctrines of Sufism have always been suspected of pantheism and the Sufi sects of cherishing ancient faiths. It is certain that the successors of his brotherhood, the 'Adawiya, were roundly accused of pantheism and heathenism, and it may be that Buddhist missionaries, passing over the silk road through Persia and the Middle East, gained in the course of centuries secret adherents amongst religious seekers to the doctrines of reincarnation, for not only the Yazidis but the Druzes believe that life on earth is many times repeated.

Jiddan, who took off his shoes the instant he passed the entrance to the valley and went barefoot the whole time of our stay, went at once into the temple (or church), first prostrating himself, kissing the stones and doorway and standing awhile in silent prayer. Then he placed his offering on the threshold stone near the relief of the black serpent. This retains its jet-blackness by being rubbed with a mixture of olive-oil and the black obtained from the smoke of the sacred lamps. To their surprise, I did not immediately visit this most important of all the shrines and pay my respect to

Door of the temple : Shaikh 'Adi.

The phallic column in the cavern of Ustuna Mradha.

Shaikh 'Adi's tomb. I had explored it on two previous occasions and this time proposed to enter it on the last day of my stay. "It is well to keep the best till last," I told the *faqīr*.

I contented myself, therefore, with examining the building on the outside. It has obviously been rebuilt several times. Not only Moslem, but Christian tradition claims that it was once the church of a monastery, and it is probable that this, in turn, was built on the site of a pagan shrine, for this valley, visited by the first sun and murmurous with many springs, must have been sacred since very early times. To reach the temple (let us therefore call it a temple), one must cross the stone-paved forecourt with arched recesses on either side which I described in the last chapter, pass under a short vaulted way with benches on either side for lying or sitting, and thence descend steps into the court of the temple itself, also paved with grey stone. When the door of the temple is open one can see directly from this dark archway across the court into the interior. Within, the deep gloom is faintly illuminated by the steady light of an olive-oil lamp. The courtyard is fairly large. The archway described above which admits to it is in its north-west corner and exactly opposite the temple-door, guarded by the famous black snake on the upright at the right of the portal. The temple occupies all the west side of the court, and on the large stone wall-blocks are inscriptions and carvings in sunk relief, or rather incisions, some of them obliterated, others clear. In the south wall of the court there are chambers: one, for storing the sacred bread, is protected by a curious representation above the door of lions facing each other with open jaws on a background of dentated ornament. They threw open the door of this room, but I did not enter, for the floor was strewn with bread, and in 'Iraq it is a sin to tread upon bread, which is looked upon as God's especial provision for the life of

man. They were pleased at the reason I gave for not going in.

Steps and an archway at the western end of the south wall lead sharply round to the left and down to the lower courtyard where the *faqīr* lives with his family and guests are entertained. Off these steps, too, a door leads to the private apartments of the white ladies, to an upper room and the terrace upon which I saw the aged nun spinning.

The masonry of most of the whole complex of buildings is of unmortared stone, shaped, square or oblong, fairly even and held in place by its own weight. The blocks of stone are massive but not of unusual size: an average block is a foot or two in length and a foot or more in breadth, though the size varies considerably, some being far larger and others smaller. In the interstices of the stones are plants and herbs, and between the paving stones of the temple-court daisies and small scented irises grow freely.

The principal motives of ornamentation on the walls, and on most of the shrines in the valley, are the sun, the moon (crescent and full), stars (the six-rayed and five-rayed being most common), conventional flowers, the *gopāl* or hooked stick of the *shaikh*, and the comb, said to be symbolical of the long hair and beard of the *qawwāls* and *shaikhs*. I noticed that, contrary to what I had heard, no Yazidi had the slightest objection to pronouncing the word *misht* (comb), and although once, when I asked Daya Qoteh the *kabaneh* what a carving on a wall represented and she made the gesture of combing the hair, it was simply because she did not know the Arabic word.[1]

On the western face of the temple, in the lunette above the door, there is a portrayal of the flaming disc of the sun, the disc enclosing a crescent moon and a five-rayed star, flanked on either side by inscriptions

[1] See p. 75.

in Arabic recording the names of donors who have repaired or rebuilt the place. Most of the inscriptions in the valley, some of which are broken or upside down, commemorate the names of those who have rebuilt a shrine; otherwise they are not communicative. The *gopāl* is portrayed in other forms beside the simple crook resembling an ordinary walking-stick. The crook is sometimes brought round so as to enclose a sun-disc, on another stone the stick ends in a crescent in the bow of which a six-rayed star is carved. A seven-spiked irregular object at the end of a stick was described by the *faqīr* as a "*gurgeyza*" or mace. A defaced and primitive lion stands beside it. On another stone on the temple-face is a five-stopped pipe, the *shebāb* of the *qawwāls*, and near it an object was declared to be a *kefkīr*, i.e. a perforated ladle for *burghul*, though to me it looked like a sun-ended staff. The great black snake was not so jetty as on former visits and badly needed a fresh coat of lamp-black. Beside the snake-stone are two objects which they pronounced to be a mace and a spoon. Nowhere, on any of the shrines, did I see a human figure.

As I was waiting for Jiddan to come out of the temple, I noticed a large dirty-white scorpion, which Hajji called a *dupishk*, lurking in the hollow of a carving on the left side of the door. He knocked it out, being careful not to kill it, and pinned it with a stick to the pavement while it reared its tail over its back, attacking the stick repeatedly, upon which a wet patch of poison appeared. Hajji explained that no creature must be killed in this holy place, and when a second stick was found, the scorpion was pinched between the two and removed to some spot less sacred for execution. "And," said he, returning after the deed had been done, "*wallah*, there were a hundred little ones within her."

Had anyone been stung, he had but to repair to the *mazār* of Abu-l-'Aqrabi. Dust from this shrine, Hajji

assured me, would cure any scorpion-bite if placed at once on the wound, and he took me to see it. It stood on the hillside which rises sheer on the north side of the temple, together with a number of other shrines and small shelters for pilgrims, built of stone and doorless, and looking themselves like natural features of the landscape, lodged as they are on the terraced slopes between rocks and grassy patches sweet with wild flowers.

Close to the scorpion *shaikh* is the more pretentious shrine of Shaikh 'Abdul-Qadir, not, I suppose, the saint of that name whose mosque in Baghdad is a place of pilgrimage for Sunna all over the world, although that great Sufi mystic was the contemporary and friend of Shaikh 'Adi. This Shaikh 'Abdul-Qadir was "one of the companions of Shaikh 'Adi". Of the other, the more famous 'Abdul-Qadir al-Gailani, a Yazidi told me years ago that there was such communion between his spirit and that of Shaikh 'Adi bin Musafir that if the latter stood in a circle traced by pious magic, he could converse with his friend in Baghdad "just as you talk to each other with wireless".

The *mazār* is decorated by a representation of the sun, the inner disc of which contains thirteen petals or rays. Just below the shrine of 'Abdul-Qadir and close to the northern wall of the temple grows an old male terebinth tree, and pilgrims believe that its leaves, placed on the eyes, will heal them and cure discharge from them. The interstices of the northern wall on its outer face are filled with chips of stone and small pebbles.

"If pilgrims place a stone here," Hajji informed us —for Jiddan had rejoined me—"and believe, the wish of their hearts will come to pass."

Jiddan at once picked up a stone and put it in, and I followed suit.

"Must the wish be secret?" I asked.

"No, it is permitted to tell the wish. What was yours, *khatūn*?"

I told them I had wished for a speedy end to the war and they chorused deeply, "A good wish, by Allah, a good wish!"

Behind the south wall of the temple, as said above, are the quarters of the *kannās*, but between these and the temple runs a semi-subterranean passage, below which a wide stone aqueduct conveys a rushing stream downhill. At intervals the paving of the passage is interspaced with square openings showing the water running smoothly below. I followed this passage and came to a door opening on to yet another courtyard behind the temple. Here the water dives below again except where, at one spot, the torrent has been unroofed for drinking and washing purposes. Stacked against a wall here is a vast heap of oak logs, kept here for roasting the flesh of the sacrificial bull at the time of the big autumn feast. This bull, which I had hitherto understood to be white, may be, the *faqīr* told me, of any colour, and is often black. The bull is led round the shrine of Shaikh Shems in procession with flowers on its head, and slaughtered just below that shrine, so that it is clearly a form of sun-sacrifice. When the beast's throat is cut with the sacrificial knife, the donor of the bull spreads his cloak so that some of the blood may be sprinkled upon it, for this brings a *baraka*, a blessing, upon him and his. This information I had from Yazidis, but the *faqīr* denied the cloak, and when asked what was said when the bull was slaughtered replied, "Nothing but 'In the Name of God'." This was obviously untrue, and I know that if I am to find out what happens at this most interesting ceremony, I must witness it myself.

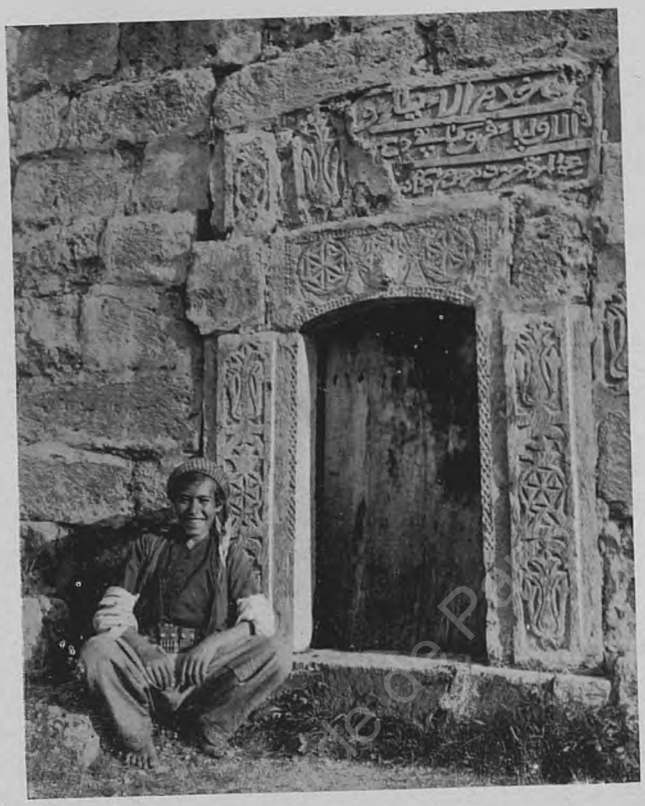
Following round to the east end of the building, and passing a large mulberry-tree, I saw water gushing out below rock and masonry in a waterfall: this may be the outlet to the spring (Zemzem) described by Gertrude Bell and Dr. Wigram as passing through the cavern

beneath the temple, although I was unable to verify this. A second mulberry-tree grew here, and steps led up to a large vaulted chamber used as a dormitory by women pilgrims during the great autumn feast. In the eastern wall of this chamber is a hole, and it is believed that if a person, standing some fifteen feet away, extends his arms and hands before him, shuts his eyes and pacing forward blindly succeeds thrice running in thrusting his finger-tips into the cavity without touching the wall itself, he will gain a secret wish. Of course we tried, and of course did not succeed. The wishes of one's heart are not so easily come by.

It was growing late, and I returned by way of the temple courtyard. In it is a cistern of running water in which wooden bowls (*shqāfaq*) float, and peering into it I discerned in the clear water one of the black and yellow newts peculiar to the waters of the holy valley. These, which when full-grown are some seven or eight inches long, are looked upon as sacred and never killed. With such vivid colouring the creatures should be poisonous, but they assured me they were not.

I bade Hajji and his uncle good night and returned alone through the darkening courtyards and reached my lodging above the noisy water. I heard its never-ceasing voice whenever I woke that night. Otherwise there was deep silence. Even by day the bleating of goat or sheep is never heard in the valley nor the lowing of cattle: it is a sanctuary for squirrels and birds. Above the rush of the water hurrying along its paved path I sometimes heard one cool musical call, like a pearl dropped into the night, or a single note from a *qawwāl's* flute. I asked what it was one evening, and they answered that it was a bird called *totoy*.

"The nightingale, too," they said, "sings at night, but he has not yet come to these uplands."



Door to the girls' baptismal chamber.
[*Hajji sits by the door.*]

The baptism cisterns.

Chapter XVII

THE SHRINES OF SHAIKH 'ADI

"Close at hand the sacred water from the nymphs' own cave welled forth with murmurs musical."

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll VII.*

LYING abed the next morning, I took myself to task for the muddled impression I had received of the whole place. I resolved to get a clear plan of the shrines into my head, to explore the maze of buildings and rocks with method. "The bother is," I excused myself, "that it is all so lovely and unexpected, so intricate and flower-grown, that one is enticed away like Red Ridinghood in the wood and forgets even to make notes, and the result will be that all serious observation of fact will be obscured by the memory of irrelevant small delights."

So, after Mikhail had brought me breakfast upon the sunny terrace, placing the table in the shade of the mulberry-tree, I got out a pencil and my fat notebook, determined to be conscientious. Hajji put himself entirely at my disposal. He knew the shrines and would take me everywhere.

I began with the baptism cisterns. Of two open cisterns, it is the lower which is used for baptism. In both one can see the curious yellow and black newts on the stone bottom. The baptism cistern is filled from above by water which leaves by two spouts, and the centre of its floor is deeper than the sides by a step, so that I presume the baptist, who may be either a *faqīr* or a *pīr*, stands on one level, and the person baptized on the other. A small archway, closed by a wooden

door, allows water to flow down from an upper chamber, the entrance to which is above. I asked several times about baptism. Only males are baptized in the open cistern. Yazidis, like Christians, go through the ceremony once only, but baptism is not vital to salvation, nor is it looked upon as an admittance to the sect. It merely confers sanctity, purity and a blessing. It can be performed nowhere else, and if circumstance prevents a person from ever coming to Shaikh 'Adi, he is in danger of no pains or penalties. The ceremony may be performed late in life, but it is the duty of every Yazidi parent to try to bring his children to the holy valley for the rite. The baby, child or youth is divested of all garments and immersed completely three times. The *faqīr*, or *pīr*, does not undress, but wears new clothes for the occasion. He does not pray at length, but merely invokes the name of God. (This information from the *faqīr* is to be accepted with reserve.) A boy pays seventy-five *fils* (about 1*s.* 6*d.*) for his baptism ; a girl, fifty *fils*.

Girls, who are also undressed, are immersed in the closed chamber above. To reach this, one ascends steps to the left of the tanks, a low door giving admission. Hajji had not the key, so we could only surmise what it was like by listening to sounds of rushing water within. The entrance is surmounted by a worn inscription in Arabic and the seven stones of which doorposts and lintel are formed are decorated by low reliefs which show good craftsmanship. The principal design is a vase with a flower-shaped top, a trefoil or fleur-de-lis adorning the body of the vase which stands on a plain, well-defined stand. On either side of the vase appear handles or lugs resembling stems or branches with floriated ends. A second chamber, also closed, lies above the baptism chamber for girls, for both are built on the hillside. The baptism chambers and cisterns are crowned by a white cone, and the whole is known

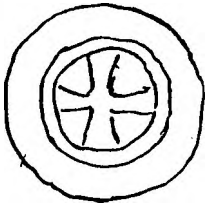
as Kan Yasbi. Noticeable on the walls of this shrine and of that of Shaikh Shems, to which the steps past the chambers lead, is the prevalence of the cross *motif* on decorated stone blocks which occur here and there. Opposite the girls' chamber is a very small dried tree to which are tied many votive rags. Women pilgrims beg a tiny scrap of its wood, which they suspend round the necks of their babies, in the belief that it will avert the Evil Eye. Grass, daisies, buttercups, dandelion clocks and grape-hyacinth crop up between every paving-stone.

The shrine of Shaikh Shems, second in importance only to that of Shaikh 'Adi, is at the top of the flight of steps. I noticed that the official title of the shrine, Shaikh Shems-ad-Din, was little used by the Yazidis, and, indeed, I think that any human "Sun-of-the-Faith" has long ago been eclipsed by the Sungod himself. There was an actual Shaikh Shems-ad-Din, grandson to Shaikh 'Adi's successor, and his full name was Hasan ibn 'Adi Shems-ad-Din. The "of-the-faith" part of the name now provides a convenient Moslem disguise, and Shaikh Shems may be no other than the ancient god Shamish to whom their neighbours in the south, the Mandaeans, still pay left-handed worship. The sun, together with that mysterious Spirit of the Place whose sign visible is the leaping water, are the divinities, or perhaps one should say symbols of godhead, most honoured in the valley. The lion, which appears on so many of the lintels, is a sun-beast, and representations of the sun occur over and over again, accompanied by his sister orb, the moon, and attendant stars.

A portico stands before the shrine-door of Shaikh Shems, and above the latter is incised the likeness of a Yazidi cone-spire, with a crescent moon and star beside it. There are other decorated stones on the wall to the left. To the right of the door a snake in the

usual elongated position is carved ; on the face of the threshold stone there is a star, and on the wall at the right, a *gopāl*, or hooked stick. At the entrance of the shrine I removed my shoes, but the tomb within is not worthy of notice. Steps continue up to the flat

On the wall going up to Shaikh Shems. (Rope-like border.)



Over the large arch above the first flight of steps to Shaikh Shems.

On side of arch, Shaikh Shems.

Decorative ornament at Shaikh 'Adi.

roof upon which stands the solid base of the fluted spire. The latter culminates in a gold, or gold-plated, ball. The shrine stands much higher than Shaikh 'Adi's, and the ball must catch the first rays of the rising sun when it strikes up the valley.

The grass and flowery terrace of the next hill level are flush with the roof of Shaikh Shems, and walking

off the roof in a westerly direction we arrived at the shrine of the Lady Fakhra. As I have said in an earlier chapter, this saint is the patroness of women in child-birth, and dust from her shrine is helpful to labour if placed under the pillow or drunk with a little water. Barren women put clay made of the dust on their heads when their husbands visit the nuptial couch.

It is a good spot from which to look down the valley, where white spires rise from amongst the leafy woods, while here and there, on the rocky sides of the hills on either side, stand pilgrim huts, or lesser shrines, doorless ; the dark arches seen thus in the distance looking like watching eyes. Bees buzzed amongst the flowers, and on the steps grew Solomon's Seal, its creamy bells drooping downward and swaying with the weight of the visiting insects.

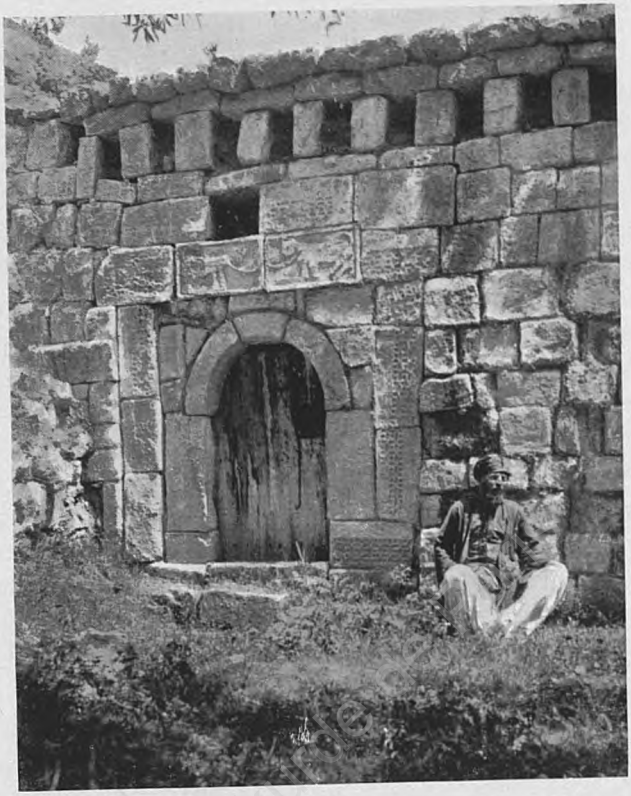
The next shrine moving across is that of Nasr-ad-Din. It is a plain vaulted building without either forecourt or cone, or even a doorway. A double arch replaces the latter and a crude lion guards the left and a coiled snake the right of the entrance. It is the only serpent in this position that I saw at Shaikh 'Adi.

A little higher up we came to the shrine of Kadi (or Qadi ?) Bilban. Above the entrance is another crude lion, his jaws open and his tail curved over his back, and on either side of it, elongated vertical serpents of the usual Yazidi pattern. The building has a second entrance, also decorated, the carvings including a *gopāl*. A little downhill to the left is a sacred tree with niches beside it for lamps. Hajji told me that dust from the shrine of Nasr-ad-Din was efficacious for stomach disorders and cured constipation. We had now crossed the head of the flowery valley, and going steeply downhill and crossing by stepping-stones a stream almost hidden here and there by overhanging blackberry bushes, we mounted the hill which rises on the north of the valley.

Here there is a cavern in the rocky face, and we entered it, for, said Hajji, it is a shrine especially visited by women. In the middle of the cavern is a pillar coated with cement and whitewashed. Whether this phallic object was originally natural rock or not, I did not discover. Women embrace it with both arms, endeavouring to make their finger-tips meet, and pray if barren that their wombs may be opened, or if unwedded that a husband may soon remove their virginity. Each suppliant brings an offering with her, and when her wish is granted she makes a gift in token of gratitude. The cave, or rather the pillar, is called Ustuna Mradha.

Close by, on the same hillside, is an oblong chapel the shape and construction of which differ considerably from those of other shrines. The blocks of which it is built are carefully shaped, and at the top it is ventilated by small blocks set endways at regular intervals. There is no mortar between the stones, and they are so well-cut that they lie even. Above the door there is a low relief of two chained leopards facing each other, and on one of the doorposts is a design portraying a chain. This is the shrine of Pir Hajjali, whose peculiar power it is to cure the distraught. Dust from this shrine mixed with water from the sacred springs, when placed upon the head, is thought to recall the wits of those whose minds are wandering, and obstinate or violent cases are brought here and chained inside for a night or so until the saint drives out the spirit of madness which possesses them.

Another shrine, also on the northern side of the valley, is called Shaikh Simail, but I was unable to elicit clearly the medicinal value of dust from this spot. Hajji murmured something about *hāwa*, "wind", which is a generic name for all bodily pains, whether caused by flatulence, rheumatism or pneumonia.



The shrine of Pir Hajjali.
[*Faqir Reshu sits by the door.*]

The shrine of Kadi Bilban.

I went presently on some errand to Mammeh, the *faqīr's* wife, in her quarters. In the courtyard I passed two other lodgers in the shrine, one a Yazidi lad of twenty, probably related to the *faqīr*, the other a *shaikh*, brown-bearded and gentle, a very likeable person. He was usually to be found on the pavement under the pergola chipping away at a piece of wood, for he manufactured spoons from the oakwood which the valley provided. Spoons coming from so holy a place are greatly valued by pilgrims and others, and the *shaikh* travels round Yazidi villages with them, or gives them to pilgrims, receiving in exchange a gift of money, or a sheep or a goat, or even a chicken. These are not payments, but return gifts, and in such manner, it seemed, the *shaikh* contrived to make a living. When I returned to Baghdad I was the possessor of one of these spoons, embellished by a carving made by one of my policeman friends.

Later in the day I received a visit from two of the white ladies, Daya Qoteh and Daya Rozeh, *kabana*, or abbess, and novice respectively. Both arrived with their spindles in their hands. Daya Qoteh had a skein of white lambs' wool over her arm, the novice was twisting strands for wicks. I had to call in Jiddan to translate, as they knew no language but Kurdish, and a bad interpreter he was. If the conversation became anything more than "What is this?" or "What is that?" he either paraphrased according to his own ideas or else broke down and giggled nervously. The ladies remained and drank tea with me, and then took their leave, while the *faqīr* presently appeared going his rounds with his flaming dish of wicks, which he had kindled with a brand taken from the coffee hearth—to use a match would be profanation. I noticed that the *shaikh*, when lighting his pipe, used a flint and tinder.

Faqir Reshu progressed swiftly, almost pattering along

on his bare feet up the rocky paths and paved ways, laying his wicks on accustomed places blackened by centuries of illumination, only pausing now and then to ladle out a little oil. The result of his ministrations is that when the sun has left the gorge small flames spring up like flowers everywhere, extinguished as soon as the wick is consumed, when the charred threads, light and brittle, fall to the ground or are blown away. Perhaps, I thought, the mystics who once dwelt here saw in these flames a symbol of human life, a sixth of an hour of life and then black extinction until the Divine Servitor again pours in the oil of life from His inexhaustible store.

Soon after he had passed, Daya Qoteh and the novice set out on their evening visit to the shrines in the valley. Catching a glimpse of them on their way down, I followed at a discreet distance. When I reached the court before the temple I saw the younger, the novice, praying at the open door of the shrine, gazing towards the dim glimmer of lamps in the darkness within. She prayed with hands extended, palms upwards, then bent herself to the ground and kissed the threshold stone, next, the stones by the door, and then the outer wall in several places. Silent as a wraith she moved round the temple court, putting her lips to a stone here, a corner-block there and sometimes a paving-stone, in a methodical way as if she were simply carrying out the usual routine. I heard a childish voice from the nuns' quarters calling to her that food was ready. It was a small girl who often accompanied Daya Qoteh and was, Mammeh told me, her niece. The novice made no sign that she heard, nor did she hurry. Above, in the dusk, I saw the aged nun on the grass-grown roof moving to supper, bowed and slow of gait, and I wondered if the abbess's pretty little niece were destined to this life of devotion, and if so, whether she would end like the Nornlike old creature above us.

Daya Qoteh certainly would not, I thought. She came here a widow, her life behind her, and is, moreover, far too intelligent ever to become the husk which is all that if left of her aged sister. After the storms of lay life she is in peace here, and her smile is that of one who has found harbour and happiness.

Hajji, the Yazidi boy, came to me soon after with a distressed look in his brown eyes. Why did I not eat? Why had I refused the meat and chicken which the *faqīr* had sent us? I explained that I had eaten and enjoyed the excellent rice and *burghul*, the curds and spring water, but they must not be hurt by my refusal of meat, because I never ate it, not even in my own house.

"Was I fasting?" they asked, for here there is a religious motive for most things.

"No," I said, and tried to explain that I preferred a meatless diet. They were puzzled and, in the end, I think, put it down to some vow. Do not Yazidis fast before swallowing sacred dust?

As I stood in the forecourt that evening, I saw Venus riding in the night sky.

"Laila!" said Jiddan, gazing up.

He looked for Majnun, but we could not discern lesser stars, for the spring sky was still light.

"They say," said Jiddan, "that these two were lovers and that when they died, by the power of God they became stars. In summer, they say, Laila goes to the hot places, such as Baghdad, but Majnun to the cold, to the mountains. The true name of the boy, *khatūn*, I forget, for Majnun [1] was not his real name: he was so called because he was mad for Laila."

"Jiddan," I replied, "I know the story. I read that he searched everywhere for Laila, seeing her in the flowers and in the very dust because her image dwelt in his heart and came before his eyes."

[1] *Majnūn* = "mad", "possessed".

"Aye, that is the story."

We looked awhile at Laila, serene in the clear sky, and then I bade him good night, mounted to my lodging by the rushing water, and was soon asleep.

Chapter XVIII

A PLACE OF INFINITE PEACE

ما قصدنا الجنان ولا حورها
قصدنا نظرة من اجلها

"We sought neither Paradise nor its houris, but contemplation for its own sake."

SHAIKH 'ADI BIN MUSAFIR, *Kitāb fīhī dhikr an-nafs.*

I WOKE soon after four o'clock, and seeing the sky flushed with rose-pink, slipped into a warm coat, for mountain air at dawn is sharp, and wandered out, stepping softly as I passed the sleepers rolled in their blankets round the blackened logs of the evening before.

The policeman on watch emerged sleepily from his wrappings, but I silenced him in dumb-show, crossed the courtyard and passed through the arched passage-way which led to the temple-court. In this passage-way, his mat spread in one of the recesses, slept the wood-carving *shaikh*, but he had already risen to perform his devotions.

I did not go forward into the courtyard, but climbed on to a small stone platform behind a tree which grew there before the shrine. As on the previous evening, the temple-door stood open, and in the blackness of the interior shone the steady yellow flame of an olive-oil lamp. Here, as before, stood one of the white ladies, this time Daya Qoteh, praying as the novice had prayed the night before, facing the east and the lamp within which stood right in the path of the rising sun. At this point I remembered that, although a *qawwāl* had told me that a Yazidi must face the sun at every prayer-

time, the novice when praying at sunset had stood in the same place and facing the same direction as her superior at this moment. Whether the lamp symbolized the sun, or whether the sanctity of the shrine took precedence here, I did not discover. At dawn, however, the *qiblas* were identical, as the temple is orientated like a Christian church which, indeed, it may once have been. As the abbess prayed and bowed herself at the threshold, a yellow tomcat rubbed himself affectionately against her white robes, arching his back and pressing his head against her. Her movements were precisely the same as those of the novice on the previous evening, and the perambulation of the holy place was the same as she kissed the sacred stones, passing from place to place, the tomcat following with dignity, his tail erect.

At this hour of dawn there was absolute silence except for the voices of wild birds, whose burst of song to greet the day was only just heard above the tumble and gush of the hurrying waters. I stood very still, half-hidden by the mulberry-tree, and watched the quiet figure as it moved, unconscious of my presence. Passing from right to left, she kissed blackened stone after blackened stone, the yellow cat pausing by each like her acolyte. Presently the *shaikh* passed, and seeing me there facing the east, gave me a shy, kind smile. I saw him moving here and there in the forecourt as I returned, kissing the sacred stones in the grey light, for the yellow light which flooded the upper heights had not yet reached us. On the rocks above the guest-room when I had regained it, I saw Faqir Reshu's little boy Suleyman, a child of eight, walking uphill higher up, entirely alone, and pressing his lips to a sacred rock in the same rapt way as his elders.

All this silent, spontaneous prayer, this unceasing individual reverence of holy places, I cannot help finding more impressive than the mass-prayer of organized crowds gathered under roofs to pray or sing from books,

or sermons delivered to half-bored congregations comfortably settled in pews. When I had dressed and walked up the valley I heard the birds pouring out their morning song in one long continuous gladness, and was well-satisfied that I had come to stay at this place at a time when there was no public pilgrimage or feast. The *faqīr's* wife, who likes gaiety and movement, was eloquent when she described the great autumn Feast of Assembly, when thousands crowd into the valley, the stone-huts are full of pilgrims, male and female, the forecourt full of pedlars and turned for the time being into the bazaar of a temporary town. She described for me the gaiety that prevails in the courtyards where the *debka* is danced with linked arms round and round over the grey paving-stones, the Yazidi *mīr* and his sons watching from the platform where the policemen this morning were still sleeping.

The feast, too, I should like of course to see, but I am glad that I came to stay when the shrine was in its normal state of seclusion. I am glad, too, that I rose early and saw the shrine at its holiest moment of first dawn. For it was then that I became convinced that some Yazidis, inarticulate and vague as they are about their own dogmas and beliefs, possess to a rare degree a faculty, as sensitive as the antennae of an insect, which makes them conscious of things outside the material. They have the instinct to be still and worship, which is the very essence of religion. And of all holy places I have ever visited, during sixty years of life in West and East, this valley of Shaikh 'Adi, the Mecca of one of the most sorely persecuted and misrepresented people in the world, seems to me the loveliest and holiest. Here one may find the spirit of the Holy Grail, or perhaps rather of the glad piety of the Saint of Assisi. Something lingers here unpolluted, eternal and beautiful: something as quiet as the soul and as clear-eyed as the spirit.

As I sat on the terrace eating breakfast, I saw Daya

Qoteh and the novice returning down the rocky terraces in the bright sunlight with bunches of wild flowers in their hands. Later, I went to visit them, bearing a gift of three red-cheeked Australian apples. They did not receive me in their house, but set cushions for me against the temple-wall, just by the black snake, and sitting beside me on the paving-stones rolled themselves cigarettes, for they think it no sin to smoke. I had many questions to ask, but, as usual, Jiddan's bad interpretership spoilt mutual effort. Our good policeman, when I addressed a question to them, *would* answer it himself out of his own ignorance, in spite of my "Ask them," or "Tell them." Their courtesy and goodwill, however, helped our stumbling efforts. Jiddan again pressed me to enter the temple, and when I gave the same answer as before, I added, "But *you* go in, Jiddan!" as it was evident that he wished to do so.

"But, *khatūn*," he replied disconsolately, "the *faqīr* will not let me go in again without more *karāma*"—in other words, another fee.

I pushed him over a hundred *fils* and in he went after the usual ritual of kissing the threshold and stones. Mammeh and her baby joined us, and as we sat there quietly, an elderly Kurd appeared in the courtyard, his pipe in his hand. Daya Qoteh ordered him, with quiet authority, to remove his shoes before he approached nearer. He obeyed and then seated himself near the temple-door after kissing the sacred stones. Then he told Daya Qoteh something in an earnest voice and she replied at some length. I inquired of Mammeh the meaning of the conversation. It appeared that the man, who was a Moslem, was in the habit of coming to the shrine of Shaikh 'Adi for some of the miraculous dust which he put upon a leg in which he had *hāwa* (here, rheumatic pains). After every application, it seems, he felt relief. But now he sought fresh advice about *hāwa* in his stomach (i.e. stomach-ache). Should

he drink tea? Would this or that food or drink harm him? Daya Qoteh told him that he should eat lightly, and that when he drank tea it should be weak and not too sweet, and then, if he rubbed his stomach with Shaikh 'Adi earth and water, "by the power of Allah" he would get well.

At the return of Jiddan, we again tried to converse with the added help of the boy Hajji and Mammeh. I asked about water drunk sacramentally, and Daya Qoteh replied that at the times of the year when the *qawwāls* go their rounds with the *sanjak*, that is, the sacred peacock image, they took with them a certain bowl from Shaikh 'Adi and gave the faithful water to drink from the bowl. This seemed to hint at a sacramental ceremony, but, realizing that without Kurdish or a competent interpreter I could do little, I rose and said I was going up the mountain.

"We will go with you," said Daya Qoteh, rising with me.

So a number of us started up the winding uphill pilgrim path which passes some shrines and is well worn though rough. Soon we branched off to a grass-grown track which led steeply upwards, past outcrops of rock, and oaks and the sacred terebinths. As we mounted higher and higher, valleys and hills unrolled themselves below us in increasingly wider panoramas. When we paused at a rocky turn shaded by an overhanging tree, we saw a range of snow-mountains rising in their purity behind more lightly covered peaks. "Snow," said Daya Qoteh, pointing them out to me. "In Kermanji (Kurdish) *bafra*." There was a pleasant fiction between us that she was teaching me Kurdish. We perceived below, like the undulating serpent portrayed on Yazidi shrines, the valley track by which 'Aziz and his car had laboured hither. Daya Qoteh pointed out a Kurdish village below, Mugharah; and another nesting on the hills, Atrush.

After the rest, we went upward again, the two white ladies leading the way placidly, never out of breath, for they do nothing else but climb up and down these hills. When the top was reached, we sat and rested again and viewed the mountains, range on range, and the blue valleys between. The summit of the hill—for although it had been steep climbing it was not to be dignified with the name of mountain—was covered with dwarf, wind-blown trees and a quantity of flowers and herbs. We walked to a large, flat rock enclosed by a rough circular wall of stones, with two entrances, east and west, both so low that to enter one must crawl. Here, hollowed out by human hands, is a round cistern to receive rain-water. Its sides are concave ; whether it is of ancient or comparatively modern workmanship it would be difficult to say. In any case, it is sacred, and Daya Qoteh and Daya Rozeh kissed the entrance and threshold stones and the rock round the cistern. It is probably a Shaikh Shems shrine, similar to others on mountain-tops.

Daya Qoteh bent to collect a few herbs, and told me that Yazidi women learn the use of herbs and simples, lore which is transmitted from one generation to another, and that few intelligent women did not know which herbs were purgative, which were febrifuge, or which allayed pain.

Down we scrambled, this time upon the more westerly face of the hill, meeting the pilgrims' way at a higher point, just where a large boulder has been plastered and whitewashed as a sign to pilgrims that from this point they must remove their shoes and go barefoot. At intervals on our crab-like progress from ledge to ledge, we saw below us the flat, grass-grown temple roof surmounted by its three white cones, and the spires of other shrines rising from the leafy bottom, all miniature in the distance.

Hajji showed me a spot from which a Kurdish sharp-

shooter, last spring, aimed at the *mīr* as he was sitting on a roof below. The would-be murderer missed his heart, but wounded the prince in the arm. It seemed an impossibly long shot, for figures seen from here looked the size of flies, so that the Kurd, if Kurd he was, must have been a brilliant marksman. I had heard, however, that the assailant had not been of another faith, but a Yazidi belonging to a faction which resented the *mīr's* monopoly of the money acquired by the tours of the sacred peacock. It is said that few *mīrs* die in their beds.

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Back in the guest-room I went down to fill a glass from the water which swept past below, while a by-stander said "'*Awāfi!*" an ejaculation which should always be made when another drinks to convey the wish that his draught may be healthful. The water is cool and delicious.

I was resting and reading when the door opened and in came the two white ladies bearing copper dishes silvered over and filled with walnuts, almonds and dried figs. Seeing that I had nothing wherewith to break the walnut-shells, the abbess went outside and returning with a stone, broke one against the ground. I begged them to stay and they seated themselves on the stone floor—cooler, they explained, than the rug—and fingered and twirled their white threads with delicate fingers. I took Daya Qoteh's bundle of white wool from her and tried to imitate their movements, but the thread broke and the spindle did not revolve smoothly as it did for her, so she resumed her work, laughing.

Our conversation was halting and difficult, still, with Jiddan's help and our mutual goodwill we came near understanding each other. I took a photograph of them as they span—alas, in absent-mindedness later I spoilt

it by taking another on it! I shall never be able to send them the copy I promised, "so that we can see what we look like", had said innocently these mirrorless white ladies.

Understanding was established between us in spite of words, and when they questioned me about my sons and heard that they were soldiers and my daughter far away was engaged in war work, they showed me their sympathy, and said they would pray for their safety, and there was genuine feeling in their eyes and looks. If I have no photograph of these gracious ladies, so still, so soft of voice and so spotless of dress, I shall always have a picture of them in my heart.

I asked them, through Jiddan, if they had adopted their life by their own wish or because their families had wished it.

"By my own wish," answered Daya Qoteh, smiling tranquilly as she span, but the novice remained silent.

When they rose to go, probably for the midday prayer, I lunched off curds, bread, cheese and an apple, an excellent meal. The light was favourable for Pir Hajjali's shrine, and when I had taken the photograph to my satisfaction, I wandered uphill with a book to find the right spot for a siesta, for the guest-room, into which the sun poured all day, was hot at noon and after. I settled myself in the shade of a tree, with a rock and my coat for pillow. All round me grew scarlet ranunculus, purple vetch, wild parsley, buttercups, iris, spurge and a quantity of minute flowers which to me were nameless. As I lay there indolently, I could see the spire of Shaikh Shems white against green on the next hill, its golden balls blinking in the sun. The voice of the water was far enough to make a mere accompaniment of rushing sound, a continuous murmurous whisper against which I heard blackbirds and heaven knows what other birds, for their voices mingled in spring symphony with the hum of the bees.

The " blunt-faced bees ", as Theocritus called them, were very busy on the perfumed ledge, their buzz muffled at moments as they crept inside the bell of a flower. A pleasant place. I drowsed and slept.

Chapter XIX

CONVERSATIONS WITH MY HOSTS

"Be sure that those thou look'st on are neither evil, nor the children of evil men."

THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XXII.*

ON the previous evening I had sat for a while with the men by the leaping fire on the platform beneath, the company consisting of the three police, the *shaikh*, Hajji and the Yazidi lad. We had conversed of countries and towns.

"Is Londra in England, or is England in Londra?" asked the *shaikh*.

"How big is Londra?" asked someone. "As big as Baghdad, or bigger?"

Then about the war. "This war, now, why has peace not been made? Was it not six months, and nothing had been done? Inshallah, inshallah, the war will not reach us here! But, already sugar has become very dear, and as the *khatūn* knows, we like plenty of sugar in our tea!" (This was always a grievance.)

Then we passed to speaking of stars and comets, and one of the older men said that before the last war a large star, father-of-a-tail, had appeared in the sky; very bright it was and the tail also.

I reminded him that Halley's comet had appeared two years before the war and said that at the time I had been visiting Palestine, where people had prayed all night thinking that the end of the world was at hand. Then, turning to the *shaikh*, I asked him, "What do your people say about the end of the world and the Day of *Qayāma* [1]?"

[1] Resurrection.

He was sitting, his legs tucked beneath him, half in the firelight and half in the light of the stars and answered cautiously. "We say," he replied, "that such things are in the hand of God, and that, being men, we cannot know."

These sessions by the fire were good for talk, and it was here that the *faqīr* became communicative. He belongs to an hereditary order, the *faqirān*. A lad born into the caste need not become a *faqīr*, but adopts the calling voluntarily. There is preliminary instruction and an initiation, after which the young man anxious to enter the brotherhood fasts for three days before he is invested with the *khirqa*, a rough woollen tunic worn next to the skin: in olden times, said the *faqīr*, a forty days' fast was required of them. This tunic, which is the sacred badge of the *faqīr*, is black in colour, round at the neck and stitched with red wool, falls to the hips, being split at the side of the body from the waist down, and is held round the waist by a sacred girdle. It is of equal length all the way round, not shorter behind, as M. Roger Lescot states in his book about the Yazidis. It is woven of pure lambs' wool and dyed by an infusion of the leaves of the *zerghūdh* and *gazwān* (terebinth) trees. "The leaves are boiled with the wool and then, by the grace of God, the white becomes black."

During his fast and the initiation, the would-be *faqīr* remains in the house and no one must approach him. At its end he takes a hot bath and is invested with the *khirqa* by his "other brother", who also puts upon him the scarlet woven woollen girdle which goes almost twice round the waist, and a sacred thread of twisted red and black wool round his neck. This thread, called the *maftūl*, may never be removed. The *faqīr* must wear nothing white, nor may he wear anything between his skin and the *khirqa*. Faqir Reshu said that when he first wore it, the rough wool irritated his skin, but

that now he is used to it. From the day that he becomes a *faqīr* a man must not cut his beard, but the head is shaved, and Faqir Reshu took off his turban (*pūshi*) and black woollen skull-cap (*kullik*) to show me his head.

In the olden days, he said, *faqīrs* were not allowed to slaughter, but nowadays they are permitted to kill a sheep or fowl when necessary. I asked whether there were a prescribed number of threads in the girdle (*shutek*), but he replied that there were not. The asceticism of the order is not severe. A *faqīr* may not drink alcohol or smoke, but coffee and tea are not forbidden him, nor is his winter clothing the same as his summer, for in winter he wears a warm waistcoat, the *sakhma*, and a short outer jacket of red frogged with black, the *damīri*.

The *faqīr* is regarded as a holy person and has privileges. In his presence there must be no brawling, and if he arrives when a quarrel is in progress, the dispute must stop instantly. Even a *khirqa* brought in the absence of the *faqīr* himself and hung on a tree has been known to check a fight. The *faqīr* has such authority that he may beat a man as much as he likes and no one may retaliate or lift a hand against him, since it is a sin to strike a *faqīr*. "The sacredness of the *khirqa* protects him," commented Jiddan. Second in sacredness to the *khirqa*, which may be removed and washed when necessary, is the *maftūl*, the sacred thread described above, which must be washed upon the person, as it may never be removed.

On another occasion I asked the *faqīr* about fasts and fasting. The subject may have come up because of their concern at my meatless diet. I mentioned to him that Lescot says that *faqīrs* fast ninety-two days in the year.

"That is wrong," replied Faqir Reshu. "We fast three days at the beginning of Kanun Awwal at the

'Id ar-Rōja " (the sun-feast at the beginning of December). " We do not fast in Ramadan, but we observe the *'Id al-Fitr* (*'Id al-Dhāhiya*) and Bairam as feasts and begin the *'Id al-Dhāhiya* a day earlier than the Moslems, so that it lasts for four days. We call it the *'Id al-Hajjīyah*."

I asked about the *'Ida 'Ezi*, the Feast of Yazid.

" That," he replied, " and the *'Ida Roji* are one and the same, for it follows a day after the three days' fast. As for the *'Ida Sarsaleh*, it is the second feast in importance of all the year." (This was the Spring Feast I had just witnessed in Baashika.)

I asked about the Feast of the Dead, mentioned by Lescot, and he told me that it was identical with the Spring Feast.

All were anxious to tell me about the Great Feast, the *'Ida Jema'iya* (Feast of Assembly), when the entire Yazidi world travels to Shaikh 'Adi. It seems that the quiet valley becomes then a town, and its peace is turned into carnival. Every roof, every cave, shelters pilgrims, and many camp out or sleep on the hillside wrapped in a quilt. The sides of the valley at night are covered with twinkling lights. Faqir Reshu hopes to reap a harvest then to recoup himself for his expenditure on his year's tenancy. As I have mentioned elsewhere, it is at this feast that the garlanded bull is sacrificed. The Feast of Assembly takes place in September, and must correspond with the Mandaean New Year's Feast.

Talking of feasts and fasts brought us to those of other religions. I confessed that my abstentions had nothing to do with religion.

" The Nestorians," observed the *faqīr*, " fast much, and their fast is severe. No meat, no egg, no milk, no butter, and no fat may pass their lips, and in spring they fast thus for fifty days."

" And yet," I commented, " most Assyrian priests are fleshy and fat."

"It is their piety," said the *faqīr* gravely, "that, by the power of God, fattens their bodies."

* * * * *

During the cooler part of the day I went to visit the southern side of the valley, for I had not completed my tour of systematic examination. Jiddan was pleased to show me the shrine of the *shaïkh* to whose family he is hereditarily attached, namely, that of Shaikh Sajaddin. It will be remembered that there is a shrine dedicated to this *shaïkh* between Baashika and Bahzané, and that Sitt Gulé claims descent from him and from the Angel Gabriel who incarnated to found the family. His *mazār* here at Shaikh 'Adi was without a spire, but the treble arch of the doorway was decorated by chevron ornament which gave it a Norman appearance. Dust from this shrine is used to get rid of pests. If cultivation is attacked by locusts, a little is sprinkled on the fields and the insects depart. If rats are a nuisance in storehouse or granary, some of the dust scattered about the place makes them decamp immediately. So say Hajji and Jiddan.

The Yazidi lad who accompanied us showed me warts on his hands and feet. Had I no ointment with me that would cure them? They told me that warts are caused by contact of a person's foot with the urine of a frog, "and *wallah*, here, where we go barefoot and there are frogs everywhere in the grass, it is an easy matter to come by them".

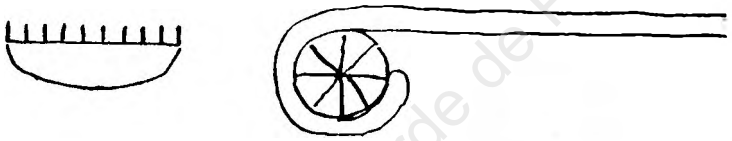
The next shrine we visited was that of Shaikh Muhammad. The door was a trefoil-headed arch, but otherwise there was nothing worthy of comment about this *mazār*. Just above it, the shrine of Pir Hasil Mama (or Mameh?) is decorated with a comb, a *gopāl* enclosing a star-like figure, and other conventional designs.

Close to it on the hillside is a terebinth of great

age, with an enormously thick trunk. The next *mazār* is that of Shaikh Mand, a more pretentious building, in bad repair. Curiously enough, no snake is represented on its walls, although it is dedicated to the *shaikh* whose descendants are reputed to have power over serpents. Dust from this shrine, according to Hajji, is good for illness of all kinds, but is not used especially for curing snake-bite.

It grows dark swiftly in the valley, and we stood back to let the *faqīr* hurry past us with his vessel of oil and flaming wicks. The vessel, I learnt, was called a *chirra* and the ladle for the sacred oil a *kavchak*. I closed my notebook and returned.

Presently Daya Qoteh appeared on my terrace, accom-



the comb the *Gopāl*

Decorative designs at Pir Hasil Mama.

panied by the *faqīr's* sun-browned wife Mammeh, and her black-eyed baby. Mammeh, who talked the Arabic of Bahzané, acted as interpreter. Daya Qoteh had come to take me to task for eating my own food instead of that prepared in their quarters. Why do I not share their food every time they eat?

"But indeed I do both eat and enjoy your food," I protested, and told them how much I had relished the *leban* they had sent for my luncheon.

They were dissatisfied. "You eat too little. You eat," said Mammeh, measuring her little finger, "*so* much and we want you to eat *so* much," and she extended both arms, laughing. "To-night," she said, "we have made for you a special *dolma* with no meat in it, so that you can eat it without sin."

I explained again that the only reason I did not eat meat was because, being an old woman, I found it suited my health.

"But you are not so old," they replied, wondering.

"Sixty!" I answered, and showed my hands six times to Daya Qoteh.

"And I," she countered in Kurdish, and I understood her, "am forty-eight. Forty—" she held up her hands too, "and eight!"

"*Hashta*," I repeated. "That is 'eight'."

"Ha!" said she, delighted, "then you begin to know Kermanji!"

I answered that when I was young I had learnt in my country the language of the gypsies, and that they too said *hashta* for eight, at which both women wondered.

Daya Qoteh said that I must return here in the summer, for then it was cool and green and the water remained cold as ice. "It is the peculiar property of our water," she explained, "that in winter it is warm and in summer icy-cold."

Again she asked me to tell her about my sons who are soldiers. Although she had not heard of Hitler, the word "soldiers" has an ugly sound to Yazidis, who have had such savage treatment for resisting military service. Then they summoned me to come with them to the courtyard by the *faqīr's* house, and there I took my seat on gaily-coloured blankets while Daya Qoteh left with the novice for her evening round of the holy places.

The *dolma* was excellent. I hear that *dolma* was introduced lately at cocktail parties in London, but in case those who read this chapter do not know what they are, they are a rissole of rice and savoury herbs wrapped in young vine-leaves steeped in brine. They are cooked in olive-oil, and each morsel is as big as a thumb. I doubt if they have the knack of cooking them in England: even our Indian cook can never quite achieve the perfect flavour.

The Baba Shaikh *and his host, Sadiq ibn Rashid.*

The shaikh *carving his oaken spoons.*

In the *faqīr's* courtyard the *shaikh* had sat all day working at his spoons. Standing in a heap of chips, he showed me his implements. He began his spoon by hewing out of the block a piece of the size required, and chipping it until it took on the rough shape of a spoon. This he did with a small *fās*, a light, sharp-bladed axe with its haft and handle at right-angles to the blade and set in the centre of the blunt edge. Next, he used a hook-shaped tool with a broad sharp blade for hollowing out the bowl of the spoon. For scraping and finishing and for any decoration on the broad, flat handle he employed ordinary knives. The spoons are intended to ladle up curds (*leban*) or *burghul*, both staple items of diet. The Kurdish sergeant of police, sitting close by, took one of the just-finished spoons, and incised on it a rough design, telling me that it was intended for me. Meanwhile the *shaikh* and I talked of death and burial and of the duties of the *shaikh* and *pīr* at such times. He was perfectly willing to give information and illustrated his meaning with pieces of oakwood : " This is the dead man ", " this is the wall ", and so on.

When a man dies, he said, the *shaikh*, accompanied by a *pīr*, goes to the house of the deceased and washes the body with soap and hot water, then places upon the closed eyes a little Shaikh 'Adi earth (*tō berek*). Women dress the body in its clothes and give the *shaikh* the shroud consisting of nine *dhra* of Japanese calico. The *shaikh* and *pīr* sew this into a long bag into which the corpse is placed, feet foremost. A strip is torn off the head end by the *shaikh* and used to tie up the mouth of the bag, the strip being well knotted. The body is borne to the grave on a bier. If the dead person is a woman the grave is dug to the depth of the digger's neck when he stands in the hole, if a man, the top of the grave should be level with his breast. A short wall is built on either side of the interior of the grave,

and a *lahad* or recess behind the head is made, but the narrower ends at the head and foot are, apparently, not covered with masonry. Stones and pebbles are laid upon the body when it is placed in the grave facing the east, and above these earth. The body does not lie on its back, but on its side.

Passing from death to life, we came upon the question of dowries, and those present began to tease Mammeh about her dowry. "Her husband," they said, "did not pay much for her," though dowries may run very high; indeed, Jiddan said, were often far more than the young husband could afford. Mammeh took their chaffing goodnaturedly, sitting with her young breasts uncovered, suckling her pretty baby. Her sister-in-law, our Hajji's stepmother, sat with us also; she had just finished giving her baby daughter Gulé the breast. Daya Qoteh had joined the circle and sat listening to the talk, gently smiling.

Baby Gulé was thin and pale, but her spirit did not match her puny body. She smiled, chuckled, gurgled and back-scraped in acknowledgement of my blandishments, kicking her small legs and opening her mouth in wide baby grins.

"She loves the *khatūn*," they cried, and, knowing that I had children of my own, did not fear the Eye of Envy: moreover, had I not distributed amulets against the Evil Eye all round? Daya Qoteh, too, talked to the babies in tender Kurdish. All the children of the place, the little Suleyman and her own little niece, adore Daya Qoteh, who has a motherly way with her and, doubtless, in her cast-off lay life, had children of her own.

Chapter XX

STORM IN THE VALLEY

" . . . the watery clouds that roll forward under the stress of the South Wind . . ."
" and the storm-rain falls from heaven as night creeps on . . ."
THEOCRITUS, *Idylls XXV* and *XXII.*

APRIL the twenty-third was grey and overcast, and I wondered if I should see the valley drenched with rain. Early in the day I got out my workbag and began to darn some stockings, a process that excited great interest in Mammeh, who was enchanted to receive an invalid pair as a present. She examined carefully the spools of thread, thimble and other etceteras the bag contained.

As I sat thus employed, I became aware of a procession advancing up the pilgrims' way. It proved to be the inhabitants of Lalish, or most of them, arriving to see me. Most literally to see me, as we could not talk, their only language being Kurdish, and Mammeh departed at their approach. A small and attractive boy advanced and presented me with some green almonds and eggs. I could only counter with sweet biscuits and could offer them no coffee or tea as Mikhail was not present to make it, and he alone managed the Primus. My visitors seated themselves in a long, solid row, facing me. Being Moslems, no doubt they wondered what on earth I could find to do in the valley of the Yazidis, but could not ask me. They just sat there and stared without the glimmer of a smile. They were so unblinking and solemn, that I began to feel like an insect under a microscope. Finding gestures and

Arabic useless, I presently escaped to my room with the poor pretence that perhaps, after all, it was not myself they had come to see, but emerging half an hour later, I saw them still sitting there, solemn, staring, and no doubt expecting the coffee that was not forthcoming. It was too much, and turning my face to a mountain path, I made unceremonious escape. Most probably my reputation stands extremely low with the villagers of Lalish.

As I went, I passed Jiddan reclining beneath a tree and absorbed in a game of chess with his friends the police. They did not see me, and I had the feeling of playing truant as I struck out up a mountain path, for, whenever I left the shrine, I was unostentatiously followed. The police explained this watchfulness by saying that the mountain was unsafe: that outlaws were about, and that they were responsible to the *mīr* for my safety. However, this time I escaped, and after walking for some distance along a path which evidently led to a village since it was well-worn, sat by the side of an empty torrent bed. Here there was no rush and murmur of waters, but the birds were singing just as they do in an English copse in May, and to my ears, accustomed so long to the lack of bird-song in southern 'Iraq, their concert was delightful. A large yellow-billed blackbird flew out of a tree and I thought I heard near-by the jug-jug of a nightingale. A curious absence was the cushy-dove. The perpetual and irritating cooing which goes on perpetually in Baghdad gardens was absent here. Dove and pigeon, apparently, did not nest in the valley.

Except for the birds, there was silence, only invaded by the hushing sound of the wind, rising and falling breath-like in the oak scrub and bushes, or by the rustle of a bird, lizard or frog in the grass and undergrowth. Once I heard a rooting sound and peered between the bushes hoping to catch sight of a wild pig, for the untidy

excavations of a herd of pig had been evident on the hillside the day before, but the pig, if pig it was, was too occupied to move or show itself. Rocks and trees rose steeply to the sky on either side, the valley was all but a gorge.

I felt sure that some of the butterflies I saw must be rare, but besides these strangers there were the common white, the tortoiseshell and the heath-blue (its blue here was more brilliant). A creamy white, or buff-coloured butterfly with dark brown spots or specklings was abundant, also an orange butterfly speckled black, with a black and white border to his wings. By the wayside were buttercups, woodruff, vetch of various hues, borage, campion, bedstraw, wild parsley and other umbelliferae, orchis, grape-hyacinth, Star of Bethlehem, scarlet ranunculus, anemone, and a host of flowers the names of which I did not know, such as a curious heath[1] with a bulbous, transparent flower which small Yazidis pop as our children do bladder-wrack at the seaside, and also a plant with thick silvery leaves and bell-like, down-drooping flowers not unlike bugloss.[2] The peculiarity of these latter flowers is that they are of varied colours, although grouped upon the same plant, and often on the same stem.

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There was a sense of tension in the atmosphere, a feeling of impending violence, as if something were approaching stealthily. The gloom in the sky deepened and, as the day wore on, the songs of the birds became spasmodic, apprehensive.

At half-past four of the afternoon a policeman arrived, his face dripping with sweat: he had ridden in from 'Ain Sifni with post and a newspaper.

[1] Mr. Guest suggests that this may be *Leontice leontopetalum.*
[2] Almost certainly *Onosma alboroseum.*

I read the news, but the war bulletins, with their tale of havoc and death, seemed fantastic, infernal and improbable. Just as I had laid down the paper, troubled, the smell of incense rose to the terrace, and I remembered that it was the eve of Wednesday, for people here reckon that the twenty-four hours of a day begin at sunset and count Tuesday evening as part of Wednesday. On this eve and on the eve of Friday (i.e. Thursday evening) Yazidis make especial illuminations, as both Wednesday and Friday are holy days. Hurrying to the court of the temple, I saw the abbess, her face framed by her white wimple, going the round of reverencing the shrines, while the *faqīr* had already left with his flaming bowl. To-night incense had been added and its fragrance and threads of curling smoke rose in the ominously windless air. Passing Daya Qoteh, who gave me a gentle smile, I went through archways and up steps until I reached Shaikh Shems. Holy flames burnt at every corner, looking like the tongues of fire that mediaeval painters portrayed in pictures of Pentecost. Even as I sat on the base of the cone, many of them flickered out in sudden little draughts of chill wind. In the stillness, and against the undertones of running waters, I heard indistinctly the voice of the police-sergeant to whom I had lent my Baghdad paper, reading aloud from the Arabic page the latest war bulletins from Europe. In the trees close to the shrine the awed, whispering twitter of the birds spoke of approaching storm.

Returning by the pilgrims' way, I passed the shrine with a cone which stands directly above it, that of Shaikh Mushellah, the "stripped shaikh". Why or how the *shaikh* acquired such a name I never heard. Then I paused for an instant by the shrine which is under the platform upon which the men built their fire by night. It is called the *mazār* of Cheyl Meyra, and is two-chambered with one square and one arched

entrance, and decorated by a rose, a sun and other designs obliterated by time and weather.

In the gathering gloom I perceived many flames more than on former nights: for instance, at the archway which led from the forecourt to the inner court of the temple there were four lights to the left of the steps, eight on the right, and a light at each wall. In the inner court I heard the voice of one of the white nuns chanting before the open door of the temple. The voice was low and the chant in a major key like all Yazidi religious music. It accentuated the menacing silence of Nature. Even as I listened to it, I heard the roll of approaching thunder, and a soft, agitated twitter from bee-eaters passing in a flock overhead.

I went no nearer, lest I disturbed her devotions, but sat on one of the stone benches in the covered way, while Jiddan crept barefoot round the temple court, kissing the sacred walls. I was soon joined by the *shaikh*, who had stopped his carving for the day. He asked me, "Have you many monasteries in London?"

Abashed, I gave vague answer, "A number."

"*Khatūn*, have you visited the monasteries of Rabban Hormuzd and Mar Matti?"

When I replied that I had, he commented, "You have done well."

"How sweet is the sound of the chanting," I observed in my turn.

"Aye, verily," he replied sententiously. "Piety is a good thing."

He might have enlarged upon his platitude, but was cut short by a peal of thunder right above us. I fled to the guest-chamber as heavy drops descended thick and fast, soon turning to hailstones.

The din as they flailed the iron roof of the small room was deafening. The thunder rolled backwards and forwards and echoed amongst the hills, but the noise of the hail on the roof almost covered it, and sounded

like an attack by a number of machine-guns. Now and then a terrific peal added heavy artillery, and violet lightning flickered and illuminated the blackness of the room. If I had wished to be heard above all this, I should have had to shout. Soon drips began to come in through a few small holes in the roof. I spread my mackintosh on the bed, put the basin on the floor and opened an umbrella elsewhere, and was then perfectly dry. When the noise and rain slackened a little, one of the police came up to see how I was getting on, and close on his heels Hajji arrived, with a platter of rice and chicken.

There was a lull at last. The rain stopped, it grew lighter and I blew out the candle which I had had to light prematurely. The sky behind the mulberry on the terrace, however, was still vividly blue-black. The men pointed to a clear twilight sky to the north and prophesied wishfully that the storm had passed and that they would sleep out-of-doors as usual. "What matter if the ground is drenched," they said, "spring rain is good and harms no one."

An old Yazidi wearing a round felt white cap arrived up the pilgrims' way as we talked: he had come from 'Ain Sifni with good news: some Yazidis who had been arrested and imprisoned had come to-day before the court and were to be released. Every one ejaculated "Praise Allah!" including the two police and myself, though I had not the least idea of what they had been accused. When I asked, I was told, "On a false charge," as if this were a normal occurrence. When it was entirely dark, the lightning continued winking and blinking. Suddenly, just after I had got into bed, two rifle shots were heard close at hand. I got out, opened my door and asked what had happened.

"A robber, a robber!" someone cried in an excited voice, and another man called out, "*Khatūn*, do not fear!"

There was a great deal of talking and shouting below, but nothing further, so I got back to bed and fell peacefully asleep, only to be roused by the sound of stealthy moving in the room. I reached for my torch—it was one of the sanctuary cats! As I arose, it dashed madly round and bolted through a window pane, making a crash.

"What is it?" came anxiously from below.

"Only a cat, do not fear!" and there was a general laugh.

By midnight the rain was lashing the roof again in a soaking downpour. With the mackintosh over the bed and an umbrella propped over the pillow I was in comfort, but the party on the platform round the ashes of the wood fire acknowledged defeat and crowded into the small room which served us as kitchen below. On the whole, it was a disturbed night, for I had to rise several times to investigate sounds of dripping and move clothes, or other objects, to a dry spot. By the morning there was a brief gleam of sunshine, only to be followed by yet another return of the storm which arrived with all its artillery of thunder, rain and hail, the latter being sizeable ice-balls which bounced on the roof and terrace and rolled into corners to melt in little heaps. It all lasted a brief ten minutes, and then Shaikh Sun came out for good, and a gentle wind caressed the well-washed leaves, which glittered with wet. The sky showed clear blue.

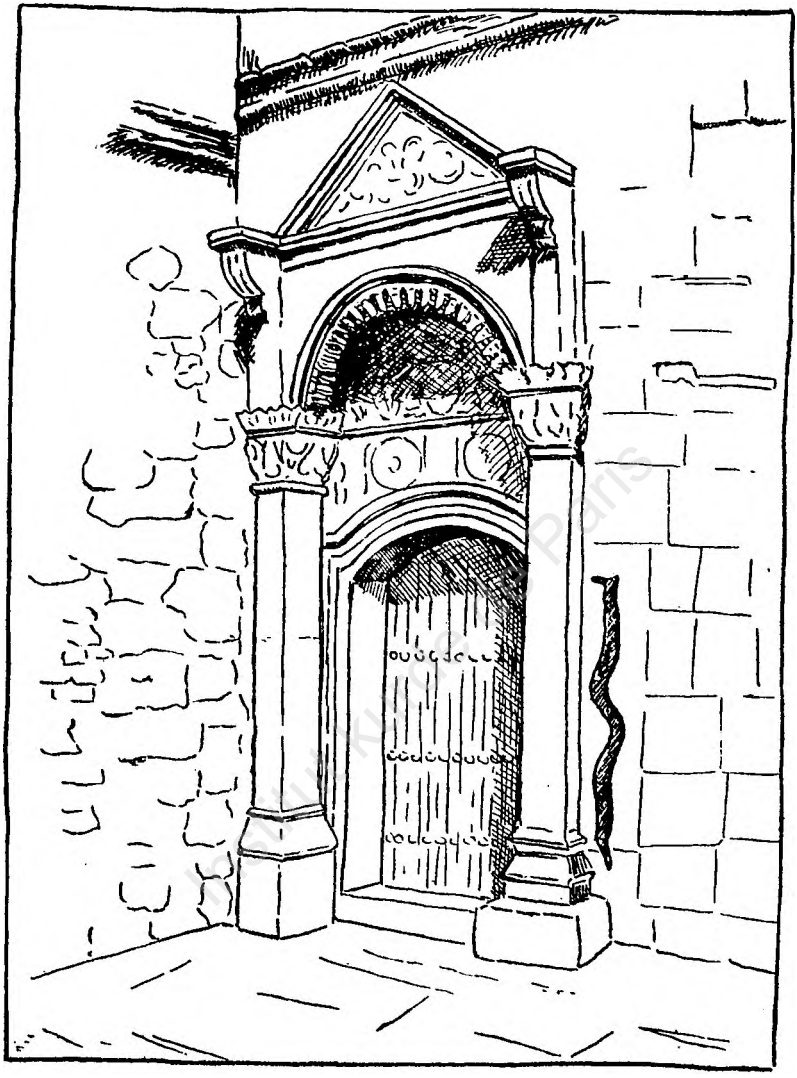
Chapter XXI

WITHIN THE TEMPLE

"These are things unbeholden of the profane."
THEOCRITUS, *Idyll XXVI.*

AND so began my last complete day. The sergeant of police, discussing the events of the night, agreed with me that the robber, however exciting it all sounded, had been imaginary. The Yazidi lad had seen someone skulking, and going to the door had cried, "Who is it, who is it?" and the figure fled. It might have been a belated villager in search of shelter. But the hunt was up, and after a thorough examination of lurking-places round the courtyards, shots were fired just to show an evil-intentioned marauder what to expect if he tried any tricks. Such nerves are excusable, since but a short while ago the village below had been attacked with a loss of three men. It was known secretly that it was a tribal feud, but as neither attacked nor attackers wished their private quarrels disclosed, it was agreed to pin the corpses on to some innocent Yazidis, who were hauled off to prison. Witnesses were easily procured against them, the whole village being concerned in the affair, and they were accordingly sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

On the previous day I had intimated to the *faqīr* that on the morrow I should visit the temple of Shaikh 'Adi, and when I set out to do so, he was ready for me. I removed my shoes at some distance from the doorway and offered to take off my stockings as well, but he assured me it was not necessary. So, carefully stepping



Door : Shrine of Shaikh 'Adi.

over the broad and high threshold stone, smoothened by many kisses, I stepped into the darkness of the temple.

It is curious that the feeling of holy ground, which is so strong in the leafy valley and on the flower-grown hillside, departs as one enters the chill of the temple itself. To begin with, to our eyes it looks uncared-for, and the greasy droppings of olive-oil and the dirt on the floor impress a Western visitor unfavourably. It is exceedingly dark: the only light comes from small piercings in the thick southern wall. Petroleum tins are placed on the ground beneath the four-lipped iron lamps, to catch the drippings.

The building is divided into two parallel naves; the tombs of Shaikh 'Adi and Shaikh Hasan al-Basri are in chapels off the north nave, that of Shaikh 'Adi being surmounted by a domed roof set on squinch arches, the walls partially covered with tiles, discoloured with damp and time, and partially fallen. Part of the plaster and masonry in this chapel lie on the ground; in fact, the place bears a look of neglect and decay. An Arabic inscription at the entrance to the mausoleum has been set in sideways, as if the mason had not known how to read, and there is paucity of decoration. The tomb itself is covered with pieces of silk, red and green, faded and dusty. These pieces were knotted, and as we stood by the tomb, Jiddan and the *faqīr* kissed the knots devoutly.

A door in the chapel led to Hasan al-Basri's tomb, and this too was covered with pieces of knotted silk like those on Shaikh 'Adi's. According to Siouffi, Shaikh Hasan al-Basri [1] is the name chosen by the Yazidis to cloak the name of their legendary Shaikh Sinn who, he

[1] Siouffi, JA XX 7me série. In view of the reverence shown by the Yazidis to the planets and the frequency with which the sun-disc and moon are represented at Shaikh 'Adi, it has occurred to me that Shaikh Sinn is, perhaps, none other than the moon-god Sin, who figures much in Mandaean legend.

says, they claim was called into being by God before the angel Gabriel. This Shaikh Sinn created a child for himself, as he was too pure to take a woman to wife. The descendants of Shaikh Hasan al-Basri are looked upon as especially holy, and the arts of reading and writing were at one time confined to this family of *shaïkhs*. A *shaikh* of the clan should be present at every marriage.

Returning to the northern nave again, I looked for the door which led down to the crypt, but it was carefully covered up, although another door, through which I passed later, was left free. On the south wall, beside the small apertures for light mentioned above, there has been a door with a decorated arch, now closed in, also three arched niches. At the west end of the temple, to the right of the door as one enters, is a cistern in the floor, a metre or more deep. When the temple was a church, this could have been an immersion basin, now it was used, according to the *faqīr*, " for washing ". However, knowing his secretive fanaticism, I accepted the information with scepticism.

Returning to the east end, I asked to go below the temple, and, without a word, the *faqīr* opened the door I had already seen at the east end, not that which was concealed. This led out to steps, at the bottom of which we entered the partially roofed-in passage which runs along the foundations of the whole of the south side of the building described in Chapter XV. A flagged path here opens at intervals to show water swiftly descending the slope in a shallow stone bed. I stopped dead and said to the *faqīr*, " But this is not what I asked to see."

The *faqīr* showed signs of agitation. " There is nothing else, by Allah, there is nothing else ! "

I said to him, " When I came here, I brought with me a message from the *mīr* to say that I was to see everything. Now you conceal from me just that which I am anxious to see."

"Have we not shown you everything? *Khatūn*, you have seen all the shrines, all! You have gone everywhere, you have seen everything."

"Listen," I said to him. "I am not asking a new thing. When Miss Bell came here, she saw the crypt which is below the temple, that which is partially cavern and partially building. Down the middle water runs, and it is wholly dark."

The *faqīr* mumbled, "You have seen everything." He had never heard of Miss Bell, he said, and obviously disbelieved in her visit.

Hajji looked from one to the other of us in distress. Then he had a brilliant idea.

"*I* will show you, *khatūn*," he announced with the air of one stepping into the breach. "Come!"

We retraced our footsteps a little along the covered way, and in the wall he opened a door. Once more I removed my shoes, though the low and dark entrance was greasy with ancient oil-droppings. "Perhaps," I thought hopefully, "this is a side entrance to the crypt."

A sharp turn brought us to a chamber, partially filled with water, used as a storeroom for jars of oil.

"Here," said Hajji, splendidly mendacious, "we bring no one, for it is very, very holy."

There was a pause, then I looked full at him and said,

"Hajji, this is not what I asked to see."

Crestfallen, he turned, and we went back into the daylight. I said to the *faqīr*, "I am sorry that you have refused me this. Had I known that no one else had entered that place, I might have been content, but as it is, I know what is beneath the temple, and that others have been there."

I waited. But the *faqīr's* face went blind and blank and I did not press the matter, for I never force these things. When we had returned in silence to the main

courtyard, I bowed and turned away with a grave face and left it at that.

All the morning, embassies arrived. First it was Mammeh, the chatterbox, with her baby Baran in her arms, seriously concerned and thinking no doubt that the silk material I had promised her was in jeopardy. "Why is the *khatūn* angry? They say that the *khatūn* is angry!"

"I am not angry, Mammeh, only sorry that they will not do what I have asked, and more, that they have denied to me, their friend, that such a place exists."

Jiddan, also troubled, arrived also as ambassador, and met with a similar explanation. Hajji hung about the guest-room, genuinely regretful, for he was a kindly lad. Jiddan remarked that if the *Shawish* had been here, *wallah*, this would not have happened. (Which was possibly true.) "The *mīr* will not be pleased when he hears of this," he added ruefully. But the *faqīr* remained obdurate as a rock to all pourparlers.

Again the intermediaries returned to the charge. "You are angry!"

"No," I assured them, "but my *khaṭr* is a little broken."

Now a *khaṭr* broken is a serious matter. It means something more than injured feelings, it means that one's prestige is affected, that one has received an ill-deserved rebuff, that one is conscious of not being treated with the usual courtesy.

So there was a storm of protestations. The white ladies arrived, gently ruffled, to throw oil—not olive-oil—on the troubled waters. Finally the *faqīr* arrived in person, his pale narrow face as rigid as ever. Finally he admitted having lied to me. He admitted the crypt and the sacred spring. He admitted everything but, he said, he would not admit me. "I have never taken my own women in" (anxious corroboration from Mammeh). "I have never taken in the *mīr* himself.

None but these," and he indicated the white ladies, " and the *Baba Shaikh*, and the *Shawish* and myself enter that place, and by God, by God, it is so holy that when I walk there my hand trembles ! "

Part of good generalship lies in recognizing defeat and in turning it to the best advantage. This was a defeat and I accepted it and reflected upon it.

In the afternoon, Hajji and I went up the mountain on the north side of the valley and walked on a plateau yellow with hawkweed and scarlet with ranunculus. Here may-trees were bursting into bloom and by one of these we rested and looked down upon the shrines below.

Poor Hajji once more excused himself and his uncle. " None, not even Yazidis," he said, " are ever allowed to enter that place," and declared again that neither he, nor the *faqīr's* own wife, had ever set foot in it. I remembered that in *Amurath to Amurath* Miss Bell recounts that when the *mīr's* aunt, then abbess of the place, took her into the crypt of the holy spring, the white lady stopped halfway and in a hushed voice asked her, " Are you not *afraid* ? " [1]

We returned, and after tea had been served I saw the *faqīr* setting off as usual with his bowl, his flaming wicks and his ladle, and I reflected deeply upon his refusal. I thought of him with less exasperation. I reminded myself that he comes of a race which has been the victim of century-long misrepresentation and hatred. Now he saw the cherished religion of his people threatened by schools, by military service, and all that to him threatened the fabric of his faith. He saw the privacy of the sanctuary menaced by the new road even now under construction from 'Ain Sifni to Mosul, thus bringing the contaminating world danger-

[1] Dr. Wigram, visiting the temple once during a persecution of the Yazidis, found the place unguarded and deserted, and entered the sacred cavern (see *The Cradle of Mankind*, 1914, p. 200).

ously close. Hitherto the valley, lodged in the Hakkari mountains, has been protected by nature, and when Gertrude Bell visited it before the Great War and the invention of the motor-car, Yazidis were still secure in their isolation, guarded by their hills and the inaccessibility of the place. Moreover, she was taken by the *mīr's* aunt, a woman of the princely clan, a family that has always been more or less in touch with officialdom and the great world.[1]

But he, the *faqīr*, is a little nobody, and yet a priest of blind faith, of dogged devotion, a man with a trust. The desecrating world is already fumbling at the crumbling walls he seeks to defend, and have I not seen for myself how careless outsiders are of Yazidi prejudices, how unwittingly, and sometimes wantonly, they transgress the laws of Yazidi taboo? In short, the *faqīr* sees in me the first of invaders from that heedless host which threatens all that he holds sacred.

So that my mind was at peace when I climbed for the last time to Shaikh Shems and gazed down at the valley with its white spires rising amidst the rain-washed green. And I even found it a good thing that they should have denied me the visit to the holy of holies, the shrine of the life-giving water-spirit, the true divinity and genius of the place. No wonder that the atmosphere of sanctity was lacking from the building above and that even the tomb of the mystic who once taught, lived and died here, seemed empty and meaningless. The real shrine was near the earth's heart, for I guess that, like the Mandaeans, whose religion is also secret and veiled, they look upon water as one of the purest emblems of Being that is Life and Eternity.

[1] When I returned to Baghdad, Mira Wansa declared that had she been present, I should have seen Zemzem, as the holy spring is called. To endue it with sanctity in the eyes of Moslems, Yazidis declare the water has subterranean connection with the famous well Zemzem at Mecca.

As these thoughts came into my mind, I heard a sound that I last heard in far-away England. It was the cry of one who is the very messenger of spring and of rebirth.

" Cuckoo, cuckoo ! "

ENVOI

IT was the last morning, and the pack animals had arrived overnight. My beast was a white mare; beside her ran a month-old chestnut filly, a white blaze on her forehead. I said farewell to everyone, distributed the last of my stores, and bestowed the last of my gifts. There was orange satin for Mammeh, in whose eyes delight dawned as she received it into her arms, there was an offering to the *shaikh* whose spoon was now in my possession, a gift of money and some perfume for Hajji, who, overcome, tried to refuse; amulets and tobacco money to the rest. Mammeh, greed in her heart, hovered round me whilst I packed. She hoped till the last that something more would come out of that wonderful Revelation suit-case. But the last of the chocolates and trinkets had been given away, and I had no purgative which would suit Suleyman. As a final inspiration, she had asked that.

"But," I suggested, "you have dust from the shrines, and there are herbs on the mountains."

Jiddan asked humbly for an Evil Eye bead, or even two; for he was afraid they would all melt away before we got back to Mosul. I produced them, and the rest were shared out between the police and my servant Mikhail, who has an infant daughter needing protection.[1] Everyone gathered on the platform, wishing me a good journey and bidding me return for the Great Feast. The white ladies were there (except the aged Norn, who was no doubt on her grey wall, weaving

[1] I found one weeks afterwards in my handbag, and delighted an Algerian Arab soldier, wounded in the Dunkirk retreat, by giving it to him in an English hospital. He had lost a leg.

wicks for the temple lamps and spinning cobwebbed fancies in her bewildered old brain). Daya Qoteh smiled at me with great kindliness. I asked her if she would remember me in her prayers at the shrine, and she said that she would. Her farewell was cordial and benevolent.

There remained the last visit to the temple. I paid it with ceremony, standing erect and silent at the open door of the shrine, gazing within for some moments, whilst the *faqīr*, its guardian, stood gravely by the black serpent, vigilant and anxious to be friendly again. I laid an offering on the threshold, and in a solemn voice he called down the blessing of Shaikh 'Adi on my comings and goings. Jiddan bent and kissed the threshold fervently for a last time, and received the same blessing, in the same tone and in the same words.

Then we turned, and when I said farewell to the *faqīr* and offered my hand it was as if a difference had never been between us.

"In the keeping of God," he said.

"We leave you in it," we rejoined, and set off walking down the pilgrims' way, the led and laden beasts behind us picking their way for fear of slipping on the worn paving-stones.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Marriage Customs

AS soon as connection has taken place, the bridegroom comes out of the nuptial chamber and displays to his three friends outside a kerchief stained with proof of the girl's virginity. I asked what happened if no sign of virginity were forthcoming. "This happened in the case of a girl I knew," said my informant. "It might indeed have been due to a fall when riding, for we women in the mountains ride, or perhaps from another cause. I told them that it was not necessarily a sign of unchastity. But they would not listen, and the bride was covered with a black veil and sent back to her people. Sometimes, if the young man finds no sign of virginity and yet loves the girl and wants to keep her, he may take a needle or knife and draw a little of her blood to stain the kerchief and satisfy his friends."

This custom is not confined to Yazidi's, but is practised throughout the country of 'Iraq.

APPENDIX B

Birth

THE midwife is called the *dapīr*, and is usually an aged woman instructed in the art by another *dapīr*. Until now, Government midwives instructed in modern methods have not reached the hill villages. In cases of difficult labour, magic, such as the beating referred to, is resorted to, and hot drinks are administered, but, according to Hajjia, nothing is inserted in the vagina. When the child is born, the midwife cuts the cord, ties it with a cotton thread, white or blue, and puts collyrium or dry coffee on the wound. She puts some pitch on the baby's head, and if the woman's face has become marked during pregnancy, they rub a little blood from the cord on her cheeks. If the infant shows no sign of life, they take a flat loaf of household bread (this is thin and concave in shape, as it is baked on a concave surface), sprinkle it with a little milk from the mother's breast and a little blood from the cord, and fan air towards the child. Nothing but bread may be used for this purpose. If the child then breathes, the bread is put away carefully, and kept always in a safe hidden place. The infant is washed with soap and warm water, a little collyrium is put on its eyelids and it is swaddled tightly. The after-birth (*havāl puchūk*, " partner ") is buried in or near the house, usually in the cellar. It must be first wrapped in a white cloth, and a threaded needle is run into the cloth to hold it together. In the case of a woman whose children die in infancy, the after-birth is sometimes wrapped in a baby's dress and buried at the threshold of the mother's room while the midwife murmurs some words such as " As thou art buried here, the boy (or girl) will live."

The mother lies in for seven days after the birth. To protect her from demoniac attacks, the *shaikh's* stick is put beside her in the bed, and a sieve into which a hair presented by a *shaikh* is threaded. Into this sieve is placed the knife which cut the umbilical cord, and the bed and sieve are surrounded by a knotted rope. Below her pillow, some Shaikh 'Adi dust is put, together with a seven-holed blue button, a black bean and a pair of scissors. A light is kept burning at night. The mother's diet must be

hot and sweet, well seasoned with pepper, cloves and raisins and cooked with plenty of *dihn* (melted sheeps' butter). If a visitor visits the woman lying in, he or she must eat something beside the bed or evil will follow. The baby must not leave the house until forty days are past, nor wear new clothes, but be dressed in the cast-off garments of other children.

Even after the seven days' purification described in Chapter IV, the mother is not considered perfectly free from pollution until forty days have passed, and before her purification she should not be visited either by a menstruating woman or a woman who has just had a child until the latter is forty days old, or an accident will happen to her own babe. Any bright-coloured material or fruit brought into the house from the market may affect the baby's health : if yellow, it may get jaundice ; if red, it may become flushed with fever. (This belief is current all over 'Iraq. In the south it is called *Kebsa* or *Chebsa*. See my article on " Woman and Taboo in 'Iraq " in *'Iraq*, the Journal of the School of Archaeology in 'Iraq, Vol. V (1938), p. 155 ff.)

On one occasion Hajjia took me to the house of a Yazidi girl who had had a miscarriage. It was a first child, and the girl, who lay lightly covered on the floor of the living-room, was hardly more than a child herself. She would be up and working the next day. I sympathized with her, gave her something for luck, and raised a faint smile on her face. Hajjia, incoherent as ever, showed me an egg-shaped ball of clay wrapped in a white cloth upon a shelf. This was the abortion. She had washed it, put some bitumen on the head, then brought clay and covered it round completely. When the girl took her purificatory bath, it would be placed upon her head so that she might have another child. The after-birth would be treated as usual, that is, wrapped in white wool and buried with the threaded needle. But the abortion would be buried in the house near the threshold stone after the ceremony described above, with a stone placed above it in its little grave under the soil of the home. Thus the disappointed mother would " come and go over it " and conceive and bear a living child.

GLOSSARY

OF WORDS COMMONLY USED IN THIS BOOK

Baba Shaikh . .	Name given to the head of the Yazidi religious organization.
Borghul, burghul .	Crushed wheat.
Daff	Tambour.
Debka	A mountain dance.
Gopāl	Staff.
Kabāneh, Kabana .	Abbess.
Khatūn	Lady.
Kôchek	A Yazidi ascetic of lay birth.
Mazār	Place of pilgrimage. Shrine.
Mīr	Emir, or prince.
Mukhtār . . .	Headman.
Pīr	A Yazidi priest, second in rank to the *shaikh*.
Qal'a	Stronghold, fortress.
Qaliūn	Tobacco-pipe.
Qawwāl. . . .	A reciter, or chanter.
Sarisāl, Sarsāleh .	Name of the Yazidi spring feast.
Shaikh	A member of the saintly caste. *Shaikhs* are the grade above *pīrs*.
Shebāb	The pipe played by the *qawwāls*.

INDEX

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