

Thomas Bois

# THE KURDS



The Kurds are one of the few peoples of the Middle East who have genuinely maintained the dignified and picturesque traditions of the past. The work of Father Thomas Bois comes just at the right time to extend our knowledge of this not too well known and frequently misunderstood people. The author after having briefly outlined the origins and history of this Middle Eastern people, presents them vividly before us in their family and social life and their daily occupations. We share in their joys and sorrows. Father Bois is no cold anthropologist. He is filled with a deep human sympathy for a people whom he obviously loves, and there are passages in this book where he reveals an affection for the people among whom he has lived, which are truly touching. Of extraordinary interest are the accounts of superstitions which sometimes approach the borderline of orthodox religion. The picture of Kurdish literature, both written and oral, which he presents so attractively will arouse the curiosity of many. In the light of the last chapter, certain recent events will come into focus which previously were obscure and blurred.

Thomas Bois

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*Translated from the French by  
Professor M.W.M. Welland*

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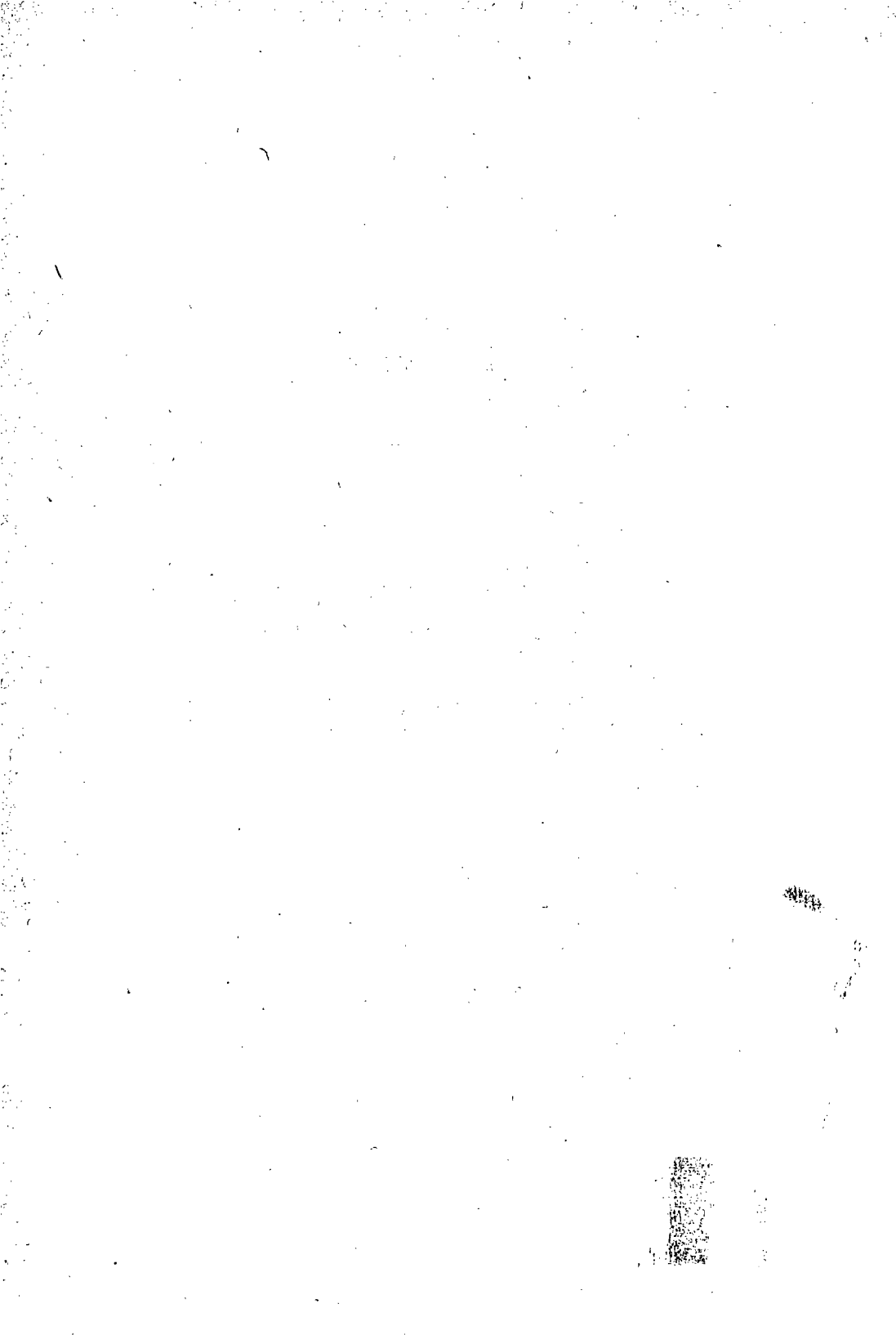
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## CHAPTER I

# Kurdistan

A land without frontiers, Kurdistan is, it goes without saying, that country inhabited by the Kurds. This name, in the course of centuries, has been given to those areas, more or less extensive, which have altered from epoch to epoch. Today, officially, it no longer figures on maps printed in Turkey, although it did appear during the time of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand the map indicates in Iran a western province, which is far from containing all the Kurds, even those of Iran.

Kurdistan forms the backbone of the Middle East. Situated in the heart of Asia Minor, it occupies the greater part of that mountainous region which extends between the Black Sea and the steppes of Mesopotamia on one side, and the Anti-Taurus range and the Iranian plateau, on the other. Its territory, which has the shape of a sickle or crescent, according to one's imaginative taste, is nearly as large as France and forms large parts of Turkey, Iran and Irak. Despite this, its inhabitants are clearly distinguished by race, language and history from the Turks, Persians and Arabs.

### Geographical Kurdistan

The Taurus and Zagros mountain ranges form, so to speak, the spinal column of this country, which is situated at a considerable elevation above the surrounding countries. Some mountain peaks, however, tower over the regions which surround them. The great Mount Ararat, on which it is supposed Noah's Ark came to rest, is more than 16,200 feet high. Mount Judi, which claims the same honour, reaches a height of more than 6500 feet; Nemrud Dagh, a height of 10,400 feet and Sipan, frequently mentioned in song, rises to almost 11,330 feet. In Irak, Pira Magrun has a height of 9,200 feet. The summits are snow-covered for a great part of the year. It is in mid-Kurdistan that the two Biblical rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, have their sources. Their many tributaries: the Murad Su, the Khabur, the two

Zabs, and the Diala follow difficult courses through the mountains over rocks and through precipitous gorges, thus contributing to the beauty of the landscape. But they also water some very fertile valleys. These are to be found mainly in the loops of the Euphrates, as, for example, the plain of Urfa and of Tigre, the regions of Diar and of Jezireh, the very rich and fertile valley of Mush, and the valleys of the two Zabs around Arbil and Kirkuk.

This country, therefore, is not lacking in natural beauty. Indeed so beautiful is it that it is from the songs that the children come to realize its loveliness, for it is easy to compare the charms of a beloved to the beauties which everywhere lie around them, such as the flowers of Ashmakhan, apples of Malatia, grapes of Sinjar. Other allusions are to the wooded, rocky slopes of mounts Sipan and Klat; to the springs which gush from the Bingol and to the gardens of Meriwan. A river flowing through a village, the fruits which flourish everywhere, a snow-clad peak like Kandil are all used as similes which vary from one province to another. One often wonders with which the singer is most entranced — the charms of his beloved or the beauty of the landscape.

Cousin thine eyes flash fire and light  
 Like to the springs of Akhmakhan,  
 Amidst the flowers of Akhmakhan  
 Thou leapest like the gazelle's young fawn.  
 Thou art a mountain rose of sweet perfume.  
 Shelter me under thy russet locks.  
 Thy tresses and their ringlets toss to and fro  
 Like to the sweet zephyr of Akhmakhan.

But life is not all poetry, for the climate is quite severe. The snow which crowns the mountain brings the cold, but elsewhere in the South a torrid heat prevails. The rains last from November to April. The principle of natural selection operates on the population so that the Kurdish highlander is strong and vigorous.



**The Economic Resources of Kurdistan**

Some of the tribes still live in tents, and for the summer season the Kurds leave the plains, which are beginning to dry up, and lead their flocks to the *zozan*, or mountain pastures where the animals find plenty of grass and refreshing coolness. Some sheep grow to a height of 32 inches, which is 6 inches higher than the best animals of many sheep producing countries. And so, many Kurds follow the shepherd's trade, and this work is held in high esteem for it allows one to live in freedom under God's sun.

The many racy proverbs which embellish conversation testify to the accuracy of the shepherd's observation of his flock and so reflect his way of life.

The good ram is recognized right from the threshold of the fold.

The rights of the defenceless ram fall down before the one with horns.

When the he-goat has had his day, the kid is named the master of the flock.

The mangy goat leaps high over the spring.

A hundred sheep rest in the shade of a single tree.

Without his flock the sheep becomes the prey of wolves.

The Kurd is a very keen hunter, and here he has all that he could wish for, since the mountains are full of bears, wolves, wild boars, not to speak of ibex and other smaller game both furred and feathered, such as partridges and wild duck which are to be found in abundance.

Today the majority of Kurds are not entirely nomads and sheep-raisers. A great many of them settle in little villages. The village Kurd often gives a hospitable welcome to the stranger. In such villages there are no streets and the houses are packed together one against another on the banks of a stream shaded by lofty poplars and fine walnut trees. Here is where fine darting fish can be caught on the line and where the little boys enjoy a

bathe, and the women clad in multicoloured garments wash their tattered rags. The fields roundabout are well tilled, for the Kurd has a love for the soil, and where this is scarce, he skilfully makes terraces on which maize, millet and hemp can be sown. Rice is a thriving crop and tobacco is an important part of the country's wealth. The vines of numerous varieties produce excellent grapes. Almost everywhere can be seen the ruins of imposing fortresses built over the centuries by independent *aghas*. Some of these castles have played their part in history. Legend is mingled with true histories, and these stories have given rise to the epics which the minstrels sing at close of day as, for example, the famous epic of Dimdin-Kala.

This country then is extremely picturesque. Is it as prosperous as it is charming? Kurdistan, as we have said, is mainly a mountainous land, and a mountainous country has never been counted as wealthy. Nevertheless, the crops of wheat, barley and rice are not inconsiderable, the fruit trees — apples, pears, peaches, and apricots, not to speak of the vines, — are abundant. Along with wool, milk, butter and cheese, sheep-rearing is one of the chief economic resources of Kurdistan. The mountains are clad with evergreen oaks, from which are gathered oak-galls which are used to make ink and tanning materials. There are, besides, almost everywhere, deposits of coal practically unworked. Copper is mined at Ergani and also exists at Palu and the districts of Van and Akra. Iron ore is to be found in the neighbourhood of Maden, in the *kazas* of Kigi, Keshkin and in the region of Amadia. There is silver-bearing lead near Maden in the dependencies of Van and Kemah. Gold and silver ores have been reported from a place near Diarbekir. But one of the greatest sources of the wealth of Kurdistan consists in the large deposits of chrome and above all petroleum. The famous petroleum of Mosul exploited at Kirkuk is right within Kurdistan, and of this the Kurds are well aware. In Turkey, the Garzan petroleum produced at Batman and the wells of Ramandagh in the department of Siirt are also Kurdish.

**The Kurdish Towns**

There are few towns in Kurdistan, or at any rate large towns, but most of them have magnificent sites. In Turkey there is Erzerum, the bastion of Eastern Anatolia with 90,000 inhabitants who have preserved the customs and religious principles of other days. Bitlis, built on volcanic rock at an altitude of more than 5,000 feet, which historically speaking might be called the capital of Kurdistan, has seen Xenophon's Ten Thousand pass by. Other centres of population are: Diarbekir on the Tigris, with its ancient Roman ramparts, Van, in the country of Semiramis, on the shores of a lake, salt-saturated like the Dead Sea, Elizig, Malatia, Mardin and Jezireh. In Iran there are: Saudji-Boulak which the Kurds named Mahabad, town of the moon, or of the Medes; Khoi, Maku, Sinna, and in particular Kirmanshah. In Irak, Sulaymaniyah, with a population of 50,000 is the most important cultural and industrial centre. Arbil, where Alexander defeated Darius, in importance follows Sulaymaniyah closely, and its citadel in its striking situation is as impressive as Amadia or Akra which also tower aloft like fortresses. Rowanduz, less important in population, undoubtedly surpasses these in beauty thanks to its gorges which are among the most beautiful spectacles that one could imagine. Kirkuk, the petroleum town, has a mixed population. Zakho and Duhok, in the midst of orchards, bear witness to the spirited industriousness of the inhabitants. Sersing and Salahuddin are summer resorts as pretty as the most charming corners of Lebanon. Everyone there lives by small-scale trading and handicrafts — weaving and carpet and felt-making. Many Kurds have found employment at the Dokhân dam or work in the petroleum refineries of Kirkuk.

One is often asked if the Kurds are numerous. It is rather difficult to give an exact answer to this question for the good reason that the governments concerned deliberately ignore the racial differences in their populations.

Certain Western sources quoting old figures of fifty years ago, if not longer, calculate the Kurds to number two to three

millions, which is plainly an under-estimate. The figure of twelve millions, advanced by Kurdish nationalists, lacks authoritative proof. But one can state, without fear of being in great error, that the entire Kurdish population reaches a minimum of nine to ten millions, of which at least six millions are in Turkey. As regards the latter figure, which some will think excessive, it is enough to study the statistics (no. 444) of the census of 1960, which substantiate it. In short, the total Kurdish population is equal to those of Irak, Lebanon, Jordan and Kuwait put together.

The following pages have been written to make known, after having summarized their origins, the people, almost unknown and often ignored, of this magnificent country. Our object is to present the particular character of the Kurds as manifested in the activities of their daily lives, both in the home and in the sphere of arts and crafts, and in the patterns of their economic, social and religious life. We shall conclude with a rapid glance at Kurdish nationalism.

## CHAPTER II

### **In Search of the Kurdish People**

The origin of the Kurdish people is one of the problems which, for half a century, has been exercising the wits of historians. Many theories have been advanced, and the subject is quite a complicated one. Russian writers, especially V. Minor-sky, B. Nikitine and O.L. Viltchevsky, have endeavoured to throw some light on it. Following these and with the help of other learned researches, we shall try to see a way through all the historical, archaeological, linguistic and anthropological arguments. We shall not be debarred from concluding that the Kurds of today have originated from several stocks, which, in the course of centuries, have fused, and that the historical process and their social system have made of these people a clearly distinct ethnic and national group.

#### **From Legend to History**

According to Morier, the inhabitants of Demavend used to celebrate towards the beginning of the XIXth century, and no doubt still celebrate in our time, a festival which they called "aid-è-Kurd," the Kurdish feast. It commemorated the victory of Feridun over the tyrant Zahlak or Az-Dahak, which means "the man of ten vices." This Zahlak, who came from Syria, fought against the famous legendary king of Iran, Jamshid, Jam the Resplendent, and replaced him on the throne. But Zahlak, no doubt as a punishment for his wickedness, was afflicted with two growths on his shoulders, in the form of serpents. To cure the wretched man the cleverest doctors exhausted all their skill, but in vain, when Satan himself intervened and to alleviate the malady recommended that every day there should be applied to each shoulder to feed the serpents the brains of a young person. In this manner a number of victims were sacrificed, until one day the cooks, Kurmaïl and Armaïl, whose duty it was to satiate the monsters, felt moved to spare innocent lives, and to replace human brains with those of sheep. The survivors of both sexes

thus spared took refuge in the mountains, and in the course of time intermarried and so became the ancestors of the Kurds, who have remained in the mountains devoting themselves to cultivation and the raising of livestock. They are those "who know no fixed habitation, whose dwellings are tents and who have in their hearts no fear of God." Zahlak then was defeated by Firidun, and like Prometheus was chained to the top of Mount Demavend where he died a slow and miserable death. At least, so runs the legend related by Firdusi in his *Shah-Nama* or "History of the Kings of Persia."

But perhaps this legend does not give entire satisfaction to those who consider it too tame an origin for the Kurds, who are a people renowned for their courage and daring. Some Arab writers go so far as to say "the Kurds are a race of Jinns." Their origin is well known. King Suleiman the Magnificent, whose memory is deeply rooted in Eastern folklore and who has, it is said, left many traces of his dominion in Kurdistan, decided one day to add to his harem. He, therefore, sent to the West for four hundred beautiful girls. Unfortunately, on the way they encountered some jinns who, at the bidding of the demon Jasad, raped them. When Suleiman heard of this insult to his dignity he drove away the four hundred concubines, whom he deemed unworthy of him, but as a result of their intercourse with the jinns they gave birth to those wonderful children the Kurds.

In considering the etymology of the word some have come to rather fanciful conclusions. The Kurds are probably "heroes" after the Persian *gurd*, hero, or "wolves" from the Persian *gurg*, a wolf. All this is innocuous speculation which does no harm to anyone. But the Soviet academician Mr Marr, giving rein to his imagination, sees a relationship between the word Kurd and the Armenian *kurt*, which it seems has the sense of "eunuch." And from this he elaborates a whole theory of matriarchy, a form of social organization, which was probably known to the Kurds. In any case he exaggerates, for if the Kurds are proud of all being taken for heroes, and at a pinch for wolves, creatures often as

unfortunate as themselves, according to the poet Cegerxwin, they will certainly not allow themselves to be thought lacking in virility, something that they are not and never have been.

But if popular legends and puerile etymologies explain some characteristics of the Kurds, it is obvious that they are insufficient to solve the problem of their origin.

### **History and Archaeology**

One thing is certain: the area inhabited today by the Kurds and which, for the sake of brevity, we shall call Kurdistan has been peopled from the remotest antiquity as is evidenced by the excavations carried out by a team from the University of Chicago (completed in 1961). Barda Balka, the cave of Hazar Merd, not far from Sulaymaniyah, and of the Mousterian era, and the cave of Shanidar, near Rowanduz, where was discovered the first paleolithic skeleton in Irak, prove that the country has been inhabited for thousands of years. In Hazar Merd there have been found the remains of meals eaten by these early inhabitants — bones of rabbits, deer, gazelles, goats, doves, partridges, as well as a large quantity of shells of the snails (*helix salomonica*) gathered for their daily menu. Jarmo, in the valley of Shamshamal, is the most ancient village of the Middle East. It was probably one of those centres where for the first time man cultivated different varieties of wheat and barley. Peas, lentils and vetch were also grown there, and flax was in cultivation three thousand years B.C. Fruit and nut gathering — olives, almonds, pistachios, figs and even grapes — preceded agriculture. Animals were also raised. The cow and the pig do not seem to have been domesticated here earlier than 3500 B.C., but sheep reared for mutton and not for wool, and the domesticated goat were known 4,000 years earlier. The dog had appeared already. Dogs were not eaten, but their close relatives, the wolf and the fox did not escape this fate.

Near Akr, in the village of Gonduk in Irak, in a cave, which the Christians of the neighbourhood call "Cave of St. John,"

"Guppa d'mar Johanna," there have been discovered statues carved in the rock dating perhaps from a time when the inhabitants were ignorant of agriculture, and when domestic animals were as yet rare. One recognizes a hunting scene, which is probably of magical import, and which according to Tewfik Wehbi resembles the pictures and carvings of the prehistoric caves in France. Moreover, throughout Kurdistan from the Aramar region to the spurs of Mount Judi (where it is thought Noah's Ark came to rest) are to be seen Cyclopean monuments, often attributed to giants or jinns, and ruins of fortresses dominating precipitous rocks, which testify to the antiquity of this habitat. Indications of the Akkadian civilization are to be seen at Kirkuk and at Yorgha Jepe (Nazu). It was on Mount Nisir, identified as Pira Magrun, that the ship of Gilgamesh probably stopped. The king of Akkad in 2000 B.C. set up a plaque to celebrate his victory over Satuni, king of the Lullu, at Derbend-i Gewr. These Lullu or Lullubi, inhabitants of Zagros, were probably ancestors of the Kurds, as also the Guti, dwellers in the mountains to the East of the Little Zab near the river Dyala. Already at this time Sargon of Agade was trying to defend himself against the incursions of these plunderers, whose bands were sometimes led by women. In turn, the Kassites, who had already encountered the sons of Hammurabi and had peacefully penetrated into Babylon by taking employment as horsemen and grooms were to arrive in force in the XVIIth century B.C. and to occupy the region known today as Luristan. They ruled Babylonia for six centuries. These invaders had the reputation of being exceptionally brave and strong. The horse which they introduced to the country had become for them a divine symbol; their chief god was Suryash, the sun. Their chiefs were related to the Mitanni whose daughters married the Pharaohs towards the year 450 B.C. There have been found in the tombs of bronzes of Luristan tripod vases that had probably been brought there by the Kassites. These Kassites, whom the kings of Elam finally eliminated in the XIIth century, must also have played their part in the formation of the



**Kurdish people**, for it is believed that they were a Median tribe. Soon the Assyrians were to appear on the scene through clashing with the Medes.

The Medes, who according to an Armenian writer Arshak Safrastian (*Kurds and Kurdistan 1948*), owe their existence simply to an error of Herodotus, appear for the first time in history on an inscription commemorating the victory of Salmanzar I over his rebel vassal Yangu, a Kassite prince of Hamri (today Kurdistan). Already Teglat Phalasar I towards 100 B.C. had fought against them. Later Shamsi-Adad forced them to pay tribute, while Adad-Hirani III, husband of the legendary Semiramis, conducted several campaigns against them. But it was Teglat-Phalasar IV, who in the VIIIth century (744) taking advantage of the dissensions among many of the tribes, overcame them, taking 60,000 prisoners and an enormous booty in flocks and herds. For he carried his invasion into the most remote recesses of the mountains and valleys and forced his captives to work on the peaceful enterprises of construction of the Assyrians. Fifteen years later, Sargon II, who built Khorsabad, seized Samaria and led its people into captivity to the banks of the Khabur, a tributary of the Euphrates and "in the country of the Medes" as the Bible tells us. It is interesting to note that up to quite lately there still existed in Irakian Kurdistan many Jewish villages. In turn, Asharhaddon subjugated the petty Median kings, who came to Nineveh to make an offering of precious stones and horses.

Of the incursions into Kurdistan territory, the Assyrians have left many traces, evidence of their power and influence. These are to be seen in the carvings and inscriptions of Maltaï, not far from Duhok; those of Batas, between Sheklawa and Rowanduz, and of Derbend-1 Ramkah on the Zab, the natural route between Nineveh and Persia. And there are many others.

But soon the Medes succeeded in throwing off the Persian yoke. While Sennacherib was engaged in organizing the provinces of Babylon under an able chieftain, the Manaïan (Manne'en) Deikokes or Dayaukku, the Medes, the highlanders of Zagros, who

up to that time had been only one of many barbarous mountain tribes leading a nomadic life or settling in miserable villages, succeeded in organizing themselves. According to Herodotus, this chieftain, whose sense of justice was proverbial, one fine day ceased to waste his time—as he said—in judging his tribute-payers to the neglect of his own affairs. The result of this was soon apparent. Again raids and brawls of all kinds broke out resulting in such chaos that the idea of choosing a king occurred to the Medes, and Deiokes was chosen. He began by surrounding himself with a corps of faithful guards and decided to build his capital at Hamadan. He reigned for fifty-three years and was succeeded by his son, Phraortes. The latter annexed the surrounding petty kingdoms and even defeated Teispes, king of Anshan or Persia, but he was halted by the resistance of the Assyrians under Assurbanipal. His tomb is probably no other than the legendary "Cave of the Youth and the Maiden" (*Ishkewt-i Kur-ûkeç*) near the village of Chornahk. Cyaxarus, his son, is one of those outstanding men, who appear from time to time in history, who are great leaders in war and excellent administrators in time of peace. Instead of levying his troops from tribes who fought each on its own, he decided to create a regular army on the model of the Assyrian. He provided his soldiers with a bow, a sword, and one or two javelins. But he paid special attention to his cavalry. His horsemen, like the Parthians later on, were specially drilled in archery and when, after a feigned flight, they let loose a hail of arrows on the enemy, these were thrown into confusion. This panic no doubt was due to the use of "Median fire," afterwards known as "Greek fire." According to Ammienus Marcellinus, the Medes smeared their arrows with a concoction of oil and naphtha. "An arrow so treated" — he says — "sets alight everything with which it comes in contact, provided that it is fired from a bow not too tightly strung, for a rapid flight deprives it of its efficacy. Water used in attempting to extinguish fires thus caused only adds fuel to the flame." Thus the petroleum of Kurdistan was already playing a part in the warfare of the period.

Mede was organized into three large provinces: Greater Mede, today Irak Ajami, Mede Atropatenus, modern Azerbaijan, and the Mede of Rhages, the district round the Teheran of today, where colonies of Jews settled, and where the angel Raphael was to lead the young Tobias.

Cyraxarus tried to take Nineveh, and the prophet Lahum, whose tomb is venerated at Alkosh, 32 miles away in the foot-hills of the mountains of Kurdistan, and who was an eye-witness of the attack, compares the attacking army to a cloud of locusts and to a blazing fire. But at this moment a horde of Scythians outflanked the Medes and forced Cyraxarus to raise the siege of Nineveh and to defend the territory to the north of Lake Ourmia, where he was defeated. However, he invited the king of the Scythians, Madyès, and his chief officers to a banquet. He made them drunk and then had them all massacred. This is a stragem frequently utilized. Meanwhile, Assurbanipal having died, Cyraxarus joined Nebopollassar, governor of Babylon and with his Median troops from the mountains destroyed Nineveh. The Assyrian empire had had its day. This memorable date is the first year of the Kurdish era, as the nationalists reckon today. Astyage, last independent king of the Medes, was in turn defeated by Cyrus the Great, his grandson, who made Hamadan or Ectbatana the capital of unified Iran. In fact with the victory of Cyrus "a new era opened for the Persian people whom destiny had united with the Medes" (Ghirshman).

Let us now summarize what we know of the Medes still quoting Ghirshman: "If we can assume that the political organization of the Median kingdom was rather like that of the Assyrians, on the other hand its material and intellectual culture is practically unknown to us. In the sphere of arts and crafts the Medes, like the Scythians, must have displayed their taste in finely embellished arms, finely tooled harnesses, vessels of precious metals and garments of coloured embroidery. The appearance of the common people can be determined from Assyrian bas-reliefs which show bearded men with moustaches, with skins worn loosely over

tightly fitting clothing and shod in high boots, leading horses to their Assyrian conquerors. From the knowledge gained from the treasure of Sakkez, an idea can be formed of their art, a knowledge to be supplemented in the future by fresh evidence provided by the borrowings made by the conquerors from a people possessing a civilization superior to their own. Of their great works of art only a few vestiges have survived, such as that huge but very much mutilated lion to be seen at Hamadan. There are also the rock tombs, one of which is near Sari-Pol on the western buttresses of the Zagros range, and others at Dukkan-Daoud like that of Fahrika to the south of Lake Ourmia — princely tombs, hollowed in the mountain sides, of which the first is adorned with a carving in relief of a religious character depicting a personage holding the *barsom*, the sheaf of branches used in religious ceremonies."

If we have thus expatiated on the Medes, it is because they are believed to be the most authentic ancestors of the Kurds.

### **Linguistic Evidence**

As regards the question of the origin of the Kurds we are confronted with two theories. There is Mr Minorsky who maintains their Iranian, that is to say Indo-European origin, and who believes that they moved in the XVIIth century B.C. from the neighbourhood of Lake Ourmia towards the Bohtan (Kenrites), and there is the thesis of the Soviet academician N.J. Marr who asserts the autochthonous character of the Kurds related to other Asiatic groups like the Chaldeans, Georgians and Armenians.

It is by basing his theory on linguistic and historical data that Mr Minorsky has decided to classify the Kurds with the Iranian peoples without taking account of the complexity of racial strains which they incorporate.

In the Vth century, Herodotus tells us, the 13th department of the Achemanian Empire included, beside the Armenians, a region, Patiuki which sounds like the Bohtan of today. To the East of this lay the country of the Carduks or Cardukhoi,

to whom Xenophon refers (400-41 B.C.) at the time of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand. Since then, a name of the same origin has been applied to the territory on the left bank of the Tigris, near Mount Judi. The classical authors refer to the same region as Gordyene; the Arameans call it Bêt-Qardu and the town Jezineh Gazarta of Qardu, while the Armenians speak of a country called Kordukh, rather limited in extent.

These Carduks, Xenophon tells us, recognized neither the authority of King Artaxerxes nor of the King of Armenia. But, according to Professor C. F. Lehmann-Haupt, the Carduks may be the ancestors, not of the Kurds, but of the Georgian-Kartuelians. Relationship with the Chaldeans and with the Khaldes of Urartu has also been suggested. But Urartu was a god and not a people. Furthermore neither the Georgians nor the Khaldes spoke an Indo-European language as do the Kurds today. But too much stress should not be laid on this, says Mr Marr, for the Kurds have changed their language.

The ancestry of the Kurds has also been claimed for the Kyrtoi or Kirtians, nomads of Atropatenus and first mentioned by Polybius in 220 B.C. as being slingers in the army of the governor of Mede, who fought against the Selucid Antiochus III. Thirty years afterwards they took service with this same Antiochus, and in 171, they became mercenaries of King Pergamus. Later Tigranus the Great, King of Armenia, took 35,000 Kurds prisoners "to lay out roads, build bridges, clear rivers, cut down forests and carry out other military works." The inhabitants of Gordenia did in fact enjoy the reputation of being excellent architects and military engineers.

Whatever etymology may claim, Mr Minorsky, just like Mr Marr, but reaching his conclusions from different data, attributes to the Medes a share in the formation of the Kurdish people. The Kurds are also known as *Kurmandji*, a word consisting of three elements: *Kurd-man* plus the final *j*. The first element is clear enough in itself; the third is a suffix denoting origin. As for the second *man*, it must be connected with the name Medes — Matai

or Mada. The Medes, moreover, were to a great extent intermixed with the Manneans or Mannai, who appeared in the area in the IXth century B.C.

At the time of the capture of Nineveh in 612, among the allies of the Medes were the hordes of Manda or Umman Manda, as the Assyrians were accustomed to call the Cimmerians and the Scythians. The philologists admit the probable identity of the following names: Manda, Medes, the Manneans and Mantianes of Strabo, the Mationes of Herodotus and the Martianes or Margianes of Ptolemy. Moreover after the encounter with the Kenrites or Bohtani, the Ten Thousand were attacked by a Persian detachment which included Mards and Armenians. The Mards were neighbours of the Kyrrians and must be descendants of the Manneans. To conclude with Mr Minorsky: "In the light of historical and geographical facts it is very probable that the Kurdish nation was formed by the amalgamation of two kindred tribes, the Mardoï and Kyrtoi who spoke two very closely related Median dialects. Moreover, it is certain that in their expansion towards the West the Kurds incorporated several indigenous strains."

I shall not stress Mr Marr's thesis according to which the Kurds are aboriginals from the mountainous regions of Asia Minor. Despite certain acute comparisons, his theories of language based on economic processes and the class struggle do not appear to me convincing and are not susceptible, in my opinion, of leading to the conclusions which he draws from them. However, he recognizes the close ties between Kurdish and Median, which in fact corroborates the theses of Mr Minorsky.

### **Anthropology**

If the origin of the Kurds, in spite of philological and historic arguments, is not completely cleared up, anthropology hardly provides more convincing evidence. Ariens Kappers (1931), who studied the Damascus Kurds, not without taking into account the admixture of other races, recognizes that they are a dis-

tinct race. Roughly speaking he combines the conclusions of Mr Houssaye (1887), who had studied the Kurds of Persia, with those of Mr Chantre who himself took physical measurements of the Kurds of Turkey and the department of Erivan. "The northern Kurd is a big slim man (obesity is absolutely unknown among the Kurds). The nose is long and often a little hooked, the mouth small and the face long and oval. The men have long moustaches, but the beard is always shaved. They have a resolute and penetrating mien. Many of them are blond with blue eyes. A Kurdish child of this type, placed among English children, would pass unnoticed because of the white skin. In the south the face is sometimes a little large, and the body heavier." This observation of Major Soane's (1912) leads one to assume that the Kurd is not a unique type. And, in fact, according to whether one is concerned with a Kurdish highlander, a man of the plains, a man of the settlements or a nomad, a person belonging to a purely Kurdish tribe or one related to the neighbouring races, one will find quite remarkable differences. There is the Arab type, the type of the Biblical Jew, the Nestorian, the Turcoman etc., as Mr Minorsky has already noted. The anthropological studies of Henry Field (1952) which deal with 598 Kurds of Irak, and especially with those of the districts of Zakho, Rowanduz, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah have led to the same conclusion but by more scientific methods. The Kurd is of medium height (5 feet 6) with the trunk relatively long and consequently the legs short. The forehead is broad and the head large and round. Brachycephalics prevail. The length of the face is average. A little less than a quarter of the persons examined were eurorrhine and the rest equally mesorrhine and leptorrhine. The nose of the leptorrhine type is quite often aquiline. The hair slightly waved and soft is usually of a deep brown, and the eyes are black. But blond hair and blue eyes are also to be found, especially in the western parts. The skin is lighter in colour than the Arabs' but not so fine in texture as that of the Assyrian. The teeth are regular and well set. The muscular system of those

who have been studied, is in general, like their health, good. By a careful study of the photographs of those examined, H. Field distinguished different ethnic groups — Armenoid, Balkanic, Mediterranean, Anatolian and Alpenoid.

But despite all these physical dissimilarities due to the many racial minglings over the centuries, the Kurds do exist as a distinctive people. If like many other peoples, not to say all, they are not a pure race, they undoubtedly form a distinct ethnic group and they have a keen and definite consciousness of their unique character.



## CHAPTER III

### Life among the Kurds

The fact is that the Kurds, in spite of the common traits which they share as a mountain people, differ according to their various economic groupings with the consequent differences of occupations and of dwellings, always, however, preserving the characteristics peculiar to their race and history.

#### Nomads and Residents

With the Kurds it is necessary to distinguish the nomads from the fixed dwellers — an important distinction, for the latter comprise the peasants and the townspeople.

The Kurdish nomads, *koçer*, have little resemblance to the Bedouin Arabs. They are highlanders and not people of the desert, and their principal means of livelihood, stock-rearing, is confined to goats, sheep and buffaloes, sometimes horses but rarely camels. They are most numerous on the high Turkish-Armenian plateau and in the upper reaches of the Kura i.e. the upper Araxe, the Murad Su, the Euphrates and in the basin of Lake Van, as also on the southern slopes of the Taurus range. The purely nomadic Kurds have almost completely disappeared today. They have in fact become semi-nomads, for nearly all of them have permanent dwellings in the plains or valleys which they return to in winter. The governments have been trying to reduce nomadism as far as possible, without always succeeding. In Irak, for example, there still remain some nomads from different tribes — the Bilbas in the liwa of Sulaymaniyah, the Herki in the liwa of Arbil and the Surchi in the liwa of Mosul. In Iran "for the greater part the tribes are only semi-nomadic. In certain cases they are residential, but in certain respects they still retain their tribal system. The migration of tribes with their flocks varies in character with distance and the extent to which the tribe as a whole participates in it. More often than not some members of the tribe remain behind in the *quishlâg* or winter quarters when the migration is to the *yaylâk* or summer pastures.

Sometimes also there are some permanent or semi-permanent residents in the summer quarters." (Lambton)

The fixed dwellers, *demani*, as their name suggests, may be former nomads who for reasons of economy, politics or health have stayed in the plains. These are called *Bamirî* or *Gamirî* i.e. "dead fathers," or "dead oxen" or yet "tired oxen." This explains why some tribes have a considerable number of their members in the mountains and others in the plains. With those also ought to be taken into account the aborigines or *rayet*, both Christians and Moslems, who probably were conquered by tribesmen or *asiret* in former times and are subject to taxation and forced labour. Mr Edmond says that in Irak they are called *miskên* or *gorani* in distinction from "Kurds" correctly styled, who are of tribal origin. To these old style peasants, ought to be added, if it is permissible, another category — the Kurdish collective farmers (kolkhosians) of the Soviet Union. Another category of residents are the townspeople, who have broken practically all ties with their original tribes and have settled down in little towns of which the number and importance have grown over fifty years.

### **The Kurdish Dwelling**

The nomads live in tents, *kon* or *re mal*. These are low and squat and are fastened to the ground by many short cords, thus showing a striking difference from the Arab tent. The fabric is comprised of long black strips of goat hair. The number of poles varies with the means of the head of the home. "In general," writes C.G. Feilberg, "the Kurdish tent has the following distinguishing characteristics: the ample roof of black goat-hair, which hangs down over the sides and gable ends; fillet-strings and struts seem to be entirely unknown; the peak bar is absent except with some eastern tribes; the roof is divided into several sections (at least in some cases) joined by means of loops and short rods." The inside arrangements are simple. Rugs and matting strew the floor; reed partitions, *çit*, separate the women's quarters from

the reception room reserved for the men; in the centre a depression is made for the fire to boil coffee. Some of the chiefs' tents are well provided with cushions and thick piled carpets and are comfortable and even luxurious.

The houses of the villagers, *xanî*, are very primitive. The simplest consist of a large room divided in half, one half for the animals, *yaxûr*, and the other for the people of the house. The building is usually surrounded by a walled courtyard. On one side a building of lighter construction serves as a storehouse for wood and household utensils, and a corner is used for cooking. The stores of grain are buried outside the house in pits in the ground which are then plastered over with clay and finally covered with earth and stones. In the plains the houses are built of unbaked bricks dried in the sun, which the women knead from clay and chopped straw. The floor is of beaten earth. The stove, *tendûr*, is usually in the middle of the room and is in the form of a large amphora sunk in the floor. It is the sacred symbol of the family. In winter it is covered by the *kursî*, a kind of covered wooden frame around which the whole family sit to chatter and even to sleep. Along the walls on each side of the door there is a sort of bank of beaten earth, *dikan*, covered with felt which is used as a bench for sitting. Ordinarily there are neither windows nor chimneys but simply two or three apertures high up on the wall. The ceiling, low and flat, and blackened by smoke from the fire, usually consists of unsquared beams of poplar wood. Over it is spread a layer of brushwood, sure haunt of snakes and scorpions. The whole is covered with a thick layer of mud. On these flat roofs a stone is always kept for tamping down the clay on wet days. Sometimes, but not often, the Kurds of the mountains live in caves which are arranged fairly comfortably. Sometimes the houses are built in tiers, the roof of one serving as the terrace for the one above. The walls of these are of cut stone. One of the features of Kurdish village houses is a verandah supported on columns and facing west. It need hardly be said that for the poor peasant the open air, especially by a stream, does duty for

sanitary arrangements.

In the towns, of course, buildings are more spacious and comfortable. Some houses even have a guest room upstairs. Those chiefs, who in the past lived in castle-fortresses built on mountain peaks from which they could overlook the surrounding country, now occupy in the town veritable palaces with modern furniture and luxurious carpets.

But in the villages furniture scarcely exists except for a few mattresses and cushions, while felt covers the floor. Often, however, a great wooden chest painted in gay colours contains changes of clothing and the wife's trousseau. Among the wealthy, especially in the towns, there are both carpets and furniture: iron bedsteads, sofas, tables and chairs, wardrobes and glass-fronted cupboards.

Household utensils are limited to essentials: a large tray of copper or wicker-work for carrying meals, one or two saucepans, a frying-pan, a ladle and skimmer, copper bowls, a few plates and dishes, a few jars and jugs, spoons and knives. Beside the fire there are tongs and a bellows and sometimes a samovar. A little distance away are the goatskin provision bags and the sieves and strainers. Light is provided by a paraffin lamp, often a storm lantern and sometimes a pressure lamp. In a corner lies a broom of twigs. In a very few towns there is electric light.

### **The Daily Tasks**

The nomads are stock-raisers, and a shepherd's life is the one preferred by the Kurds, for the shepherd free from all constraint feels himself lord of nature and of his own soul. Undoubtedly this life in the open air where he is encompassed by dangers makes for courage, if it does not contribute to intellectual development. "If you want to make a man of your son, make him a shepherd; but be sure to take him home in time before he becomes an animal." It is definitely to this simple, carefree existence that the Kurd owes his love of independence. There he knows no law but his own good pleasure. So we need not be sur-

prised at his innate abhorrence of discipline and of all encroachments on his liberty.

While the men, of course, are the experts in everything concerning the breeding of animals and sheep-shearing, it is the women who have all to do with the milking of sheep and cows and the production of butter and cheese. To make butter they first boil the milk in cauldrons, *kazan*, add to it a spoonful of curdled milk and leave it to sour until the following day. The curdled milk is next poured into goatskin bags, *mesk*, and hung from a tripod. Two women then proceed to churn it by agitating the bags. The butter is now washed and salted and packed. The residue of the butter, *dew*, is used to make white cheese. It is salted, flavoured with various aromatic herbs, and when it has quite solidified, it is put into cloth bags and compressed by weights. The whey is fed to the calves, while the cheese is well packed in skin bags. White cheese is the principal food of the Kurds. Cheese is also made by a less primitive method. The women pour into cauldrons the fresh unskimmed milk of the day. It is then boiled and curdled with placenta which has been thoroughly washed, dried and cut up into little rounds. The curdling process follows quickly and the milk coagulates in fifteen to twenty minutes. Then it is poured into little cloth bags, tied up and placed on a smooth stone slab. A large, heavy stone is used as a press. The pressed cheese emerges from the bags in the form of flattened discs which are then dried in the open air.

In the country the peasants till the fields and sow wheat, barley and rice. Ploughing is done with a primitive plough consisting of a ploughshare and a stilt made from a branch of a tree. This hardly penetrates the soil. The implement can be dismantled and carried over the shoulder. Sowing is carried out by broadcasting the grain. At harvest-time everyone joins in the task of reaping, lining up in straight rows and singing. A sickle is used, the fingers of the reaper being protected by metal finger-stalls. When the wheat has been cut and strewn over the threshing floor of beaten earth at the entrance to the village, it is threshed by

means of a thick wooden plank to the underside of which are fixed flints or thin slips of iron. This is drawn by an ox and an ass, and it is the delight of the children to go round and round for hours on end in the dust and sunshine on this improvised vehicle. The grain is then separated from the chaff with big wooden forks. In the house, the wheat is finally gathered into receptacles of pressed earth about 2 yards 8 inches high and 1 yard 4 inches in diameter. These large vessels are decorated with imprints of hands and designs in convolutions of baked clay, which it is said should ward off the evil eye. The straw, *ka*, chopped up and stored in heaps in the hayloft, *kadîn*, serves as forage for the livestock and is also used in the manufacture of bricks.

The Kurds are also excellent gardeners. In their mountains, like the mountain people of Lebanon, they make ingeniously contrived terraces with little containing walls, where they sow maize, millet and hemp, when the arable land is insufficient. Vegetables are various and plentiful. Fruit trees grow wild, but apples, pears, peaches, figs, apricots, mulberries and pomegranates are all carefully cultivated in magnificent orchards. The Kurd is an expert vine-grower and cultivates the vine for preference, harvesting excellent grapes of which I have noted a score of varieties. These, of course, are eaten fresh, but they are also dried to make raisins, a very good food for the winter; grape jam cakes are also made. Only the Christians make wine, using raisins for the purpose, from which they also distil aqua vita or arrack. Tobacco too is a profitable crop, and the cigarettes manufactured at Sulaymaniyah are in great demand. The gardens and rice-fields are watered by little irrigation canals flowing directly from the village well. In some places the water is raised from rivers by means of norias. Incidentally it may be noted that it was the Kurdish princes who introduced the cultivation of cotton to Syria in the Xth century.

In the mountains, the Kurd gathers gall-nuts which are exported for use in tanning. He also collects tragacanth and manna, *gezo*, a kind of natural nougat. Where the forests grow thick-

ly teams are organized to fell trees. The wood is then piled up in kilns to make charcoal, indispensable for foot-warmers and braziers, *manqal*, which are always in use.

To the towns remote from Kurdish centres many Kurds come to seek work. Such work will often mean laborious toil as navvies or porters. In Istanbul many of them become bricklayers or because of their trustworthiness find employment as concierges. In the small towns of Kurdistan the citizens will be traders. The little shopkeepers furnish the nomads and peasants with the common articles which they need. There are also wholesale traders, sheep-dealers, butter and cheese merchants, buyers of skins and wool, buyers of gall-nuts, who are suppliers of the large towns and the neighbouring countries. In Istanbul itself the cattle-dealers and butchers are Kurds. In Beirut there are a considerable number of Kurds who work in the vegetable and butchers' souks. Some, who are easy to recognize by their woollen caps, are costermongers and push their carts through many quarters of the city. There are also among them some shopkeepers. And let the porters not be forgotten, who can carry on their backs refrigerators and glass-fronted cupboards. The expression "strong as a Turk" applies exactly to the Kurds, of whom many, as we know live in Turkey.

In Irak today the Kurds have become very good workers on the Dokhân dam and in the petroleum installations of Kirkuk. It is from the Kurdish townsmen that are recruited the doctors and lawyers who are much more numerous than is generally supposed. Many officers of great ability have come from Sulaymaniyah and elsewhere in Kurdistan. Thus Kurds who have occupied high posts in the army and the administration, or who have held ministerial portfolios have always been distinguished by their intelligence, efficiency and honesty. It is interesting to note that in Turkey many journalists of distinction are of Kurdish origin.

The life of the Kurds of Armenia deserves to be treated apart. The majority of them were originally Yézidis. Before the

1914 war those who had ceased to be shepherds became common labourers, porters or scavengers in Tiflis and Erivan. In fact they were in the lowest category of manual workers. Today they are all settled as members of collective farms, kolkhoz. In a work published in 1957, a former porter extols the progress realized and the new ways of life. It cannot be denied that improvements of all kinds have been made, whether it be in housing or in the system of daily life. There are no more underground dwellings, but houses of handsome stone lighted by Ilitch lamps. Furniture has also been transformed. The peasant no longer sleeps on rags or rotting felt but on carpets of piled wool, with woollen bedspreads and mattresses covered with shawls and drugget. In the Kurdish home of today one finds a radio, nickel-plated bedsteads, chests of drawers and a clock. But property is owned collectively. Instead of the plough and farm-cart of former days, the plains of the collective farm are now cultivated with the aid of the tractor and the combine harvester. Thus the whole manner of life has been completely transformed by the collectivisation of agriculture and stock-raising. There is cited, as an example, the model village of Ralkis in Soviet Armenia where is established the co-operative farm Kirov, founded in 1929, which consists of some hundred houses with 350 inhabitants, 30 of whom are Party members. In the village there is a creamery for processing milk and yoghurt, a club, a secondary school, four public libraries and a hospital of 15 beds with 2 doctors, one of whom is a Kurd. The farm has 1,500 sheep, 400 cows and covers an area of 600 hectares of which 500 are for crops and 100 for pasture. There are 3 tractors, 2 harvesters and 3 trucks. Here we are, as can be seen, a long way from the material and social conditions in which the Kurds used to live.

It may be said of the Kurdish woman that she is on her feet from 5 in the morning until 11 at night. All the heavy work of the house inevitably falls on her. In addition to milking the sheep, making butter and cheese (as we have already noted), she is responsible for baking the bread. The dough is made of flour, water



and salt and is without leaven. It is kneaded on a flat stone and then rolled out with a wooden rolling-pin, placed on a sort of cushion and stuck on to the inner side of a jar-shaped oven or on a convex plate of sheet-iron, *sac*, if wafer-thin bread is desired. When the bread is baked it is kept in a large round basket. To the woman also falls the drudgery of fetching water from the village well, sometimes half-an-hour's walk distant. Then there is the task of obtaining fuel which consists of gathering dead branches or kneading cow-dung cakes, which are afterwards stuck on the walls of houses to dry in the sun. Naturally cooking is the woman's province. The staple dish is rice for the rich and crushed wheat, *savar*, for the rest. There are also vegetables, egg-plants and tomatoes in season, and sometimes for a guest highly odorous mutton cooked on skewers. In addition there is fruit, especially grapes, but also melons cut up in small pieces. For drink there is, of course, water, but often plenty of highly sweetened tea. Then there is yoghourt, *mast*, but especially whey, *dew*, which is very refreshing.

### Arts and Crafts

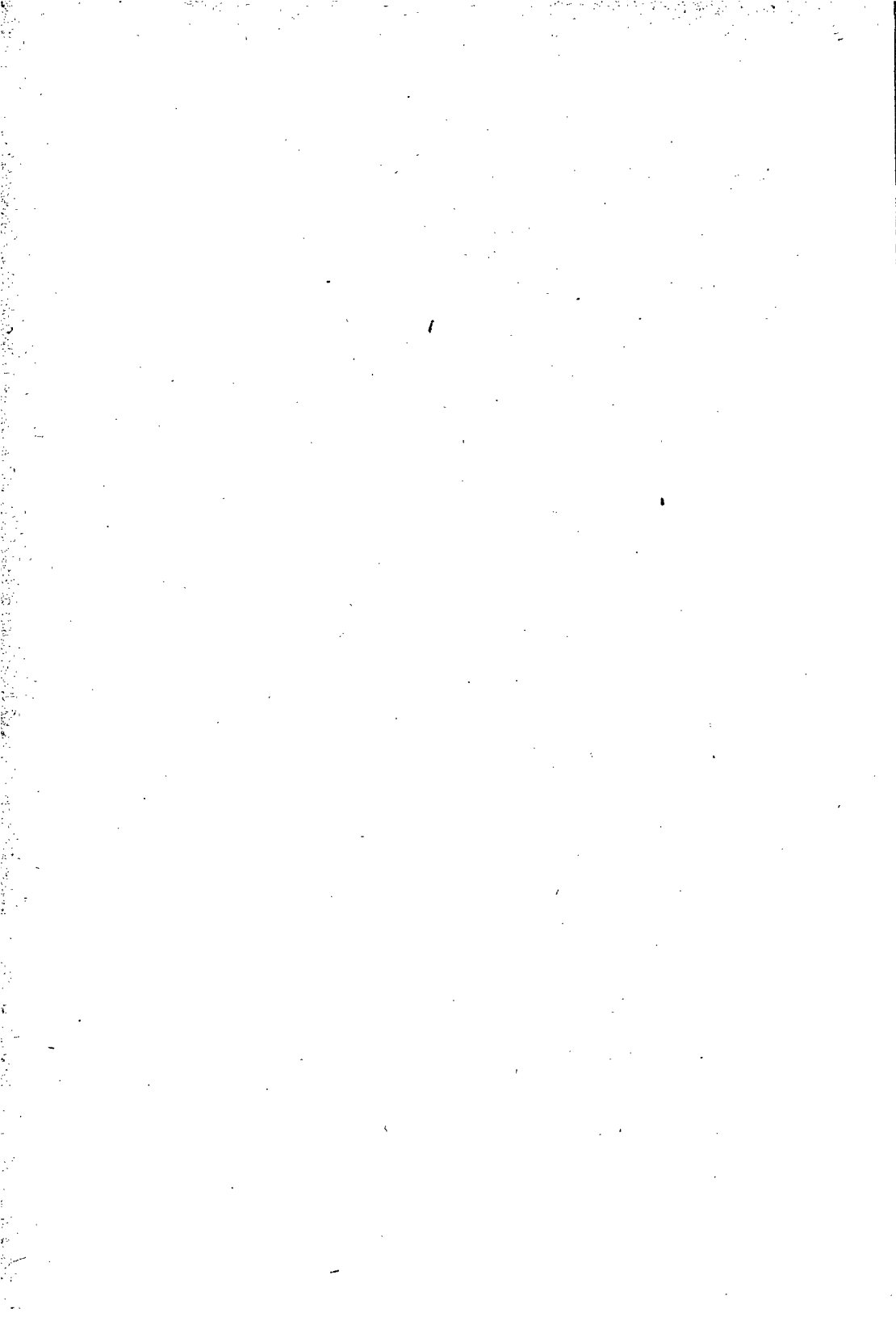
To some extent in all parts of Kurdistan the women spin as they go about here and there. As soon as all other work is finished, the spindle begins to turn in their skilful hands. Some of them also weave on the loom. There exist two types of loom. One is vertical, after the manner of Penelope, and is to be found in the provision storeroom. It consists of two uprights, *keleke*, about one and three quarters yards apart. Two cross-bars or cylinders are fixed, the one, *serdar*, at the top, the other, *jêrdar*, at the bottom. The warp, *po*, is fixed to these two bars which are 3 yards apart. The warping of the thread has already been done by the women outside in the yard. In this system there is no shuttle to interlace the threads with the woof, only a long simple needle. The woof is carded with an iron comb, *kelkit*, attached to the end of a wooden handle. This model is used for making bedspreads in which the warp is wool and weft goat-hair.

The horizontal loom is of the pedal variety and rests on the ground, the legs of the weaver being suspended in a cavity dug in the soil. This appears to be more complicated than the other type. Combs, *sene*, of different qualities of fineness are used. The woof is introduced into the warp by means of a shuttle, *meko*, which has an iron bobbin, *lûle*, on which the woollen thread is wound. With this loom sackcloth, *kerara*, can be woven as well as thicker materials for clothing, the thread in this case being first sprinkled with a solution of lime. The designs are varied and colours singularly fresh and bright. Among the motifs of decoration, animals and trees, more or less stylized, figure largely. Trees and spiders frequently appear. Prayer rugs, *secade*, from Sinna in Persia are famous.

Some specialists, with a view to sale, make unglazed vases from clay. In like manner bottle-shaped jars are moulded with clay spirals and without the aid of the potter's wheel. These are first dried in the sun, and then a dozen are arranged in a circle and covered with briquettes of dried cow-dung. The baking takes three hours.

If in the past, through force of circumstances, crafts were in the hands of the Jews and Armenians, this is no longer the case today since the Armenians have disappeared from Turkish Kurdistan, and the Jews had to leave Irak after 1948. The Kurds therefore since then have been themselves making the felt fabrics which are used not only as coverings for the floor but also in the manufacture of waistcoats and the skull-caps worn beneath the turban. Neither are the Kurds ignorant of the arts of working in leather, metals and wood. They have excellent saddlers and gold and silversmiths skilful in the art of chasing dagger-hilts and belt-buckles. They also make goblets and nargiles. It should be remembered that inlaying on copper is an ancient Kurdish technique, which was brought to Europe by craftsmen from the East. In Venice there were special workshops for this and on some pieces made there in the XVth century can be seen the signature of a certain "Muhammed the Kurd." It is not so long ago that

from Sulaymaniyah alone more than 150 expert armourers were able to supply the tribes on both sides of the border with Martini rifles. Some employ the slack times of winter in moulding from a special clay pipe-bowls and cigarette holders, while others hollow out the stems of the wild cherry tree or carve wooden spoons.



## CHAPTER IV

# The Social System

The Kurds that we have seen living as graziers in the mountain pastures, the peasants resolutely bending to their tasks, the skilled workmen in the cities — all have a tendency to band together through certain affinities of which the most obvious seems to be a common tribal origin. This age-old form of social organization of nomads and semi-nomads is tending today to disintegrate, either because of the pressure exerted by certain governments as in Turkey and the Soviet Union, or quite simply owing to the unavoidable changes brought about by the conditions of modern life. Many developments of today can only be understood within this context. The recent Kurdish insurrection is an impressive case in point.

### The Kurdish Tribe

It is extremely difficult to enumerate all the Kurdish tribes. We shall, however, indicate those who have played some rôle, and who still retain a certain renown. In Irak there are the Pijden, the Ako, the Khoshnaw, the Hamawend, the Herki, the Libani; in Persia the Shikak, the Bilbas, the Mukri, the Ardalan, the Jaf, the Kilhur (not to speak of the Lur and the Bakhtiyani who by some are not considered to be genuine Kurds); in Turkey the Hakkari, the Hartushe, the Zirikan, the Jabali, the Heyderan; in Syria the Barazi, the Milli, the Miran, the Dakuri, the Haverkan, the Mersini, the Kikan. The Babans of Irak and the Bedir-khan of Turkey are not, properly speaking, tribes. They are rather princely families who rule over several tribes in the same area. The famous Barzani no longer form a tribe, but are composed of different tribes who acknowledge the religious and political authority of the sheiks of Barzan on the great Zab.

Mountain tribes in general, and the Kurdish tribes in particular are distinguished by three main characteristics. Their world is a small one orientated inwards and thus it forms a defensive structure. The institution of the tribe is largely based on

tradition and is, therefore, conservative. In short, such a community will have a strong consciousness of its superiority over all the surrounding tribes. This esprit de corps and pride in the tribe is undoubtedly a source of strength, but it is also, as may be imagined, a fruitful cause of misunderstandings and clashes with neighbouring peoples, or with the authorities of central governments. Some have tried to represent the Kurdish tribe as an extension of the family somewhat as the Bible refers to the tribes of Israel. Perhaps this is usually the case with the Arabs where ties of relationship, *naseb*, are in a manner, the backbone of the tribe, while with the Kurds it is rather the soil. Moreover, in Kurdistan it has been possible in the rural population to distinguish three different types of social and economic organization: 1) The classical tribe of tradition under an *agha*, the members claiming a common origin but divided into sections, *tira*; 2) a tribe under a 'feudal' chief of a different descent as in the case of the Dizai, Khoshnaw and Jaf; 3) the religious chiefs whose temporal power is combined with religious authority such as the sheiks Barzinja in Sulaymaniyah and the sheiks of Barzan or Shemsdin.

However, be that as it may the tribe, *asîret*, includes several divisions, *bir*, made up of various clans, *bavik*, settled in the same place and themselves composed in turn of a number of homes or families, *mal*. Each clan is headed by the *mezîn* (great) or the *makûl* (wise) who is advised by one or two *rêspî* (white-beards). The chief of the tribe, who formerly bore the title of *Beg* or *Khan* is today called *Agha*, a title which goes back, at the latest, to the XVIIth century. It is known, however, that such a tribe can break up following a disastrous event like a battle, an epidemic etc. while others may grow stronger thanks to the prestige of a chief whose rôle, as has been seen, is important. Moreover, along with the stable and permanent elements there is often in a tribe a floating population composed of outsiders who have come to join a community in which they may recover a lost tribal attachment. This would be, for example, the case of a murderer

banished from his own tribe and pursued by a vendetta. Isolated, he is in danger of losing his life for there is no one to protect him. It has already been pointed out in the previous chapter that among the Kurds everyone is not on an equal footing. There are, just as among the Assyrians, both the tribesmen who call themselves free, *asîret*, and those others, *rayet*, who are rather like the serfs of the Middle Ages. These take no part in tribal warfare and are simply used to work for their masters' profit. Observers have also established that there are other subdivisions in the tribe — the nobles, *torin*, with their families of chiefs or *aghas*, the *rayet* or plebians who do the work, the armed servants of the chief whose function is particularly exacting and finally the religious leaders, the sheiks or mullahs, who as will be seen, are a frequent cause of struggles for power within the tribe.

#### **The Tribal Chief: his prerogatives and his rivals**

Whether it is a question of a federation of tribes such as one finds in the course of history, or of an autonomous tribe properly speaking, at the head of each of these groupings is to be found a chief whose authority is usually unquestioned.

#### **Origins of the Chief**

The means by which a chief acquires power differ according to circumstances. They vary from tribe to tribe and according to a particular period. Succession can be determined by inheritance, by election by the tribe or by the peers of the chief, by government nomination or very often by the strong arm. But succession by primogeniture plays the major rôle. On the death of his father the eldest son succeeds him. But the eldest might be incompetent or without influence. In such a case where the heir presumptive is considered unworthy of the position, an assembly of the principal men of the tribe is convoked. If, after deliberation, the chief is considered unsuitable, a pair of shoes is placed before him, and the assembly waits until he puts them on and leaves the room. This is considered to be the sign that he accepts the transference of the succession to another candi-

date, but his land and property remain his own. It can also happen that an eldest son does not wish to take his father's place but prefers the religious life to the responsibility of ruling a tribe. It is not altogether uncommon to see a younger son wishing to supplant his brother. This was the case of the great Bedir-Khan who found his elder brother too pious. But if the other refuses to renounce his claim, it is easy in Kurdistan to cause him to disappear. This is what obliges a new chief always to live on a war footing surrounded by body-guards for fear of assassination by the ousted elder brother. Political assassination of the successor is common among the Yézidis. But if the new chief can make himself respected and liked, he is forgiven the methods he has used to seize power. Neither is it rare for a son who deems himself defrauded of his heritage to depart and with his partisans found a new clan elsewhere. Women also have been known, on the death of a husband, to take over the command of the tribe even on the battlefield.

*Election*, a choice made by the chiefs of different clans has been known in cases where the heir has not got the sympathy of the majority. The most popular candidate and also the one esteemed to be the most prudent is then selected. But it can happen that a choice is due to luck. Indeed, if a bird should alight on a candidate's head, he is considered to be God's own choice. In folklore there are recounted many instances of this kind, more or less authentic. When a chief attains power by government nomination, as has occurred sometimes with the Turks and Persians, it is necessary that the new chief be chosen from the family of a hereditary chief. Otherwise to command obedience and respect he must surround himself with gendarmes.

### **Privileges and Prerogatives of a Chief**

In feudal times the functions of a chief depended on whether he was a vassal of the government or a representative of the tribe and its traditions. As a vassal he had to levy troops, a few men equipped at his own expense if his fief was *timar* (poor), but in



time of war a much larger contingent if his fief was *ziamet* (wealthy) i.e. if its revenue exceeded 20,000 aspres. On the other hand if the Sultan (as the government) appointed the collector of the poll-tax, *tahsildar*, it was the prerogative of the Khan to nominate the collector of customs dues or tolls, *bacdar*. As chief of the tribe he administered justice and rendered to it certain services of protection and assistance. On him devolved the duty of providing board and lodging for passing guests. In return for all this he had the honour and rather burdensome expense.

But now that modern governments have been established to some extent everywhere, it follows that the functions and powers of the chief have been considerably reduced. Today when military service is compulsory the chief no longer has to enlist recruits. This in any case would be regarded with great disfavour, for the Kurd, who loves fighting, does not necessarily like military service. If he is to be a soldier he wishes to be one freely, he volunteers. He hates to be enlisted against his will and cases of insubordination and desertion are frequent.

Until recent years the exactions of the Turkish government were many and onerous, as is told us by the Kurdish-Soviet writer Ereb Chamo, a shepherd before the 1914 war, in recalling his youth. These were: *xerc*, fiscal dues; *qepç'ûr*, dues on livestock; *olan*, public forced labour; *bêgar*, other forced labour; *serê pez* and *serê dêwêrê*, a tax per head on livestock great and small; and above all, *dis kîrasi*, the cost of entertaining functionaries or soldiers passing through, who had to be lodged and fed at the expense of the village. This Turkish system of living on the inhabitants is still in force in those parts of Irak where disturbances are boiling up.

But if, in principle, it is no longer the tribal chiefs who are responsible for collecting dues, this does not mean that the tribesmen and villagers are exempt from certain dues, which they still today have to pay to their *aghas* or landlords, who do not scruple to squeeze money out of their people on the pretext of services rendered to them. These charges bear the general name

of *axatî* or *agha's* dues. The main contribution comes from the *zekat*, a tithe levied on wheat and barley. A further sum is provided by the *meran*, a claim on one in every fifty sheep or the equivalent in cash. Then there is the *pûsan* or grazing tax, and the many payments in kind on the greater part of farm produce, for example, the *rûnan* on butter, the *hêlkan* on eggs, the *hir-meyan* on pears, etc., not to speak of the *micêwer*, a contribution to the wages of the *agha's* domestic staff. To this may be added the *sûran*, a marriage tax, and the *pîtek*, a contribution to the wedding expenses of a relative of the *agha* or the cost of ceremonial occasions. To crown all, there are the different forced services, *bêgar* or *herewez* i.e. two or three days of compulsory work at the ploughing, *herewezê cot*, the harvest and the threshing, *herewezê dirû û gêre* as well as the forage and wood "Corvées," *herewezê gila û dar*.

Such are the contributions still exacted in southern or Iraqi Kurdistan as noted by C. J. Edmonds. It was the same in Turkey until the drastic suppression of the tribal system. The Agha of Jeliyan, for example, made money out of everything. In spring every village owed him the *do anî* of one or two sheep according to its relative wealth, and in autumn *kêsim* a load or two of grape jam, of rice and of wheat. On the occasion of festivals, the gifts, *êdani*, also consisted of products of the harvest and of the flocks. The *agha* also reserved for himself the right of letting land, refused to the people. For each lot, *tof*, of farm woodland consisting of from 300 to 500 poplars he received payment, *spîndarî*, up to five *mecîdî*. When the government agents came to assess and collect the tax on livestock the *agha* helped to conceal the exact number of animals, but in return the peasants paid him the *dûvikê gemcûrê* in acknowledgment of his good offices. Merchants in transit were also taxed on each sheep, on each load of butter and on each fleece sold. Likewise passing nomads were required to pay a sheep-fold due. Mahmud Beg, son of the famous Ibrahim Pasha of the Milli, taxed his subjects on the sales of their produce. Up to 1934 he still used to demand

10 piastres for every lamb sold, 5 for a fleece, and 5 piastres per *oka* of butter, 7 *mecîdî* for a camel.

These taxes in the interest of the chief were therefore a very heavy burden. They were often payable in kind but not always as has been seen. To these taxes and to the indirect contributions to the *aghas* must be added the dues of the religious chiefs. The village mullah sees to it that he is not forgotten at harvest and feast times, and the itinerant dervishes, *muftxwar*, or parasites also want their slice of the cake. But what the tribesman is not required to pay as a due to his *agha* he takes to him as a present, *bahsîs* or *pêshês* on the occasion of a celebration, a marriage or a visit when one never goes empty-handed.

The only function which still attaches to a chief, if not officially at least by tradition, is perhaps that of justice, if even that! Instead of appearing before the tribunal of government judges, *hakim*, or even the ecclesiastical judges, *qadi* or *qazi*, the Kurd prefers to come to a friendly arrangement before the chief of the tribe in accordance with the law of custom, *irf*. Naturally this service is not free, far from it. For every trial, *dawa*, there is a fee to pay, *heqê qazîtîyê*, and in addition the fines, *cerime* or *dirav*, varying between a few dirhem to ten dinars for offences committed or for settling disputes. Fines are imposed for theft, *dizî*, for murder, *kutsi* and for assault and battery, *brindar*. Mahmud Beg, already mentioned, had a complete tariff: for a murder 10 gold pounds, and in the case of a notable even up to 50. For the abduction of a woman, 10 gold pounds were paid by the ravisher and the same by the father of the girl. In the case of theft of livestock the equivalent must be restored to the owner and four heads of livestock to the chief, but he gets only two if the theft is of fowls. In the XIXth century some chiefs displayed such severity in the suppression of theft in their territories that crimes of the kind ceased to be committed. Thus it was with Mir Kor of Rowanduz and Prince Bedir-Khan of Jezireh.

Murder is judged according to the principle of vengeance, *tola*. The relatives of the victim have the right to avenge them-

selves on the murderer, who at the same time is banished from his tribe for a period of five years or more. If during this time the claimants kill him, the affair is ended; if not, on the expiry of the term of banishment the murderer can return to his tribe following a favourable decision of the elders confirmed by the chief. But the right of vengeance is still valid. An agreement can be reached as to blood price, the payment of which has the virtue of arresting the flow of blood, for it is believed that the blood will continue to run until it has been avenged. But this friendly arrangement does not find much favour with the Kurds, who prefer a bullet or a dagger thrust. Nevertheless, if the culprit presents himself to the claimant with his shroud and his sabre, that is to say he throws himself upon the claimant's mercy, a settlement cannot be refused.

#### **Rivals of the Chief and his adherents**

The power of the chief today is certainly in decline; his authority can be questioned and it is sometimes openly defied, often by rivals who have no tribal feeling. Such rivals are as a matter of course prominent citizens and landed proprietors. They own villages and farms and so act as judges of the tribes, arbitrators and go-betweens with the governments as well as being investors and money-lenders. They usually live in the towns. So it is from them that assistance is sought rather than from the natural tribal chief, who is often a poorer and a probably less educated man. In Irak some chiefs have succeeded in securing for themselves as family property the hereditary pasture-lands of the tribe, and this to such effect that they have themselves become landed proprietors. In such a case, the tribal chiefs, just like some princely families in Iran, having become large owners of property, are closely connected with the bourgeoisie and like them participate in commercial enterprises.

If the landed proprietors, in a certain sense, counterbalance the moral authority of the tribal chief, they do not for all that do anything to alleviate the poverty of the peasant. He indeed,

already weighed down by the exactions of his *agha*, now has to suffer in like measure those of the lord of the soil. In any case the *agha* gains both ways when he takes over the land, both arable and pasture, and whatever happens the small farmer comes to the end of his year empty-handed and saddled with debts. In fact the landowner takes from the Kurdish peasant (who incidentally is better off than the Arab fellah) half of the summer harvest of tobacco and cotton, and one tenth of the winter crops of wheat and barley. Add to that the taxes due to the bailiff, *serkal*, 7½%; to the government 10%; and other small sums which from time to time fall due to the domestic entourage of the proprietor. It is understandable that under such a régime peasant uprisings are frequent and that there are mass migrations of serfs whose resources scarcely reach the figure of \$1 to \$2 per month.

In the Kurdish parts of Turkey extensive landed estates are still the rule. In Iran, it is in Kurdistan that the Shah has initiated the distribution of his personal and Crown lands to the peasants. In Irak the law of agrarian reform promulgated by Kassem has hardly been applied at all because the large feudal landowners tried to turn it to their advantage. At the time of the Kurdish insurrection in Irak (1961-1964) the Kurdish Democratic Party wanted to carry out confiscation and redistribution of land, but it was difficult to wage a frontal war and at the same time carry out social reforms desired by some and opposed by others. As far as this aspect of the Kurdish problem is concerned nothing has been settled and its fate is in suspense. All the more interesting therefore, is it to notice the original initiative of a Kurd of Syria, a big landed proprietor, Hussein Ibish. After the Second World War and before any ideas of agrarian reforms had begun to concern governments, he dried out and drained 24,000 hectares of marshes of the Wadi Awaj, which he had bought cheaply, at Hyaneh some 19 miles from Damascus. He laid out this property with a view to both dry and irrigated tillage; settled on it 6,000 families and handed over, in due form

to the peasants nearly two thirds of the land. All profits were reinvested in the enterprise.

A second rival to the chief, especially among the nomads, is the *oba-basi* who centralizes small flocks corresponding to 20 to 25 tents or organizes them to form a huge flock of several thousand head. The *oba-basi* hires shepherds on wages, chooses the pastures and organizes the seasonal migration of flocks. Each owner pays according to the size of his flock. The organizer does not pay anything and moreover has the right to certain services: his effects are transported and his tent is pitched and struck. This system of economic exploitation, particularly called attention to by Soviet authors of Turkish origin, reduces the political power of the tribal chiefs.

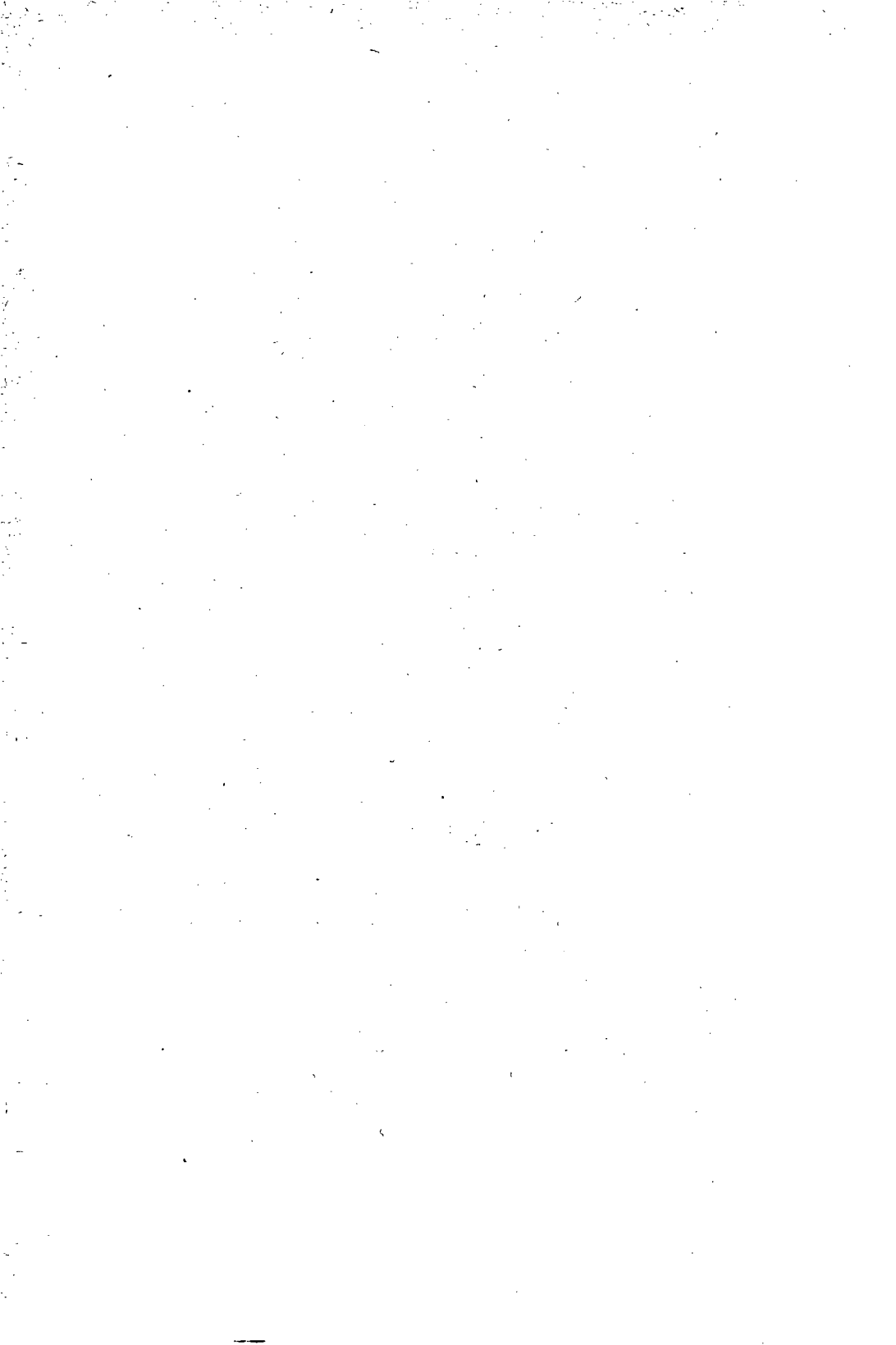
Lastly the religious heads, especially those who belong to a confraternity, often succeed in eclipsing the authority of the chief of the tribe. The latter is not happy to see a personage settling down in his tribe or village who will be a source of embarrassment to him, for under cover of religion the sheik will not be long in arrogating to himself a political rôle which is not always for the general good. We shall have occasion to return to the question of the influence of these religious leaders among the Kurds.

### **Decline of the Tribal State**

If there are still in existence tribes with their chiefs officially recognized and even appointed by the Iraqi and Iranian governments, this is by no means the case in Turkey and Soviet Armenia where all tribal authority has been suppressed, often in a brutal manner. With the Soviets there is no doubt of this. Avdal, already cited, is enthusiastic about this. Many things of the past, he writes, have been abolished. Henceforth there are no more slaves of sheiks and of the *pîr*, nor servants of *aghas* and *begs*. But who knows but servitude may have taken other forms? But all the chiefs have not been hanged, and certainly their sons and grandsons are very much alive. There is still to be found

among the people of some regions a certain respect for the old noble families. Their prestige is admitted even by Soviet authors, like Mr Kotlov and Mr Viltchevsky. But is there any regret for the passing of the ancient authority? This is not so certain, if I am to believe a progressive young Kurd who told me in the summer of 1958: "It is, of course, obvious that the tribes have lost their inner solidarity, but the chiefs have been trying to regain their influence, not on the grounds of feudal traditions, but through new services rendered to the community in the social field. The sons of former chiefs have become lawyers and doctors and thus make themselves of use to their old dependents. And these, moreover, do not forget them when it comes to parliamentary elections, for example. Thus a new aristocracy more congenial to modern ideas is in course of formation." On the other hand, an uprooted Kurd of Beirut gave me clearly to understand that all obligations to the *agha* of the tribe belonged to ancient history, and that if a chief wanted something he had only to work for it like anybody else! And so evolution is in progress and it seems obvious that it is not going to be arrested.

In the Arab countries of Irak and Syria the process of centralization is contributing to the diminution of the prestige and authority of the chiefs. It is civil functionaries who are responsible for dispensing justice and collecting taxes. The programme of agrarian reform which has been announced and is being sketched out will hasten this social transformation. It seems that it is in Iran that tribal ties are still close. But there also, with the settlement of the nomads and the centralization of the administration, it is plain to see that the disappearance of all tribal organization is only a matter of time.





## CHAPTER V

### The Family

Whether he lives with a tribe or is entirely divorced from it, whether he is a nomadic shepherd living in a tent in the mountains or settled in one place, whether he is established as a shop-keeper or farmer in a village, an artisan in the town or a skilled workman on a dam or in a petroleum plant, the Kurd never lives alone. He always has his wife and children. Does the family pattern of the highland Kurd bear any resemblance to that of the Bedouin? May it be compared with the family system of a peasant, a Christian town-dweller or that of the neighbouring Assyrians or Armenians? Let us enter a Kurdish home where we will be agreeably surprised.

#### **In Kurdistan there is no Trifling with Love**

The Kurdish family assumes a religious character which transcends its social and economic functions, and this quality, without any doubt, has its influence on young people even before marriage.

First of all, the Kurds all marry, and a celibate is hardly to be found in Kurdistan, not only because of the proverb which says "A single man grows weak, a single woman gets hot," but because society is thus constituted, having no place for spinsters. Hardened bachelors would be regarded most unfavourably. The Kurds also marry very young; the boys do not all wait until their twentieth year, and a wife of twelve years of age is not uncommon. At that age the girl is already an accomplished housekeeper and well acquainted with the duties which she will assume. Today, however, there is a tendency to delay the age of marriage, especially in the towns, and more particularly in the case of young people who are engaged in studies; and there the civil law imposes age limits.

Early marriage is undoubtedly one of the reasons that prostitution is unknown among the Kurds, who are unable to mention it without borrowing the Turkish word for it. There are no brothels in the little Kurdish towns of Iran and Irak. I remember that twenty years ago in a Kurdish village of Syria when

a detachment of light cavalry from the Levant was stationed there, the military house of call was patronized only by Turkish officials from the other side of the near-by frontier. Neither does Lesbianism exist, nor in general pederasty, although the word *hetwibaz* is not unknown in Sulaymaniyah where, however, it is used as a term of contempt for the Arabs.

The Kurds, being in the main Moslems, have a religious sanction for polygamy. In former times, and with political considerations in view, the chiefs used to marry several wives and had numerous children. Today things have changed. Polygamy is tending more and more to die out. It exists still in uneducated urban communities, but there are never more than two wives. Monogamy prevails in peasant communities, and the average of bigamous unions is not more than 2%. The common people thus avoid the worry of complicated establishments, and they recall the proverb "He who marries two women becomes a doorkeeper." Monogamy is also the rule in the educated classes of the city, but here it is due to the influence of western culture on young people. On the other hand, remarriage following divorce is common among the village aristocracy. And there is cited the example of the Sheik of Sadala in Irak who, during his long life, was married nineteen times. Divorce, too, is comparatively infrequent. The grounds for it are usually the sterility of the woman or her inability to produce male children. Generally, a man who wishes to repudiate his wife is an object of ridicule. But if he rejects her following the pronouncement of the triple formula, *teleq*, he must pay the arrears of the dowry, which amounts on an average to a half or a third. Among the Kurds of the Kurd Dagh he would pay a ridiculously small sum. But in any case, the children are placed in the custody of the father. Separation by mutual consent is also uncommon. A rejected wife, especially if the reasons are serious, rarely manages to re-marry. Besides, does not the song say:

"The beautiful women by wicked men  
May not be deserted but slain" ?

Needless to say, "free love" is unthinkable in Kurdistan. It is not unheard of for a Kurd to take a mistress, but this will be abroad in Europe or America, where he is a student. But it would never occur to the young man to take the woman back with him to his country. Some prefer a straightforward marriage. As for adultery, it may be said to be non-existent. The woman knows very well the fate that awaits her if her crime is discovered. She will die by the hand of her brother or a near relation, jealous for the honour of the family. The same would be the fate of a single girl who let herself be drawn into a guilty union. In such circumstances the courts are often lenient with the murderers. But this restraint imposed by custom would not suffice to keep youth in the right path if a robust moral health did not also exist.

#### **Preparations for Marriage and the Betrothal**

The Kurd is usually a good husband and father, but family happiness requires the choice of a good partner, for the business is serious. Considerations other than attractiveness and beauty must therefore be taken into account. "Don't look at the woman, look at her relatives." "Inspect her mother's brother, then lead the girl home." The best choice in fact will often be a cousin, seeing that a girl's cousin has a prior right to her, even if the dowry he proposes is less than that offered by other suitors. The right of a cousin of blood descent from a common forefather is such that a potential fiancé has to pay him a certain sum as compensation if he renounces it. If not, the abduction of the girl may be expected, especially if she is willing. In the case of abduction, the fugitives place themselves under the protection of a chief powerful enough to appease the parents and arrange matters. In any event, so long as the question is undecided, the young man respects the girl. This is a matter of honour. If the girl, however, lets herself be persuaded to marry the outsider, the ousted cousin will not hesitate to murder his rival, or even both parties. Be all that as it may, the proverb says: "Who takes a woman ought

to have either a bag of gold or a sack of lies," and also: "You can't marry a princess with a cowherd's dowry."

In the country young people often meet at the well or in the course of their work in the fields, and among the nomads, at times of seasonal festivities with the accompanying dances. Intentions are always honourable; virtue must not be confused with prudishness. This is something that the Kurdish girls know full well, as they sing their lovesongs while spinning, while coming down the mountain side from their summer abodes, when milking the sheep, when weaving their many-coloured carpets. Their songs voice feelings that exist wherever hearts can love and sing, but the images and the comparisons with which they express them have a marked local colour and a special quality of their own. They are well aware of their charms, these coquettes, and they do not hesitate to tell them over. They boast of their blond curls, of their pretty dark eyes like the gazelle's, and of their gait like the wild duck or the partridge of the desert. But like Heftsade of the poem, who wishes to caparison her cousin's horse, they would freely sacrifice their jewels for love of their swains:

"From my ear-rings I'll make his shoes  
For nails I'll hack my bracelets into pieces small  
From my plaits I'll make girth straps  
And of my locks his reins."

Roguish and coaxing, occasionally spiteful, the Kurdish girl has all the charms to turn a young man's head. "Behind every blonde head there is a red moustache" and here as everywhere else "The girls are pilgrims' shrines."

With the rich, and in the towns meetings of the young people are not so easy. Also a certain modesty restrains the young man from showing too openly his desire to found a home. If once he is of age and has not revealed his feeling for any girl of his choice known to the family, his mother goes herself in search of a future daughter-in-law. Then there begins a round of visits to discover suitable girls. If the mother or other relative finds a candidate

who meets with her approval, she will not hesitate to describe in highly rhetorical terms the physical and moral qualities of the girl chosen. If there is no objection on the part of the young man, and if it is assured that the relations of the girl are favourable to the match, the mother or aunt of the suitor makes a tentative approach, or a close friend will present himself at the home of the fiancée and offer her a present. If this is accepted, it signifies that agreement is reached: this is the betrothal, *herê kirin*. In theory a girl could refuse to agree to the union, but such a refusal would be taken as an insult. On the other hand, a father would certainly not force his daughter into a marriage which she rejected. A short time afterwards, the father, uncle or brother will make the formal request for the girl's hand, *xwezgîn*; a request, of course, which can only be made on a propitious day. On this occasion, raisins and other sweetmeats are served, hence the name *şîrîni* given to this ceremony. The amount of the dowry is then fixed, the Koranic *mehr* which the Kurds call *qelen* or *kelîm* depending on the region. This has been discussed beforehand through intermediaries so as to avoid family wrangles, for the occasion often gives rise to haggling. This dowry varies from one region to another and according to the financial situation of the parents. One has heard of the campaign waged against this custom among the Kurds of Soviet Armenia who compare it to the selling price of the girl, as if it were a matter of selling cattle. The fact that they insist so strongly on this, shows that the custom is very deeply rooted. But this aspect of a purchase, which so often shocks our Western mentality, is by no means regarded in this light by the persons concerned who, Madame Hansen tells us, look on it as an assessment of real worth. This is a point of view which cannot be ignored, even if it is not to the taste of the progressives. It is indeed true that some parents inflate the price and demand a sum far beyond the means of many peasants, thus making the marriage almost impossible. To form an idea of the question, here are some recent figures (1957) quoted by Madame Hansen. In Balkha for a little girl of twelve, 20 dinars; in Topzava for an

educated girl from Sulaymaniyah, 200 dinars; in Sulaymaniyah, itself, the highest dowry was 1,500 dinars with a supplement of 750 dinars in case of divorce. With the Yézidis, the average is 40 dinars. Even among the Christian Kurds and Chaldeans of Irak, the bishop, to preclude abuses has to fix a maximum amount. In some cases the marriage can be arranged by the exchange of two sisters, *bedli*, and this takes the place of a dowry.

Following the formal request, the young pair are *xwestî*, promised. After a lapse of several months or even a year, the betrothal is celebrated, *destgîran* or, among the Ahl-é-Haqq, *dazurâni*, which is the occasion of a great family feast at the conclusion of which each guest makes a gift of money. The young man, for his part, presents his fiancée with a piece of jewellery, *nîşani* or *diari*, usually a ring. From now on the pair are *disgirtî*, affianced, and the fiancé, by tacit consent, can visit his fiancée at her home. When the dowry has been paid, they will be *delenda*. But in addition, it is necessary to estimate the price of milk, *ştr-beha*, which will go to pay for the bride's wedding dress, and to give other presents, *pişt-aqd* which can consist of land, a mill or jewellery.

### The Wedding

Everything now is ready, but spring or autumn is awaited for the wedding ceremony. Properly speaking, the wedding requires two ceremonies, which do not necessarily take place on the same day. One is religious, *mâra-brîn*, and is performed according to the Islamic rite. It is concerned with the marriage contract, and for the signing of this the two interested parties are not necessarily obliged to be present.

It is the Qazi or mullah who draws up the deed in the presence of witnesses for the bride and bridegroom. The four male witnesses for the bride include her protector, *wali*, who as often as not is her father. The agreed sum for the dowry is then paid, and as an insurance in case of divorce or possible widowhood, a sum is also agreed upon as compensation, usually amounting to

a half or one third of the dowry. Then the mullah asks the consent of the interested parties and makes the bride's sponsors repeat the following declaration: "We have given our daughter in marriage to so and so and have received in exchange such and such a sum." During this ceremony, all present must keep their hands flat on their knees so that no one can bewitch the fiancé. The agreement thus ratified is sometimes followed by the recitation of the *fatiha*. From this moment the couple are officially married, and although the marriage has not yet been consummated, the husband cannot go back on the agreement except by a repudiation in due form and the payment of compensation.

There now remains the second ceremony, the wedding celebration which is purely secular, but in the eyes of many carries more importance, for it has all the picturesque quality of folklore; and it is in the course of this ceremony that the bride is conducted to her husband's home. On the eve of the great day, mutual friends take charge of the toilet of the future spouses. They are bathed, and henna is freely used on the palms of the hands, the finger-tips and the toes. The young man's hair is shaved by little stages as a joke. As for the bride, all the hair is removed from her body with a depilatory paste composed of a solution of zinc and arsenic. The sparkle of her eyes is heightened with antimony powder. For the wedding, the young bride will be covered with a long yellow-ochre veil. Some people from the towns substitute a white veil like the Europeans. There is plenty of jewellery, which is highly esteemed in all Kurdish communities. The most common types are a chain of pieces of gold which hangs from the top of the fez down to the chin, and a necklace coming down the whole length of the jacket. Some necklaces are of little stones or silver ornaments which are supposed to have the virtue of warding off the evil eye. Then there are bracelets and a broad belt with silver buckles; in the left nostril is fixed a gold stud or a blue button in the shape of a little flower; on the forehead hangs a little crescent with three heart-shaped pendants.

When the toilet of the bride is complete, the wedding procession is formed. Everyone is on horseback, and in the towns sometimes in motor-cars. In the front goes the bride's trousseau and her battery of kitchen utensils. The idea is to display the wealth and generosity of the bridegroom. In some places, in Kurd Dagh for example, to make a show of wealth, utensils and furniture are borrowed from the parents and returned after the celebration. It is good form for the fiancée, at the moment of quitting her paternal dwelling, to shed or seem to shed a few tears. But by way of consolation, her companions sing her a nuptial song, *hevalê*, which everyone takes up in chorus as they already have done when she was being arrayed in finery. Shouting, singing, music and dancing continue until the procession arrives at the house of the bridegroom. He does not appear immediately. He has to be implored not to abandon the little one, who for her part, makes a show of not wanting to dismount from her horse. Finally, of course, everything is happily arranged.

The entry of the bride into her future home is accompanied by a traditional ritual, which varies according to the region. Usually before crossing the threshold, the bride must step over fragments of a jar full of coins and sweets, which has been broken at her feet. In Azerbaijan, a relative of the bridegroom throws some cakes between the threshold and the legs of the bride. She then picks up the bread and kisses the threshold. Among the Ahl-é-Haqq of Iran, in crossing the threshold, the bride holds up two lighted candles, while the bridegroom, standing above on the flat roof, throws down to her small coins, wheat and coloured rice. Among the Yézidis, on the arrival of the bride, her mother-in-law throws from the terrace sweets and flowers. Then she comes down and gives the daughter-in-law a jar full of sweetmeats which the girl must break on the threshold before crossing it. There follows a scramble by all for the scattered sweets, for they bring good luck. The bride then enters her new home stepping over pieces of the jar and the blood of a sheep which has just been slaughtered at her feet. In Kurd Dagh, a



large wooden spoon is broken up between the bride's feet before she enters the conjugal abode. At Topzava, in Irak, as the bride is crossing the threshold, a bird is set free, while the bridegroom from the terrace above gives his wife a tap on the head with a pole which he holds in both hands. This latter gesture is also to be found among the Kurds of Soviet Armenia.

As soon as the bride has come, the religious ceremony described above, if it has not already been celebrated, is begun. Then while the company divert themselves, the new bride, seated on her throne in a corner of the room, remains in silence, entirely covered by her veil, like an idol. When the people have thoroughly enjoyed themselves with plenty of singing and more dancing, and when the horsemen are tired of their wild gallops and tricks, the ceremony has come to an end, and the married couple, *bûk û zava*, are left to themselves and enter the nuptial chamber, the door being guarded by a page of honour, *bravaza* or *kardaş*. Before the marriage is consummated, the bridegroom presents the bride with the price of her modesty, *şermkşêna* another present. The traditional gun-shot fired by the husband himself or his page of honour announces that everything has passed off happily, and all the guests go home. Squares of cloth on the marriage bed or a pale face bear witness to the virginal integrity of the bride. The *pîrek* or *berbûri* or *pâ-khasû*, a matron who has accompanied the young bride and has initiated her in her new duties, will show the next day to her parents and friends "the signs of virginity." These pieces of cloth will be kept in the family of the young wife until the birth of her first child.

### The Kurdish Home

There, then, is our young pair settled into their home, usually in a house of their own, but sometimes in an apartment set apart in the home of the husband's father. Life then resumes its daily rhythm smoothly enough, if one is to believe in the proverbs: "The woman is the pillar of the household," "The woman is a citadel, the man is a prisoner," "A virtuous woman is of great price, a

bad woman is a chain," "The man is a river, the woman a lake." She is usually, to say the least, more conservative than the man. There they are united until death — "Jin û mêr, tevir û bêr" which means "Husband and wife, pick-axe and spade," that is to say, that only the pick-axe and spade which dig their graves can separate them. Thus in harmony, they will no doubt enjoy many pleasant moments. "The look in the eyes shows the joy of the heart." And the husband can recall to his wife: "Because of a spring I came to love a mountain." For all that, he will not let himself be led by her. They both know their place! "A modest woman is worth a town, a modest man is only worth a kid," and neither is it natural that "the man should be in the cellar when the woman has to answer the call to arms," nor that he should be "a cock for a day and a hen for a year." So too, "A man subject to his wife is like a solitary log", or "It is not with prayers that a wife is ruled." But let us by no means exaggerate, for the Kurdish woman enjoys much more liberty than her sisters of other Moslem countries. She is usually unveiled, though her head is always covered. She directs the affairs of the house, often holds the purse-strings and controls household expenditure as she wishes. In an extremely interesting book on the life of the Kurdish woman, a Danish woman, Madame Hansen, already cited, throws light on the reciprocal role played by husband and wife in the Kurdish home. Everyday life, she says, shows that as far as authority is concerned the man, in fact, is not privileged. Inside the house his place is definitely limited, and she tells us with a little dash of humour "a coat-rack or a nail driven into the wall to hang up his clothes, a place on the floor where he sits to eat, a mattress or an iron bed for him to sleep — that is all!" Even in the aristocracy the man is no freer than the woman in the choice of a partner, and he is forever exposed to the united action of all the women of the house — his mother, his wives, his sisters and his daughters of all ages. Peasant women enjoy more liberty of movement, and inequality here is due to the fact that all the heavy work falls on them, which is not the case among educated townspeople.

Even in uneducated urban communities, if the man is polygamous, it is he who lives in servitude. In reality there is little life shared in common between partners who live apart from each other in those separate worlds of men and women characteristic of Islam. Nevertheless, the husband loves his wife and can earn her love also. This is a fact well-known. And then the Kurd trusts his wife, for he holds all women in high regard. The woman, therefore, maintains her position in the home, and so it is not surprising to see some acquire real authority in the tribe or city. It is also known among the Kurds that to place oneself under the protection of a woman is to be in safety.

### **Round the Cradle**

Whatever may be the worth of a woman in the eyes of strangers, it is in her home that she is truly queen. "God created woman, woman created the home", says the Kurdish proverb, and "When the woman gives, it is God who gives." And so her happiness will be complete when she has a child. Is not this the reason for marrying young? "Marry young that you may enjoy in time the company of your children." Hence the following formula: "If it please God, at the end of nine months, nine days and nine minutes, the All-Highest will make green the barren encampment"; and again, "The Lord will cause the woman to bring forth a child and will sprinkle on his countenance three drops of light." For truly, "children are the fruit of the dwelling-place." "The house that has gold for riches can be laid low! The house that has sons for riches can never fall." And here is a noble pronouncement that silences all the words of selfishness: "To the house which has a child the Devil never goes."

What a joy it is, indeed, for the father and mother bent over the cradle to catch the first smile, the first caress, the first word! The father himself, if rough at times, becomes tender and listens silently to the cradle-song that the young mother hums to lull the baby to sleep. There are many charming Kurdish cradle-songs. They are composed by the grandmothers, but as often as

not by the papas which I think is an indication of a lively paternal love. There is one by a Soviet Kurd, in which the tenderest sentiments intermingle with a novel mystical sense:

Lory, lory bonny boy,  
 With eyes of jet and eyebrows arched,  
 When I look upon thee  
 My heart is filled with love.  
 Sleep sweetly, sleep in quiet,  
 Lory, lory bonny boy

My tender baby grow up soon.  
 Be thy father's sure support  
 Grow up soon, be brave and strong  
 Guard our Reborn World.  
 Sleep sweetly, sleep in quiet  
 Lory, lory bonny boy

The night is come, thy parents sleep  
 And sleeps the doe beside the fawn  
 The stars are out, the moon is up  
 In silence sleep the fells and streams.  
 Sleep sweetly, sleep in quiet  
 Lory, lory bonny boy

In Sulaymaniyah, to avoid possible accidents, the pregnant woman must wear a *duabend*, a sort of talisman upon which are inscribed passages from the Koran. But it is known that the wife of anyone who copies these amulets will not bring children into the world.

As a rule, the confinement takes place in the house with the assistance of relatives or a more experienced neighbour, for certified midwives are rather rare. In case of difficulties, recourse is made to expedients partly or wholly based on superstition. In Sulaymaniyah the *dua*, a stone with certain prayers inscribed on it, is fetched from the mosque. It is placed on the back of the woman in labour and everything now goes well. In the tribe of Shamesdin, in like circumstances, it is the sword of Khano-lep-zerin

(Khan of the golden arm, hero of the epic of Dimdim) that is laid on the bed of the mother-to-be. Among the Christians of Duhok, the roller from the flat roof of the church is believed to have the necessary magic virtues. The umbilical cord is severed with scissors and in some places with a sharp stone. Care must be taken to note where it falls. If it falls on a weapon, the child will be a great warrior, if on a plate, he will be a glutton. At all events, it is necessary to guard against the evil spirits. In Soviet Armenia and in Persia it is the spirit *âl* or *halanassi* who tries to tear out the liver and the lungs of the woman in labour. Among the Yézidis, the *Re, ê şévê*, the "Blackness of the Night," may strangle the baby or harm both it and its mother. With the Moukries, it is the spirit *cheché* and in Sulaymaniyah, the ghouls *Shai-va* who wish to strangle the child. As soon as the woman is confined, there is placed on her bed a copy of the Koran, a sword, a piece of iron and other amulets to ward off spells. If the child should be a boy, the men of the family mount guard day and night, for a week, in the room of the woman lying-in. Similarly during the whole of the same period, the midwife and the women who have been present at the confinement cannot go out nor take away anything which has been used in the operation. Needless to say, it is also forbidden than any woman menstruating should enter the room, for she would bring bad luck. The new-born baby is placed on a sieve covered with a cushion. This will be its bed for the first six or seven days. Afterwards, having been completely wrapped up in swaddling clothes, it is put into the cot. Three types of cot are used by the Kurds. The most common is the rocking cradle; next comes the hammock slung between two poles; finally there is a fixed cot for the older babies. In the cots, the mattress has an orifice with a wooden tube, *bilwar*, for carrying away urine. The anthropologist, H. Field, has established that deformations of the cranium exist, and in particular, the flattening of the occiput as the result of the use of certain types of cot, especially with those Kurds who live in contact with Armenians.

Many presents are given to the mother, especially if she has given birth to a son. The presents vary according to tribal custom and the social position of the family. To the mother, gold can be presented or a ram for sacrifice. For the baby, it will be a mare, a little pistol or a dagger. The birth of a child is inevitably celebrated with a feast.

It is usually the mother who gives the child its name, although sometimes the mullah has a word in this. Many Kurds, as might be expected, have Moslem names, and so Muhammeds, Ahmeds, Mahmuds etc. are plentiful, as well as Alis, Hasans and Husseins. But there are specifically Kurdish names like Çolo, Cindo, Mend or Xodéda or names which have taken a Kurdish form of a Moslem name, as for example, Meho (Muhammed), Reşo (Rachid), Hemo (Hamid) etc. Neither are the names of historic and legendary national heroes forgotten; Xosrew, Kubad, Cemşîd Féridûn, Guhderz, Behram. Sometimes the name designates the virtues desired for the newly-born, or there are just names of flowers, fruits or even animals of which the special qualities are universally admired. So for the flowers there are: Gulê (rose), Nêrzîg (narcissus), Benefş (violet), Rihan (basilic), Sosin (lily), Yasimîne (jasmin), and for animals: Xezal (gazelle), Qumri (turtle-dove), etc. So much for the girls. For the boys we have Şêr (lion), Piling (tiger), Şahîn (royal falcon).

Circumcision is compulsory. It is done now on the fifth or seventh day, and it is the mullah who performs the operation. Twenty five years ago in Sulaymaniyah the little boy was circumcised when he was from seven to ten years old, as is still the case today in Istanbul. It is the occasion of a little celebration when the boys wear shorts, a little white blouse with a shoulder-belt of silvered material and a cap, also silvered. The sponsor need not necessarily be one of the family, but he must be a man of good repute. The one most in demand is a man "who has drunk of the water of the seven springs," the symbol of Knowledge and Wisdom. The Yézidis accept a Moslem as a sponsor but never a Christian or a Jew. Other Kurds do not have these scruples and do not hesitate

to ask this service, or rather mark of confidence, from Christian friends because of the blood relationship which is thereby established. Femal circumcision, a barbarous custom, against which Moslem women are beginning to rebel, especially in Egypt, is practised in Sulaymaniyah, but not before the little girl has reached the age of eight or ten years. The custom is not general, but it has been remarked to me, regarding it, that the "Mama," that is the midwife who performs the operation, must be particularly skilful.

Weaning takes place quite late. The child, in fact, is suckled up to the age of two and even longer. The women are convinced that so long as they continue to suckle the child, they cannot conceive. Births often follow close on one another, for contraceptive practices are not resorted to and are condemned by the mass of the Kurdish people. Children suckled by the same nurse are foster brothers and sisters. This is considered to be a real relationship, to the extent that it becomes an obstacle to a future marriage.

### **Children and their Upbringing**

The Kurd likes a large family, particularly so, since infant mortality takes its toll. The mother watches carefully to see that her baby is shielded from the sinister activities of evil spirits. Throughout childhood, therefore, he will be well provided with talismans and amulets on his shoulder and on his cap, in order to divert the evil eye. On the red bonnet the lucky charms are varied: wolf-teeth, cloves, agates, solomon, onyx, mandrake roots and other different pieces of wood and stone; the arms carry various satchels on which are inscribed verses from the Koran. A crayfish claw wrapped in a rag and sewn on the clothing is today still considered most efficacious against the evil eye.

If the child does not receive many caresses, it is seldom physically maltreated. Toys are practically unknown, but a boy will make his own little cart with pieces of wood and wire, and a girl will make herself a doll with old rags. The little boy spends his early years with the women. But as soon as he is able to run, he

will pass all his time in the streets with companions.

Most small villages do not possess a school. Only sometimes a more zealous mullah or sheik will teach the brighter urchins to read the Koran. Even where a school does exist, the conditions of life in the home are hardly conducive to study. In the house there is nowhere to put books and note-books, nor a place where a scholar could read or do his homework in peace. Often a child will be sent from the house to look after a flock of goats or sheep. The rest of the time he will be in the midst of adults listening to their conversation to such advantage that when still quite young, little Kurds are far from ignorant of the mysteries of life and its difficulties. When the time comes, the Kurd thus austere educated is well-armed for the battle of life.



## CHAPTER VI

### The Leisure Hours

The climate of Kurdistan has made its inhabitants healthy and strong to such a degree as often to give them a rude appearance. But the Kurd is of a cheerful temperament, gay in his demeanour, witty in his repartees and—what may be unsuspected — quite sentimental. These various aspects of his character are revealed on frequent joyful occasions, frequent despite the hardships of his daily life which, however, has its slack times of leisure.

#### Rhythm and Song

All family festivals — births, circumcisions, and especially marriages, are accompanied with song and dance. Indeed, one could hardly imagine a Kurdish wedding without dancing, and it is an amusement in which the Kurds delight on all happy occasions. Their dances, of course, have nothing in common with Western shakings and shudders. There are many kinds known by the generic name *reqs*, which is Arabic, and *dîlani*, the Kurdish term.

The variety of dances is endless, and they often take their names from their places of origin, for example: *amûdi* from Amouda, *botanî* from Botan, *rohayi* from Roha, *şêxani* from Sheikan etc. This latter dance is almost the same as the Lebanese dabke. Dances also take their names from the patterns which are executed. There is the *govend*, a kind of round dance in which the dancers join hands or link arms to perform the steps. Another dance involves strong rhythmical swaying to and fro to the accompaniment of fife and drum. Others include *sûgavî* or *sêpeyî*, three step, *çarpanî*, four step, *giranî*, slow dance, *xirfanî*, languorous; *teşîgok* and the *milanî* in which partners dance shoulder to shoulder and the *aşiyok* or "Little Aisha" when the dancers form a complete circle. The students have a special dance, a kind of quadrille called *bêlîte* or *bêlûte*, which was formerly of a religious character but is by no means so today. The dance *çopî*, which is very widespread, has little skipping movements.

The dancer who leads it, *serçopikês*, waves a handkerchief in one hand and with the other leads along the dancers, who in a line advance or retreat, moving to and fro from one side to the other. "There is a gentle undulating motion of the whole circle in keeping with the music, just like a field of wheat stirred by a gentle breeze." (Millingen). When the women join in the *çopi*, which is not unusual in the villages, it is called *reşbelek*, the motley. Some of these dances, including *bêriyo*, the milkmaid; *temzara* and the *sêxani*, already mentioned, are danced by the Assyrians. The sabre dance, *dilana-sûr-û-mertal*, which is fascinating to watch, requires great skill and agility.

Songs too, are as numerous as they are varied. "The same song sung by night is different when sung by day. Sung by a child it is one thing and by a woman something else. It changes according to whether it is sung by the old or the young. It is not the same on the mountain as it is on the plains. It forever varies." Thus a Kurd, Yachar Kamal, expresses the sense of infinite variety in Kurdish song. The epics of warlike themes, *şer*, known as *delal* in the plains and *lawiqê suwaran* in the mountains, are often very long. The usual theme is familiar; the beloved at home sings the perils and vicissitudes of war and the feats of arms performed by her hero on the battlefield, where he covers himself with glory. Each tribe, it may be said, has its own *delal*. Long religious poems, not to be confused with those purely from the Koran, are sung to solemn and pensive music. And then there are a host of little songs which make pleasant accompaniments to the thousand and one tasks of daily life: the *bendolavî*, songs of the spinning wheel, which the girls hum as they spin; the songs of the harvesters; the *pehîzok*, songs of the autumn sung alternately by boys and girls while coming down from the mountains where they have spent the summer; the *serêle*, songs of spring — not to mention, of course, the innumerable dance songs, *dîlok*, which are accompanied by flute and tambourine. We have already referred to the wedding songs, *hevalê* or *şerêzavano*, which accompany the young bride as she enters

her new home. The *lori* or cradle-songs are in a class by themselves and breathe freshness and simplicity.

Kurdish music naturally forms part of what it has been generally agreed to style oriental music, but although it has sometimes influenced the songs of neighbouring peoples, it cannot be confused with Arabic, Armenian or Turkish music. Musical culture was highly developed in the Sassanian empire, and this tradition is maintained by the Kurds. It was a Kurd from Mosul, a famous musician and arbiter of good taste, Ziriya (789-857), who, after having started his career in Baghdad, continued it with brilliant success at the court of Abder-Rahman at Cordoba where he established a conservatoire. The Eastern music that he introduced took on an original quality recalled in the Andalusian airs which the gipsies have retained up to our own day. It is to Ziriya that we owe the fifth string of the lute. History still preserved in the IXth century the name of a whole dynasty of Kurdish musicians — Ibrahim ibn al-Mahedi, his son Ishaq al-Mewsili and his grandson Hammâd. Whatever its origins may be and whatever its past glories, Kurdish music today is not at all sophisticated or complex but of a popular nature and innocent of harmony. Its numerous and varied melodies have a certain quality of melancholy which is quite striking. In fact, "Kurdish airs are distinguished by quite regular modulations and have at the same time a haunting sadness of such a nature that one cannot imagine how the sentiments of which they are the expression could have arisen in tribes known to us only for their propensity for violence and rapine." Such, at least, was the opinion of Edouard Dulaurier in the last century. Western travellers have not failed to notice the originality of this music. Some of them have been attracted by the peculiar charm of the tunes; others, on the contrary, have found this music with its seventeen tones and its lack of polyphony and harmony "flat and false." It is rather curious to note that it was an Armenian priest with an artistic sense, Vartabed Comitas (1869-1935), who was the first to collect and study some Kurdish popular songs. But quite recently (1963)

Dr D. Christensen has given us a very scholarly study of the dance music, instrumental and vocal, of Hakkari, analysing the melodies and the style. But today the Kurds themselves are beginning to take an interest in the uniqueness of their national music and are deeply anxious that this treasure should not be lost. Thus in Irak, students have formed groups with a view to preserving, unifying and developing Kurdish music, while in Soviet Armenia, a young Kurd, Jamilé Jamil, has published a remarkable collection of Kurdish songs (1960).

The musical instruments used by the Kurds are often of rustic manufacture. Every shepherd carries his *bilûr* or rustic flute in his knapsack. At the dances, the *zirne*, a short flute, accompanies the *erbane*, tambourine, and the *dehol*, or big drum. The double flute, *juzale*, about 10 inches long, consists of two hollow reeds coupled. Each tube for its whole length has holes for the fingers. Flutes with a deeper tone and of better quality are made of the hollow bones of birds. The mouthpiece consists of two little reeds inserted into two longer ones. In each reed of the mouthpiece there is cut a long, narrow flexible segment which forms the vibratory mechanism. When this instrument is played, the whole mouthpiece goes into the mouth, and when it is blown, the cheeks distend like a balloon. The sound is like Scottish bagpipes. The viol of stretched skin, *ribab*, the violin, *keman* or *kemança*, and the lute, *tanbûr*, are played at the peasants' dances. The Yézidis sometimes mark the rhythm of their religious chants with cymbals, *xelile*, which are also used in the ceremonies of some Christian communities of the East. The guitar, *saz*, is also used, although it is not specifically a Kurdish instrument. The trumpet, *borî*, is a purely military instrument.

### **The Troubadours**

"Every Kurd, man and woman, is a poet," said the famous Armenian writer of the last century, Abovian (1804-1848). He might equally well have said that every Kurd is a musician and loves singing. But there are also specialists in the art. The

*stranvan*, singers, and especially the *dengbêj*, troubadours, and the *çirokbêj*, story-tellers, are highly esteemed. These must not be confused with the *mitirb*, a sort of gipsy, not connected with the tribes, who wander from place to place providing entertainment. Professional singers and troubadours are unfortunately fast disappearing, because even in the most remote villages today there are transistor radios. Thus it is possible to hear Kurdish songs over Radio Baghdad and from stations behind the Iron Curtain. No matter from where the voices of the singers come there are men and women listening in to their favourite songs and singers. In the long winter evenings it is still not uncommon to find story-tellers who hold their audiences spell-bound. They have a very extensive repertoire, and their recitals of marvellous and fantastic adventures can last for hours until the children fall asleep on their mothers' knees. The stories are often in verse, and the rhymes serve as guide marks to the teller who might otherwise be in danger of losing his way in the story, not that that would be any great disadvantage, for provided there are marvels, pretty houris and brave heroes, who by their prowess and good swords can gain a sweetheart's love, everyone is happy, and the listeners never tire.

Here are two legends of the purely idyllic kind.

In the harem of Fatoul, Khan of Iran, lived two beautiful girls, but the loveliest and the favourite was surely Zélikha, the adored of Fatoul. "Tell me your desire, even if it be the moon and it shall be yours." Zélikha was content to ask that a troubadour should come and sing to her the beauty of the moon. Now, in Ispahan, Tari, a troubadour happened to pass by the palace where dwelt Zélikha, and there was dance and song. So he went in to join in the gaiety, and he perceived Zélikha, beautifully attired, seated on a throne in her boudoir. A crowd of attendants, Arabs and Persians, waited on the princess. Tari prepared to play his guitar, and hardly had he touched it when all the company were enraptured. Attracted by the music, Zélikha drew nigh. They exchanged glances. The troubadour then began to sing, and tears trickled down Zélikha's cheeks: "I am the lover Tari seeking

work. I want to sing of liberty and of the sorrows of this life." These words touched the princess whose whole bearing betrayed that her heart was bound captive to the young musician. Night came. The palace lay deep in silence; only Zélikha was awake looking out of the window and wondering where Tari could have gone. But she heard a noise, a door opened, Tari appeared, and the two lovers embraced. A faithless slave-girl had informed Fatoul who surprised a kiss exchanged between the two lovers now petrified with fear.

A gallows was erected in the public square, and on it Tari was hanged, Tari, the stranger whom no one knew and whose last look, before he gave up his soul, rested on his beloved, for Zélikha from near the river had witnessed the scene. The women wept and lamented. The maid-servants took the princess by the hand and led her back to the palace while they tried to calm her grief. Meeting on the way the servant who had betrayed her, she seized her dagger and plunged it into the faithless heart.

Zélikha could not forget her lover, and she used to go to his grave to deck it with flowers and to mourn beside it. In the palace she remained grief-stricken and never spoke. Fatoul Agha would sit beside her and try to console her with caresses, but in vain. One day, having discovered that Zélikha was in the habit of leaving the palace, he would have beaten her, but she escaped him. He ordered the body of Tari to be disinterred.

The weeping love-lorn girl grew pale. In the starry night she began to search in the plain of Ispahan for the body of him whom she would love forever. She wandered in that haunt of foxes, wolves and savage beasts. She wailed and sighed and in her mournful dirges besought the wolves, the mountains and the trees to show her where her Tari lay. She thought she was going mad. Far off on the plain a noise broke the silence, the river stirred its waters, but it was only a hare which started away. But behold, in the light of the moon Zélikha perceived at the foot of a tree some human bones. The skeleton was intact and wind and rain had left it bare. Beneath the moon's rays Zélikha sat beside the corpse and

wept. Then through wind and rain she made her way to Isphahan. Three days later she went back to her castle, but she left behind her life and her joy.

A narrative no less popular of which there are many versions is that of Siyabend and Khadjé.

In olden times there lived on the Sipan-Dagh the handsome Siyabend, a hunter of the tribe of Zilli. Siyabend fell in love with the fair Khadjé. But he was poor and could not pay the dowry demanded. So he carried off the lovely one and took her to the mountains where, happy and free from care, they spent three days and three nights. On the fourth day, it happened that Siyabend fell asleep with his head on Khadjé's knees. Just then some deer passed by, and one of them, the biggest and finest, seized a hind from the herd and fled away with her. At the sight Khadjé wept and a tear fell on Siyabend's cheek awakening him. Seeing Khadjé in tears, he said to her: "If you have wed me against your will, I shall treat you as a brother would his sister, and I shall take you back to your father's house." "No, my dear Siyabend, I love you, and will ever be your faithful wife. But I weep to have seen how a magnificent stag has seized a hind from the herd without another stag daring to contend with him. This stag is as valiant as you. It is the memory of your great daring that has caused me to weep for happiness." "And where has the stag gone with the hind?" asked Siyabend. Khadjé showed him in what direction they had fled and Siyabend cried: "I am a hunter. There is none mightier than I on this mountain, and see, almost under my eyes, a stag takes away a hind from the herd; what an insult to me!" He arose and rushed away in pursuit of the stag. As soon as he came upon it, he took aim with his bow, but the stag rushed upon him, struck him with his antlers and flung him into a ravine. There Khadjé found him grievously wounded unto death. He was lying at the bottom of the abyss and Khadjé, leaning over him, wept bitterly. She cursed the beauty of the forest, the flowers and all the loveliness of nature; she cursed the water of the spring, the bushes, the fruits and the very grass that the

stag had cropped and which had given him the strength to overcome Siyabend. In an access of despair she cursed the lush green pastures, the soft air laden with the perfume of mountain flowers and the dazzling sun which shone on Sipan-Dagh, refuge of the wicked stag. Soon she lay dead on the corpse of her lover; and since that day a tree forever in flower reminds the passers-by of the strength of love.

### **Festivals and Seasons**

As well as the purely family feasts there are seasonal festivals celebrated by the shepherds. These rural festivals are various: *serepêz* at the first lambing time; *barodan* at the time of departure for the *zozan* or summer pastures; *berxbir* for the sheep-rearing; and the greatest festival of all *beran-berdan*, which the Turks call *kasim*, when estivation ends and the rams are loosed among the ewes. It appears that traces of this festival are to be found in the Avesta. At all events it is an occasion of merry feasts and rejoicings of all kinds. It may also lead to future marriages, for the young girls tie their silk handkerchiefs round the necks of their favourite sheep and the young man who removes a handkerchief reveals himself as a suitor for the hand of the girl. If the parents, who, of course, are aware of the scheme, agree, the engagement will soon be celebrated, to be followed by the marriage in due course.

The shepherds' celebrations are related to their calling, but there are others in which everyone takes part and one vies with another as to whom shall do most honour to the occasion. The *newrûz* or *nûroj* is a festival existing prior to Islam and dear to all Iranians. The Yézidis have always held it in high honour. They are considered to be the preservers of the national religion, and they regard this as the festival of the New Year, *Serêsal*. It is in fact the feast of spring, of renewal, since it falls on the first Wednesday in April. The Kurds of Irak, who had allowed it to fall into disuse, or rather had been forbidden to celebrate it, have taken it up again after a lapse of several years. It has even



become a real national festival which the Kurds celebrate in Sulaymaniyah with fireworks, and in Baghdad with sessions of poetry recitals and song. For the occasion the Kurdish newspapers publish special illustrated editions. The Kurdish students, wherever they may be, take advantage of the opportunity which it offers, to make their country known through parties which give their friends the chance of singing and dancing to their national airs. In Iran, on the last Wednesday of the old year, that preceding the *newrûz*, the rejoicings are accompanied by magical rites which have the object of expelling evil spirits. The day is propitious for it begins a year which is as yet a white page, unblotted and unstained. The cannon (*top-emorvarid*, pearl cannon) in the Ark Square in Teheran is supposed to bring good luck to those who pass under it. Fireworks recall in this land of Zarathustra that light is the symbol of God, of Goodness and of Truth; the ceremonial breaking of pitchers is as much a fertility rite as it is a spell against the evil eye; pebbles thrown into a jar are a rite of augury as are words overheard by chance. The proceeds of a votive collection, *qashoq-zani*, will contribute to the cost of preparing a special soup which will ensure good health throughout the coming year. These old customs are, however, tending to disappear.

This festival of the New Year is undoubtedly associated with the ceremony of the baking of the Samani, *samani-pazan*, which is a form of evocation of the famous gardens of Adonis. Grains of wheat are sprouted in a sort of flat basket. When the plants have reached a certain height, they are cut on a given date after *newrûz*, the day after the sun's entry into Aries. They are then mashed in a mortar to extract the juice; the residue is thrown into running water. On the evening of the same day the juice is used in the making of a sort of cake. Every family invites friends and neighbours to the celebration of a *mewlûd*, and in the evening there is dancing round the fire on which the cake is baking. As soon as it is baked, it is placed on a tray with a looking-glass, kohl and henna, and the whole is put into a locked

room. The persons who have prayers to make have lighted tapers round the tray. At dawn the room is opened and the cover of the vessel containing the cake is lifted. The imprint of a hand on the cake is then looked for. If it is found, there is great rejoicing, for it is believed that Aisha or Fatima has paid a visit in spirit and has blessed the ceremony by leaving the imprint of her hand on the cake. The cake is afterwards shared out among the friends and neighbours. In my opinion, as in that of Tewfik Wehbi, this ceremony is rooted in the very distant past. The visitor will be the Queen Anahita of the ancient Iranians or Ishtar of the Sumero-Babylonians. By forcing the symbolic growth of some grains of cereal the ceremony must have been intended to produce through the intervention of the Goddess of Fertility a successful harvest. Today it is practised with the object of producing offspring or to have prayers answered.

At the end of the XIXth century certain travellers, such as Morgan, noted among the Moukri of Saouji-Boulak (today Mahabad) the spring festival of the sham Emir, which had all the character of a carnival. T. Wehbi mentions similar rites still practised in the spring in Sulaymaniyah. The preparations are entrusted to a special committee, and on the day fixed the people of Sulaymaniyah leave the town for a place where the ceremony is to take place. A king is enthroned and courtiers and a guard are assigned to him. The "king," sitting astride an ox and accompanied by his court and a large crowd, goes to the encampment where tents and divans have been set up and cauldrons put on the fire. Individuals, disguised as sheep or goats, play the part of these animals during the whole period of celebration, which lasts three days. The "king" is obeyed without question; he even imposes taxes on people, whether they are present or not. He retains his title until the following year when a successor is nominated.

Ereb Chamo gives us an account of another popular festival at which he was present as a child. This is the feast of *-kose-geldi*, also a kind of carnival in which a young man is disguised as a

sheik or mullah while another is dressed up as a woman. The two then go from house to house collecting butter, cheese and money. To the wealthy the pseudo-woman complains that her honour has been impugned. To compensate her for the affront and to get rid of her she is presented with a kid or money. Everything which has been collected in this manner by the young men is distributed to poor families.

### **Games and Pastimes**

On the occasion of these festivals, whether they are seasonal or otherwise, the travellers, Rich, Millingen, de Moltke and others, have observed among the Kurds some popular sports which are still practised. First of all comes the *cerid*, a display of horsemanship or rodeo, which is given on the occasion of a wedding or other public rejoicing. The *taghaleh* is another very popular equestrian performance. Riders set off separately galloping at full speed and on arrival at a selected spot they fling to the ground, a little ahead of the horse, and point downwards a stout staff about a yard long. If it is correctly thrown, it bounces into the air; the skill of the rider consists in making the stick rebound to such a height that he may either ride under it or catch it in his hand. The *chogan*, polo, is an ancient game of which Saladin was very fond. He played it with great enthusiasm and skill on the grass pitches which he had laid out for the purpose in Damascus on the banks of the Barada. Wrestling, as it is practised in Turkey and Iran, is also a favourite sport with the Kurds. Young Kurds of Beirut are well trained in this, as in other forms of athletics, dumbbells and boxing, not to mention football and basket-ball. One of the most popular games is *hol* or *gok* which is similar to hockey. Cock-fighting and combats between partridges still continue, but buffalo fights are more spectacular, as are the fights between rams which have their own picturesqueness. The little shepherds also have their amusements. Ereb Chamo refers to the game of *zézé* (tipcat), races, ball-games and stone-throwing. Moreover, many games resemble those

played by European children — leap-frog, blindman's buff, prisoners' base, etc. Marbles *qaq* or *gula* are also known, as well as tipcat, *talûl* and games of pursuit. While the children, in winter especially, amuse themselves, like children all over the world, at "birds fly," *çûkfiri*, and in school at *dibistan*, a kind of "hot cockles," at hopscotch, *berdaq*, and especially at knuckle bones, their elders indulge in games which are considered more serious. Cards, *iskenbil* or *isqabil*, and dice, *zar*, have their numerous enthusiasts among the gilded youth of rich families, according to Mr Viltchevsky. Tric-trac, *nard*, is the perennial pastime of the habitués of *chaikhana*, tea-houses. But the really noble game which is the delight of cultured people and forms part of the superior education of every self-respecting *agha* is chess, *şetrenc* a game which Saladin had a passion for, and at which he used to spend whole evenings.

Along with these pastimes of a private nature there are others which are public and are of interest to the community at large. On the occasion of the festival of *Ashura* the Persian Shiites organize theatrical performances with religious themes. These are the *taziya* which correspond to the Christian Mysteries of the Passion of the Middle Ages. The Kurds, who apart from small groups are not Shiites anyway, do not seem to have interested themselves in these performances. Neither has the Turkish *karagöz* or Chinese shadow theatre aroused interest in Kurdistan. Besides, since the theatre today hardly exists among the Arabs, one must not be surprised at its virtual absence among the Kurds. However, one must not fail to mention that some Arab playwrights like Jamil Sidki Zehawi (1863-1936) are pure Kurds. Many classical tragedies have also been written by that Prince of Poets, Ahmed Shawki (1868-1932), also of Kurdish descent. In Sulaymaniyah in Irak there have been some academic attempts at drama, and also during the period of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in Iran (1945-1946). But it was in Erivan in Soviet Armenia that the first Kurdish theatre was founded in 1934. There also existed in the village of Ali Kotchek a troupe of

players, but the writer does not know anything about its artistic standards, nor what success it had with a Kurdish audience. In Kurdish Soviet Armenia one has heard of Kurdish films both documentaries and those with traditional themes. Some groups of young people are also making their appearance on radio Erivan and have broadcast a radio play. But Kurdish drama is still in its infancy, and it is to be feared that the craze for the cinema may kill it before it can reach maturity. But after all, it is not in watching indoor performances that the Kurd spends the greater part of his leisure.

### **Nimrods and Tartarins**

It may easily be imagined that this kind of diversion appeals to the Kurd, who is above all a man of the open air. It is therefore out of doors that he will seek his amusements, and at the top of the list comes shooting and the pursuit of game. The Kurd is indeed a wildly enthusiastic sportsman and an excellent shot. Hunting is his favourite sport, and a Kurd of good family will readily invite his guests to a hunting party. The country, abounding, as it does, in game of all sorts, both furred and feathered, is ideal for the pursuit of this royal sport. Many kinds of wild animals are hunted — the bear, the hyena, the fox and the wild boar (not eaten by Kurds). Formerly, up to the end of the last century, if one is to believe some accounts, the lion, which today has completely disappeared, was still hunted. But the hare is still hunted and also, for its meat, the ibex. A proverb recalls that "To hunt the eagle one has to brave the perils of ascending to the lofty heights where he lives." This is also true of the mouflon. In Iraki Kurdistan on the banks of the Sirwan there is an abundance of feathered game. The partridge is especially prized and many methods are used to take it according to whether the object is to kill it or capture it alive to tame it. Accordingly, therefore, the gun, net or decoy will be used. In times of snow, partridges can be caught by hand, and in spring-time they are shot from butts (ambushes). Some places with good cover for

butts are so prized that they can cost as much as a girl's dowry! The Kurdish greyhounds are famous as are their big sheepdogs. Some falcons are trained for the sport of falconry. Thus the royal falcon, *şahin*, which is worth as much as thirty gold pounds, is used for the pursuit of storks. The *sipir* which is valued at only twenty pounds, and the *doxan*, at a still lower price, are used for partridges and pigeons.

In the Middle East the most famous hunter of our day is undoubtedly a Kurd of Damascus, Hussein Ibish, who has already been mentioned for his enterprises of social improvement. Since 1900 he has hunted the gazelle and the wild goat in the Palmyra district of Syria. Ten years later, in the Sudan, he hunted the buffalo, the rhinoceros and the leopard and continued the sport in Uganda and the Belgian Congo. In India he killed tigers and elephants, and antelopes and ostriches in Portuguese West Africa. His palace in Damascus is adorned with innumerable trophies of the chase and is a veritable museum of exotic beasts.

As with their brothers everywhere else in the world, the Kurdish hunters are often inspired by the spirit of Tartarin and delight to tell long tales of their deeds of prowess and of their misadventures in the field.

In the time of Bedir-Khan, a lion ventured into the district of Jézireh and devoured sheep and cattle. The Emir of Botan, after having tried in vain to trap him, proclaimed to blasts of a trumpet that he would reward whoever succeeded in killing the ferocious beast. A nomad, Garisi, attracted by the lure of a little money, came to Jézireh without any other weapons than a big cudgel. He had hardly arrived at the haunts of the lion, when the beast appeared. Before the animal had time to attack him, our man dealt him a mighty blow with his cudgel between the eyes. Just like a common fox, the beast fell senseless at his feet. But the man, imagining that what he had killed was the Emir's dog, feared that he might fall into the hands of the Emir's servants and left the town. Now it happened that a very cunning Boti (native of Botan) passed by and seeing the body of the lion he put

the barrel of his gun under its ear and fired. Then he put the lion-skin on his ass and carried it to the Emir's palace. Immediately the prince was informed and, before giving the reward to the Boti, he first questioned him. But he quickly perceived that this could not be the person who had slain the lion. He then proclaimed by his heralds that he wished to know the man who had really killed the lion.

In the meantime our nomad had told his story to a shopkeeper, and as he still thought that he had killed the prince's dog, he embellished his tale as little as possible. The shopkeeper then asked him for more precise details of his exploit and finally said, "It was not the Emir's dog but truly the lion that you have slain! Run quickly to the palace and get your reward." He then went to the palace and, as soon as he saw the lion's skin, he avowed to those around him, "Truly, if it were not for that wound in the head, I would say that it was I who killed him with my cudgel."

The thing was reported to the Emir, who sent for the nomad. As soon as he saw such a sturdy figure of a man, he was convinced that a fellow like that would be quite able to kill a lion with a stick. And this dialogue followed: "Is it you who killed the lion?" — "My Lord, if it were not for that wound in the head, I should say it was I." — "How did you kill him?" — "My Prince, suppose that you are the lion and I am myself. Right! when he tried to spring at me, I lifted my stick like this and struck him between the two eyes." The servants were only just in time to hold his hand for he was about to strike the prince between the eyes. "Excellent," said the Emir, "it was you who killed the lion. Speak. What do you wish that I should give you?" — "My Lord, I want for nothing. I have need only of a piece of silver to pay my tribute to the Emir." — "From today I exempt you from payment of the tax. What do you want as well?" — "My Prince, I have my gun, I have sheep, I have a good store of provisions, I want nothing more!" As he could not persuade the nomad to claim anything, the Emir ordered his servants to conduct him to the market and buy for him and his children

several suits of clothes and to add a sabre and a gun in chased silver.

This anecdote as well as many others is related with great spirit by Osman Sebri, one of the best Kurdish story-tellers of today.

Fishing, which is of course a profession, is nonetheless a sport which gives great pleasure to its enthusiasts. It is a flourishing sport, for fish abound in the Euphrates and its tributaries, and in the Tigris and the Khabur, in the two Zabs and in the other many rivers of Kurdistan. It is practised with the net, *tor*, with hook and line, *çengal*, and also with the harpoon, *metran*. This last is used to take large fish like the tobie (cat-fish) in the Zab, which when it is laid across the back of an ass to transport it to market, touches the ground with head and tail.



## CHAPTER VII

### The Dark Days.

As all underdeveloped countries, Kurdistan leaves much to be desired in the sphere of health. The houses, as is well-known, are, especially in the villages, not only without running water and electricity but have no provision for sanitation. It is not uncommon to see people relieve themselves close to the village well, because it is easier afterwards to perform the ritual ablutions. In the larger villages for some years now there have been in existence small buildings housing communal latrines. The anopheles mosquito can still live at an altitude of six thousand feet, and their larvae are to be found in all the rice fields. Flies swarm and are a real torment for passing travellers. In spring there are so many fleas that it is often preferable to take up one's lodging outside rather than inside a house. On the Persian frontier, ticks (*argus persicus*) suck one's blood at night. There are hospitals only in the large towns like Sulaymaniyah or Halebcha, but there are not enough beds. Doctors are scarce and there are none in the villages, where sometimes the government has opened a dispensary in the charge of a male nurse who distributes some medicaments, principally quinine and Epsom salts. And so one need not be surprised at the observation of an English doctor referring to Irak, but which can equally well apply to Kurdistan: "For me as a doctor, Irak is the most interesting country in the world, for it is a veritable paradise of diseases."

#### **Sickness and Injuries**

Life in Kurdistan is therefore no picnic, and various afflictions, maladies and injuries are of daily occurrence. The open-air life of the nomad, the risks of the hunt and the brawls among shepherds, keepers of vineyards and shopkeepers are frequently the origin of wounds and injuries. The Kurd is hot-tempered, and his dagger is always within reach. Danger also comes from animals: from the bites of dogs and wolves, snake-bites and stings

of scorpions, and wounds from the horns of rams and oxen. The handling of firearms also gives rise to accidents. Burns, too, are not uncommon.

The severity of the climate, and the primitive conditions of life expose the Kurds to all kinds of diseases. These naturally are the maladies arising from poverty and lack of hygiene. Under-nourishment is responsible for 50% of infant mortality, which is truly appalling, reaching a figure of 25% to 40% of the total death roll. This, however, is accepted fatalistically. For adults the expectation of life is about 30 years, and even as low as 28 according to some experts. Diseases of the eye — cataract, conjunctivitis and trachoma are very common. Blindness also takes its toll. Tuberculosis has many victims in contrast to syphilis which according to Mark Sykes was unknown at the beginning of this century. But a form of infantile syphilis, *bejel*, affects all the Arabs who, like the Kurds, live on the banks of the two Zab rivers and the Tigris. Malaria wreaks havoc, and a quarter of the mortality is attributed to it. But drastic measures have practically eliminated it from some regions of Irak and Kurdistan. In 1953 and in the following years an Italian doctor, Luigi Mara, of the World Health Organization, did marvels in this campaign to such a degree that the Kurds named him "Dr Malaria." Small-pox is sporadic and takes many victims. Many Kurds bear the marks of it on their faces. Intestinal infections are frequent and varied, and intestinal worms are also common. Diaphorrea and dysentery are to be feared, and foreigners passing through are liable to contract these disorders very quickly. They tend to be of the bacillary rather than the amoebic type. It is interesting to note that the few American and European journalists who ventured into Kurdistan at the time of the events of 1963-1964 were all afflicted to a greater or lesser degree by these maladies. Disorders of the liver are not unknown, and rheumatism is common. According to an official report the diseases which resulted in the greatest number of deaths in the liwa of Sulaymaniyah in 1952, were pneumonia 69, malaria 66,

anaemia 57, heart disease 34, inflammation of the kidneys 30, relapsing fever 23, tuberculosis 23, dysentery 17 and undiagnosed maladies 264. Although these statistics may not be entirely trustworthy, the magnitude of the figures is such that they cannot be altogether ignored.

### **Remedies**

There is nothing more individual than an illness even though epidemics may affect the mass of a community. Nevertheless, it is the community which provides the means of treating the individual illness. The Kurds have various procedures to adopt. In the first place there is the recourse to God and to the saints, His faithful servants, and then there are talismans and practices of a more or less magical nature. Empirical and natural remedies are also in common use, but at last the Kurd is beginning to call upon the services of qualified doctors.

Illness comes from God and from God comes the cure. Therefore it is He whom one approaches in the first instance, in this following the example of the Prophet himself. Indeed according to Aïsha, his favourite wife, when the Prophet was ailing in any part of his body, he repeated into the palm of his right hand the verse "Say, there is one God — etc." followed by the two suras of the Koran imploring assistance. He then massaged the affected part with the palm thus treated. To drink water in which has been moistened a piece of paper inscribed with a verse from the Koran is in daily use as a specific for all kinds of diseases. The visit to the shrine of the tomb of a holy personage is also a popular therapeutic practice. In this case it matters very little whether it is that of a Christian or a Moslem. Thus the tomb of Father Poldo (Leopoldo Soldini, O.P.), a Dominican missionary and excellent botanist, physician and experienced surgeon, is still resorted to today for curing fevers, by Kurds, Moslems, Christians and Jews. Parents take their children there bringing a small cake, an onion and a little salt which they leave as an offering to the "saint," as well as a goblet of water which is used

to wash the sick person, the vessel afterwards being broken on the tomb. The earth of certain holy places is efficacious against various aches and discomforts. Thus if one suffers from itch or other skin complaints one proceeds to the remedy as follows: one goes to the Yézidi *mazar* of Sheik Musa-Sor taking a jar of water which is sprinkled on the soil of the holy place; the earth thus moistened is scraped up and applied to the affected part. The vessel which has contained the water is then broken. Some sheiks are artful in exploiting the credulity of people. They keep in boxes the dust from different sanctuaries, each one having its own curative speciality: diseases of the eye, pains in the limbs, constipation and diahorrea. These remedies are taken in water for internal complaints and applied externally for the other aches and pains. They are especially effective if used after seven days of prayer and fasting. The Emir Ismaïl Beg Tcholo of the Yézidis, an unscrupulous man if ever there was one, did not hesitate to use his so-called healing powers. For example, he made poor dupes of women of the tribe of the Jemaldins, on the Turco-Iranian border, drink water that he had spat in. The sick were to be cured, the barren to conceive and give birth, and the forsaken wives were to recover their husbands' love. He would also give to women whose infants were dying, earth which he had obtained anywhere, claiming that it was from the shrine of the great Abd el-Qadir Gilani; and to allay the fever of the sick child, a red thread was to be tied round its neck or arm. He was quite cynically aware that these practices were all nonsensical. Warts, due to the contact of the feet with frog's urine, are cured in Bashiqa at the sanctuary of Melik-Meran, a specialist in this domain. All it is necessary to do for this cure is to throw into water from the spring a piece of straw wrapped in a rag. When the straw has decayed, the wart has disappeared.

But all these magical remedies are not the only ones employed by the Kurds. They are not unaware of natural, empirical remedies, of which the effects are certain. Every tribe has its doctor, *hekîmê kurmançî*, who has hereditary knowledge and

who knows by experience the curative properties of simples. These they collect, as also do the old women, experts in the art, and use them for infusions and compresses. In the XVIIIth century the first missionaries to Kurdistan were masters in this branch of medicine. Father Garzoni, who has been called "the father of Kurdology," has enriched our vocabulary on this subject, and Father Campanile has shown the uses to which the different plants are put by the Kurds. He tells us that galingale hardens the teeth; sage promotes perspiration and prevents apoplexy; grains of the agnus castus are effective for the menstrual periods of girls; the leaves of the anemone raise blisters and those of *trachyspermum copticum* render sterile women fertile; henbane produces sleep and gives tranquil dreams; dock leaves neutralize acidity and stimulate the appetite; the white water-lily cools heartburn; orchis root fortifies natural vigour. Vervain, which is rather rare, is effectively applied to the spleen instead of hemlock, which is unknown; chervil, also, rare, is a heart stimulant. Wormwood is plentiful and is used as a tonic for the stomach. The castor-oil plant also grows in abundance. Its oil is used in dyeing and also as an unction for persistent colds and for the colic. Southernwood if placed near water is supposed to have the virtue of banishing poisons from it. The shepherds use as a purgative the juice of *euphorbia* mixed with must. Sometimes for it is substituted bitter apple or grains of spurge, neither of which is entirely safe to use. Finally the mandrake, which must be gathered with all care, is renowned for its aphrodisiacal qualities.

But therapeutics are not solely concerned with medicinal plants. A French doctor, Dr Marquis has recorded that in 1948 he confirmed with his own eyes that in various places in Kurdistan some old women were clearly aware of the beneficial effects of the mould formed on bread (*penicillium glaucum*) on certain wounds and diseases, thus anticipating penicillin. Wounds are often cauterized, the cautery being a mixture of salt, yoke of egg, butter and honey applied to the wound at boiling heat. The wick

for draining the pus from wounds is not unknown. For gunshot wounds the cautery consists of herbs and gunpowder. To extract the bullet an incision is made in the flesh. If the bone is broken, the surgeon or bone-setter takes charge and sets it. Some of these practitioners are very skillful. A poultice of little fish kept until they are rotten is supposed to soften the bone in a badly set fracture, so permitting the operation to be repeated. For back-ache after a fall from a horse the hide of a freshly skinned goat is applied. It is then left until it putrifies — and effects the cure! Some amateur doctors are rather reckless. The Rev. Wigram met at Barzan a quack who suggested to a man suffering from trachoma that he would remove "the superfluous mould" from behind the eye-balls by passing a white hot spit across his temples! A Kurd who, to test his newly acquired gun, had fired it into the calf of his leg, filled the hole with a mixture of butter and cow-dung. A poultice of cow-dung and pitch is sometimes used to treat a burn.

But more and more, although with set-backs in certain communities, the Kurd is seeking the services of an official doctor or the nurse whom the government places at his disposition in the dispensaries of the big towns, or he goes to a private doctor. The doctor enjoys great prestige, but he must not rely on fair words and charm. He will be esteemed in proportion to the remedies he prescribes, and a remedy will be considered of little use if it is not unpleasant to take. The Kurdish temperament demands drastic medication. For example, the normal dose of Epsom salts has a coefficient of 3 for the Assyrians but 5 for the Kurds. Hypodermic injections are in great demand, for their effect is rapid. The tribal doctor was not paid unless his treatment was successful. In the government dispensaries of Irak, treatment is generally free, but the Kurd who has been cured is always grateful and gladly offers a gift to the doctor who has treated him. Many Kurds today both in Irak and Turkey study medicine in the universities and practise their skill for the benefit of their compatriots. Some of these doctors, as are the lawyers, are descen-

dants of the families of chiefs and in this way continue to retain their influence over their people.

### **The Path which All Must Tread**

Whatever the trust he may have reposed in amulets and talismans, whatever the virtues of the remedies which he has used, the Kurd like everyone must end by passing from life to death. Instead of joyful songs it is cries of lamentation which resound. For death with its accompanying funeral ceremonies the Kurds also have their own typical customs. The Kurd, extremely tough as he is, can face death with courage. As his proverbs express it: "He who knows life well has no fear of death," and again "When death presents his cup, put it to your lips with no regrets; it is only time which separates you from those you leave behind." But the Kurd prefers to die in battle rather than in bed, especially after a long illness. "Let death come, old age no!" "To die is to die, but why the suffering?"

Among the Yézidis the dying man must be assisted by his brother from The Other World, who, if need be, will help him across the grim river, should death tarry too long. The laying-out of the body is done quickly, sometimes by the professional corpse-washer, sometimes by the *pîr* (mullah). When it has been washed, the corpse is rubbed with aromatic plants and wrapped in one or several unstitched cotton shrouds. Formerly, especially in the case of a young man, a sort of puppet to represent him was set up in his room. This was called the "mourning tree," *darê şîné* and in the funeral cortège it was seated on the dead man's favourite horse. A light must be kept burning for three days in the funeral chamber.

The burial usually takes place on the day of death, unless the deceased has been assassinated. In this event, he will not be buried until his death has been avenged by the slaying of the murderer. The corpse is laid on a stretcher, and not in a coffin, and in this manner is borne to the cemetery by friends. The cortège is made up of relations and friends. The women, who

following an old pagan custom lament vociferously, are not excluded. If it is an important person, his horse draped with black follows him to his last resting place. Babies are wrapped up and rolled in a prayer mat. A chicken is beheaded and the head buried with the infant to avert from the family other occasions of mourning.

The corpse is placed on the right side in the grave with the face looking towards Mecca. The grave is dug to about the depth of a man's height. The mullah then recites the *Talqin*. Dirges, *sin*, often are also chanted and sometimes a funeral oration in praise of the deceased is delivered. A heap of stone *şkêr*, is piled up, in the place where someone has been killed and the passers-by add stones to it to keep alive the memory of the dead man.

The cemeteries, *gorîstan*, are generally situated outside towns or villages on a hill. It is customary to plant them with trees especially Judas trees (*cercis siliquastrum*) beneath which the dead take their rest, so that the cemeteries have nothing gloomy about them, quite the contrary. The tombs vary with the region. A cupola is erected over the graves of the wealthy, but usually two stones, *kêl*, standing at either end of the grave are the sole ornaments. There are hardly any inscriptions. However, the Yézidis of Sheikan sometimes indicate in Arabic that such and such a one has departed this life in the mercy of Allah on a certain date. Usually there are engraved designs — daggers, guns, tools, eagles or circles representing the sun if the grave is a man's, particularly a warrior's. In memory of a woman there are carvings of flowers, combs and bracelets. There are some who profess so see in these designs survivals of the Zoroastrian cult. Sometimes little holes are made in the grave and filled with water, so that birds and animals may drink to the departed. Very often, as many travellers have remarked, a widow or a fiancée will sacrifice her tresses which she hangs on the tombstone as a token of fidelity and affection towards the one she has lost. An iron hand is fixed to the tomb of a holy man perhaps symbolizing the handing on of his standard to the next generation. Some sects are



remarkable for their special ways of honouring the dead. Thus there exists among the Sendjabi Kurds a cemetery with very curious sculptures representing the dead. For example, one can see a woman holding two infants by the hand or a Kurd with his gun surrounded by moufflons and gazelles. The Bahkhtyaris erect a statue of a lion on the tomb of a brave man. Madame Chaghinian in her book *Across Soviet Armenia* (1952) relates how she was surprised to find in the Yézidi village of Kandaksaz "tall silhouettes of huge horses of all colours, bronze, red, black, white. They were on pedestals and were in the act of galloping with the fore and hind hooves flexed towards each other so as to form the figure eight; the head on taut reins was pulled down so as to rest on the chest; the tails were raised and curved. These extraordinary statues gave a remarkable impression of energy and strength." These were Kurdish tombs, but this form of commemoration, which was still in existence at that time in Kurdish and other villages, has now disappeared. In contrast, the graves of women had only "simple slabs with a carved design representing a cradle." All this gave to these old cemeteries "a strange and fantastic atmosphere."

Mourning, *sin*, in theory lasts a year. During the first three months so as to receive visits of condolence, *serxwesidan*, the relatives do not leave the house. The formulas used on these occasions express submission to God's will and wishes of long and happy life for those who remain here below. For example: "May you have good health" or "May God rejoice your heart." To which is replied: "May God spare you," "May God grant you long life," "May you at least preserve your health." If it is a son who has died: "May God supply his place!" and other expressions of the kind. Of course, with the Kurds of Soviet Armenia all allusions to religion have been abolished. The formulas seem rather cold, as for example: "The team of workers of the newspaper *The New Way* offers its condolences to X, a worker on the editorial staff, on the occasion of the decease of his uncle Y," or again: "V, Y and Z offer their condolences to A, B and C on the

the expressions of sympathy which appear in print. It would not, however, be at all surprising if verbal condolences still retained something of the traditional flavour.

During the period of mourning or *sîn* there is no participation in any festival. Everything red is removed from the house. Even the neighbours of the bereaved family try to avoid cooking the dish of rice of which the Kurds are so fond. Mourning meals are served on the third, seventh and fortieth days. On that day a sheep is slaughtered on the grave and the flesh is distributed to the passers-by. On the anniversary of the death the whole village joins in love-feasts. The Yébidis on the eve of *newrûz* walk round the cemetery, while musicians playing a flute and a tambourine stop before each grave for some ten minutes during which time the women lament and beat their breasts. Food is left on each tomb and afterwards distributed to the poor and those passing by. The Kurdish women like to visit the cemetery on Thursday evenings or on Fridays. Those who have suffered a recent bereavement give way to grief and lamentations. Those visits to the tombs of relatives continue for five years after which the grave is forgotten, but those of young children cease to be visited after a shorter period.

## CHAPTER VIII

# The Kurds under the Crescent

It is appropriate to begin here with an explanation of the religion of the Kurds. The Kurds, as is known, constitute an important (nine to ten millions at least) but not well known portion of the Moslem world divided between Shiite Iran, more or less secularized Turkey, Sunnite Iraq and Syria. It is naturally to be expected that at this cross-roads of Islam the Kurdish religion would have special characteristics, not widely known, which distinguish it from that of the neighbouring peoples. It may too be pointed out that in Kurdish Irak and Iran there are some hundreds of villages of Christians, for the greater part Assyrians, who in dress and customs are practically identical with the Kurds. The Assyrians, apart from their own language, all speak Kurdish, and their tribes before the First World War joined in the alliances and the conflicts of Kurdish tribes.

### From Paganism to Islam

The religion of the country which today we call Kurdistan and which in the past was that of the Medes was Magianism. The inscription on the tomb of Darius at Bisutun, known to the Persians today as Naqsh-i Rostam recalls the power of the great God Ahura-Mazda, the "Wise Lord," by whose grace Darius was enabled to conquer the many peoples mentioned in the inscription. This god was not the only one. There were other divinities: Mithra, the god of the sun and of redemption, and Anahita, goddess of the waters, of fertility and procreation. The forces of nature were also worshipped, the worship being celebrated with bloody sacrifices which could not be offered without the aid of the Magi. The brotherhood of the Magi, probably of Median origin, enjoyed certain political and especially religious privileges. They recognized two principles — Good and Evil i.e. Ahura-Mazda or Ormezd and Ahriman. They practised the exposure of corpses and prepared an intoxicating drink, *haoma*, which was used in the religious ceremonies of the Persians. They celebrated their rites in the open air, but they also

had some temples in the form of square towers with a single storey of one room where the Magi tended the sacred fire.

The Mazdian religion was reformed during the period of the Achemenians by Zarathustra or Zoroaster. The Kurds knew him as *Zerdest*. This prophet of ancient Iran, according to some authorities, was born probably in the country of Mukri in the heart of Kurdistan in 660 B.C. and lived until about 583. The doctrine of Zoroaster is preserved in the *Gâthâs* contained in the *Avesta*, the sacred book of the Parsees. These are poetical works which transmit the doctrines of the reformer. Blood sacrifices were rejected and the use of *haoma*, but the sacrifice of fire was retained as "a symbol of justice and the struggle against the forces of Evil." Every man had to choose between light and darkness, Good and Evil, Ormezd and Ahriman. Kind treatment of animals was enjoined. "Good thoughts, good words, good works — there is the triad which comprises Zoroastrian morality." Zoroastrianism became the official Persian religion under the Sassanians (224-652) until it was supplanted by Islam.

But this change did not come about without conflicts. Following the occupation of Tikrit and Hulwan in 637, Islam made contact with Kurdistan. Sa'ad bin Abi Wakkas marched on Mosul, where the Kurdish districts were occupied as well as al-Mardj, Ba-Nuhadra, Hibtûn, Dasen etc. But these victories did not by any means bring the whole country under Islam. The troops of Caliph Omar clashed with the Kurds of Ahwas, and after considerable bloodshed they took possession of Shahrizor in 643 and of Berud and Balasjan in 645. The memory of this violent and more or less brutal conversion is evoked in a text said to be ancient but on the authenticity of which doubts have been cast of late (Mackenzie):

The temples of Ormezd lie in ruins, the fires are quenched  
 The greatest of chiefs has fled and is in hiding  
 The cruel Arabs have routed the Kurds  
 They have fled to the bounds of Shahrizor  
 Mothers and maids are captives.

And the heroes have been in ambush basely slain.  
The law of Zerdeht has lost its power,  
Ormezd with pity on no one looks.

The fall of the Sassanian dynasty (652) furthered the decline of the religion of the King of Kings and of his subjects, and many things of social and political import served as pretexts for the change from the religion of the Fire Worshipers to that of the conquering invaders. At Surdash in Irak there can still be seen the ruins of the castle of King Julindi who claimed to have allied himself with the Devil in an attempt to throw back the armies of the Caliph Ali. Under the rule of the Omayyads, al-Hajjâdy in 708 was to send a punitive expedition against the Kurds who had sacked Fars. But these same Kurds were to support the Caliph Merwan II (744-750), whose mother was a Kurd, against the Kharijites. The Kurds, a good number of whom had turned Moslem but not a majority, more than once revolted against the armies of the Caliphs.

In 839 the Kurd Jafar bin Fahirjis, defeated at first at Ba-Baghas, withdrew to the mountain of Dasem where he defied the troops of the Caliph al-Moutasim. In 866, the Kurds of Mosul joined the Kharijite Musawir. In 894, they took the side of the Arab Hamdan bin Hamdun, who had taken possession of Mosul. But in 906 Muhammed bin Bilal of the Kurdish tribe of the Hadhbani laid waste the district of Nineveh, but was finally driven back and defeated, along with the Humaidi and the inhabitants of Jebel Dasen, by Abdullah bin Hamdan. In 940 the adventurer Daisam bin Ibrahim, half Kurdish on his mother's side, used exclusively Kurdish troops for his expeditions into Azerbaijan. From all these facts, it can be seen that at the beginning of their conversion to Islam, the Kurds on the whole favoured Kharijisms and some of them even embraced Shiaism. Nevertheless, in the Xth and XIth centuries the Kurds went over completely to Islam and thenceforth can be considered as Moslems, for the greater part Sunnites.

### The Five Pillars of Islam and the Kurds

As orthodox Moslems the Kurds adhere to the principles of the school of canon law, *figh*, of Shafei (767-820). This school rejects the principle of personal opinion and its secondary motivations of preference and depends on the general agreement, *ijma'*, not only of the doctors of Medina, but of all the doctors living at any given epoch. This school, therefore, leaves elucidation of doctrine always open. It is through this principle of consensus of belief referred to texts of the Koran and of the Sunna that reasoning from analogy, *qiyas*, must operate.

Once having become Moslems, the Kurds took their new faith seriously. They created many Koranic schools, *medresa* and many *ulema* arose who won fame in theology, law, science and history. To mention only two, there was Mewlana Muhyi al-din al-Aklati who had his share in the building of the observatory of Maragha, and Ibn al-Salâh al-Shahrazori, the author of a very famous theological work on the *hadith*, who inaugurated the *medresa* of Ashrafiya or School of Traditions founded in Damascus (630). The encyclopaedist Haji Khalifa (1658) affirms that the sciences were held in honour by the Ottoman Turks until the epoch of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566), after which, he writes, it was only "in the lands of the Kurds that philosophy and natural science were still fostered." We have proof of this in the library of more than 2,000 manuscripts which Sultan Hussein, Emir of Bahdinan (1576), kept in the school of Qahban at Amadia and in the still more precious collection of Abdal Khan, prince of Bitlis, which was sold by auction in 1655 because he had refused homage to the Wali of Van appointed by the Sultan. It is then not to be wondered at that Kurdistan should have contributed a large number of Sheiks al-Islam, official muftis of Istanbul and of the Sultan himself. Even up until today the famous Moslem university of al-Azhar of Cairo has always included Kurds on its academic staff.

If such is the elite, what of the masses?

The daily life of the Kurd is permeated with Islam, and this becomes apparent as soon as he opens his mouth. Whether in greetings or in the expression of a wish, God is always invoked, either by the Arabic word Allah, or the Kurdish, *Xwedê*. Two proverbs may be quoted which are expressive of a noble trust in Providence: "God builds the nest for the blind bird," and "God provides food for the guest." A host of other examples could be quoted in which picturesque imagery and piety are equally mingled. However, there always exists the possibility that such utterances are merely habitual and meaningless, for the Kurds of Soviet Armenia in an edition of their collected legends have not purged them of expressions of this kind.

To aid the Kurds in the practice of their religion and to fortify their faith there have been composed in Kurdish little books of instruction, such as the long poem on Moslem prayer by an unknown author of Botan about 1783; the Summary of the beliefs of Islam by Sheik Abdullah of Zehri, who died about 1820; lessons in Canon Law or *shari'a* by Emir Kamiran Bedir Khan in 1938. The same author has translated, into Kurdish, several hundred *hadith* and especially the Koran which has been published only partially. The review "Kurdistan" of Teheran has also recently published (1959-61) articles on fasting and the conformity of Islam to the laws of human nature.

Having received instruction in his religious duties, the Kurd has only to put them into practice. The profession of faith, *shahâda*, proper to the Moslem presents no difficulty. The ritual prayer, *nimêj*, accompanied by prostrations must be offered five times daily wherever one happens to be. The individual Kurd is faithful to this ordinance and even some women in so far as the conditions of modern life permit it. The little girls hardly pray at all. On Fridays, the midday prayer in the Mosque attended by the faithful assumes a special solemnity. It is only in the more important towns that there are cathedral-mosques, *cami*; the villages have only a small mosque, *mizgeft*. The Friday

holiday facilitates attendance at this midday prayer. Lawfully sanctioned alms-giving, *zekat*, is a duty generously fulfilled by every Kurd who can do so. This perhaps explains the large number of beggars to be found in Moslem countries. The fast, *roji*, of Ramadan is on the whole well observed. The pilgrimage to Mecca ought to be made at least once in a lifetime. At the time of the Sultan Abd al-Hamid (1876-1908) it was the Kurds who were entrusted with the task of policing the routes on the way to Mecca, but today there are relatively few Kurds who have made the pilgrimage. At least there are not many who have the title of *Haci*. The Kurdish women who have made the journey to the holy place afterwards always keep their heads covered, even in the presence of their husbands.

These practices constitute the Five Pillars of Islam, but there are others equally binding on the faithful. Thus the Kurd always has his sons circumcised. If it is abhorrent to the Kurds, as it is to the Assyrians, to eat pork, some of them have no scruples in drinking wine occasionally, and especially arrack. Among some sects such as the Yézidis wine is allowed. The various ritual ablutions are strictly observed. It is said jokingly of a man given to excessive sexual intercourse that he makes great use of the baths. A woman during menstruation may not enter a sacred place, mosque or place of pilgrimage nor even touch the Koran. This, indeed, is the reason that the volume is kept in the bedroom hung in a special satchet.

The birthday of the Prophet has been celebrated by the Kurds since ancient times and goes as far back as Saladin. It is known that Mozafer al-din Kokburi, brother-in-law of Saladin, shed on it a special lustre. In order to give the Kurds the opportunity of recollecting in a direct, graphic and vivid form the miracles of the Prophet, many sheiks and mullahs have composed long religious poems in Kurdish called *mewlûd* which are sung or recited on the occasion of this festival. Some of these are old and well-known like the poem of Mela Baté (1417-1459), but there are others of quite recent date like those of Osman



Effendi (1900), Ehmed Ramez (1904), Sheik Mohamed Khal of Sulaymaniyah (1937) and of Mullah Rachid Mufti of Erbil (1952). It may be said that every year sees new productions of this kind, but many remain unpublished. It has to be admitted, however, that all these religious practices are often prevented by the conditions of modern life, and the Kurd who is no longer in his own country but in a foreign environment will eat during Ramadan, and if the occasion offers will take alcoholic drinks. Some, however, manage to remain faithful. But it has also to be recognized that the religious practices, devotion and even the faith of Islam itself have declined among advanced Kurds today, particularly if they live abroad.

### **Mysticism in Kurdistan**

The liturgical use of Arabic is certainly a handicap for the mass of the people usually with little education, and religious practices tend to degenerate into mere formalism. The result of this is that the devout Kurd will try to compensate for it, not through the official Moslem ceremonies, of which he understands little, but in the mystical teachings of the Sufi brotherhoods, which have taken root so rapidly in Kurdistan where they have a large following particularly among the lower classes.

Sufism made its appearance quite early among the Kurds. Already in the XIIth century it was in full vigour. The historian Muqaddasi, who visited Kurdistan about 980, discovered forty Sufis who wore hair shirts and subsisted on acorns. An old converted Kurdish brigand became the spiritual director of a Kurd of Qalmini, Abul Wafa al-Hulwani (some time after 1110), who was the first to receive in Irak the title of Tadj al-Arifin. He collected forty disciples of whom seventeen were princes. But there were many other Sufis in Kurdistan at this time, and the Moslem hagiographers record a large number. It is even possible that it was the presence of these bands of mystics in the Kurdish mountains which attracted Sheik Adi to settle in the mountains of Hakkari. He was the sheik who unknowingly and most unwill-

ingly was of Yézidi origin as will be seen hereafter.

These pious Moslems were not satisfied with learning the Koran by heart and deducing from it a theology, *kalâm*, nor with depending upon Koranic law, *fiqh*, and drawing from it practical applications; they wanted to get away from these abstract and purely legalistic studies to turn to meditation and through aspiration to the highest spiritual virtues attain to ecstasy and union with God. They explained their mystical theories and their methods of asceticism in numerous poems which only the initiates could understand. These poems were, of course, allegorical, but there is apparent in them something of purely human feeling and love directed towards an earthly creature who shares with God the passionate invocations of the poet. The same must be true of the symbolism of wine where no doubt the purple-stained cup stands for spiritual intoxication, but in the employment of the vocabulary of the tavern certainly some of the devotees have in mind literal drunkenness rather than its metaphorical counterpart.

In the schools of mysticism "the relationship of master and disciple familiar in other disciplines, presently developed into the characteristic Sufi counterpart of elder sheik, *pîr* and disciple, *murid*, *shagerd*; and convents were founded and endowed where a celebrated saint would reside with a group of his followers, who studied under him and worshipped with him for a longer or shorter period. Initiation into the Sufi mysteries was marked by the investiture of a special frock *khirqâ*, symbolising this acceptance of a tradition of Divine Service going back stage by stage to the Prophet" (Arberry). In the XIIth century the convents united in one huge confraternity, *tariqa*, recognizing a common master and practising a common discipline and ritual. Today the Order is presided over from generation to generation by the successor *Khalifa*, of the founder whose rule is accepted by the chiefs of the subsidiary branches of the various centres. A restricted minority of professionals reside in houses dedicated to teaching and to the practice

of the cult, *Khâneqa* or *Tekké*; the great majority is composed of the simple faithful or *mourids* living in the world, who formally attend from time to time the ritual ceremonies of the order. It is by ritualistic details rather than by doctrine that the different brotherhoods are differentiated.

The first of these Orders was the Qadiriya founded by the Kurd Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (1078-1166) which in a short time established itself among the Kurds. Today the Qadiris are still numerous. Some of the families of their sheiks such as the Talabani at Kirkuk and the Berifki at Amadia are famous and powerful. The Superior General in Baghdad has the title of Naqib al-Ashraf.

The second Order, the Naqshbendi founded by Beha al-din of Bokhara (1317-1389) spread rather late to Kurdistan, and that it at length reached Kurdistan, was thanks to Mewlana Khalid, a poor Kurd of the tribe Jaff, born at Qara Dagh in 1779. As the result of a dream, he made the pilgrimage to Mecca where he encountered a dervish killing lice, just as he had seen him in the dream, who told him to go to Delhi where he would find the way to salvation. In effect he went to the school of Sheik Abdullah who initiated him into the Order of Naqshbendi. He then returned to Sulaymaniyah, his country' about 1808. There he met with much opposition from the other sheiks, but he succeeded through his preaching in attracting to his *Tariqa* members of the Qadiriya and today the Naqshbendi sheiks are more numerous and generally more influential than those of the Qadiri. Amongst the most powerful families are to be noted those of the sheiks of Shamsedin or Zehri, of Tawilé and of Barzan. The rivalry between the two Orders does not always confine itself to speculative questions but sometimes leads to complications which result in real conflicts.

The Order of the Tijani more recent and founded in North Africa by Ahmed al-Tijani (1737-1815) had only a few followers among the Kurds of Anatolia. Like the other Orders in Turkey.

it has suffered from the effects of the secularizing policy of Ataturk.

The influence of the sheiks on the Kurdish population, primitive and lacking in resources as it is, is almost incredible and the blind trust reposed in their sheiks by the humble *mourid* transcends the bounds of all common reason. Mr Edmonds remarks that, either because of the absence of any high authority in the neighbourhood or owing to lack of instruction, the uneducated members of Naqshbendi in Kurdistan seemed to be particularly given to peculiar eccentricities.

However this may be, it is to be feared that ill-disposed sheiks take advantage of the credulity of their disciples to exploit them for their own ends. If occasionally some fanatical movement develops among the Kurds, it is their sheiks who have provoked it. Thus there was the call to a Holy War or Jihad in the district of Ourmia at the time of the First World War. It will also be noticed that most of the later insurrectionary movements in Turkey and in Irak have been stirred up by the sheiks, nearly all Naqshbendi. This also applies to Sheiks Saïd of Piran, Mahmoud of Sulaymaniyah and Ahmed of Barzan. Political rather than religious interests play the greater part in such movements.

It appears too that the mystical impulse has lost its original force and spiritual energy. One of the later Sufi classical writers is a Kurd from Erbil, who died in 1904, Sheik Muhammed Emin al-Kurdi al-Shafei al-Naqshbendi. He wrote a *Tanwir al-Qulûb*, "Illumination of the Heart," which in 1929 went into a sixth edition in Cairo. It is a disillusionment to read the account which this sheik gives of the manner in which the cult *dhikr qalbi* is practiced. Arberry, who summarizes the text, tells us that at this point Sufism had lost its sway over the hearts and minds of serious and cultivated people. Because of the lack of intellectual discipline and clearly defined doctrine it is not uncommon to see arising in an uneducated and mentally impressionable community eccentric fanatics who believe they have a mission to reform religion and society. Their brief career often ends unhappily.

One has only to mention the sect of *Haqqa* of the sheiks of Topzawa and of Sergalu in Irak, who are accused, albeit wrongly, of nudism and immorality.

### **Kurdish Dissenters from Islam**

Departures from Sufi beliefs and practices gave rise to certain aberrant sects who ended by breaking away from Islam, and in the process have suffered such changes that it is difficult to determine their real character and affiliations.

The most original of these dissident sects is that of the Yézidis or Devil Worshipers, as they are sometimes called, which is entirely Kurdish. They number today just about 50,000 and dwell in Irak in the wooded valleys of the Sheikan and the mountains of Sinjar. In Syria they are to be found in some villages of Jezireh and in about a score of villages in the Jebel Sim'an. The Kurds in the regions of Erivan and Tiflis in the U.S.S.R. are also of Yézidi origin. Since this religion is secret, all sorts of theories have been advanced to explain it: it represents Zoroastrian dualism, Mithraism, primitive Kurdish paganism, or it is an offshoot from Christianity. The fact is that the Yézidis derive directly from Islam. To prove this, it is hardly necessary to go deeply into their religious ideas; one has only to observe their external customs and usages. The essential Moslem character of these is apparent in the nomenclature, the calendar, the prohibition against representing the human figure, circumcision etc. To these may be added the sacrifice of animals, the cult of the saints, and the pilgrimage to the tomb of Sheik Adi, an obvious imitation of the pilgrimage to Mecca. At this tomb are celebrated the Moslem rites of the *Hajaj* with the use of Arabic names, most unusual among the Kurds. Moreover, the whole atmosphere is Sufi; the saints who are venerated are well-known Sufis, the religious hierarchy is Sufi, and the prayers and other religious texts show a striking similarity in vocabulary and thought to Sufi mysticism. Affinities with the "frenzied" mysticism of Islam are apparent in the far-fetched ideas on the

origin of the world and of man, incarnation and metempsychosis, and especially the final rehabilitation of Iblis from which comes their name, incidentally misleading, of Devil Worshipers. It is therefore plain that it is only necessary to take out the joining stones of Islam and its sects to find Yézidism in its integrity.

But how did the Yézidis, the founder of whose faith was a genuine Moslem, come to accept such departures from the faith of Islam? The process was a gradual one. The grand-nephew of the founder of the *zaouia*, Shams al-din Hasan (1197-1246) opened the way to heresy. Then his followers split into two branches: one emigrated to Syria and Egypt *Qarafa* and remained for a long time in the orthodox faith of Islam under the name of "Adawiyya"; the other remained in Mesopotamia on the eastern side of the Tigris where it lost not only all intellectual contact with the disciples of Muhammed but soon separated from them doctrinally until in the end open hostility developed between them. From the XVIIth century onwards periodical massacres only had the effect of confirming the Yézidis in practices and beliefs which were becoming more and more strange and mysterious. It may therefore be said in conclusion that if the Yézidis have ceased to be Moslems, it cannot be denied that they were so originally.

While the Yézidis originate with the Sunnite Sufis, the partisans of the Caliph Yézid I (680-683), another Kurdish sect, the Ahl-é-Haqq, carried to extremes the Shiite theories. This sect probably arose in Luristan and was introduced into the region of Shahrizor-Hewraman towards the middle of the XIth century by Mubarak Shah Baba Khosin. It was he who included among his seven companions a woman, Fatima, the slender, the famous Bibi Fatima, sister of the famous poet Baba Tahir of Hamadan (935-1010). This sect is supposed to have been reformed by Sultan Ishak or Sohak, son of Sheik Isé Barzandji and of Dayirak Khanim, daughter of Mir Muhammed, chief of the Jaffs. The Sultan Sohak built in 1316 a *niyaz-khana* or place for votive offerings at Hewraman and fixed his headquarters at Perdiver.

His entourage consisted of three groups of seven persons each: the Seven Eternal Ones, the Seven Sinless Ones, and the Seven Vicars, who were chosen from among the eighty-two Elders to be Guides or *Dalil*. The present Seyids of Kakaï in Irak are descendants of these holy people.

The Ahl-é-Haqq hold Ali, whom they regard as divine, in great veneration as also his descendants the Imams. Notwithstanding, they are on good terms with the Sunnites. They also venerate Baba Yadgar (1596) whose tomb is an object of pilgrimage. They invoke Moses, Elias, Jesus and especially David. They believe in seven successive manifestations of the Deity, who appears attended by four or five angels. They also believe in metempsychosis, as do the Yézidis and the Druses. This sect occupies the Gorani villages on the road Khaniquin-Kermanshah. The tribes of Luristan also belong to the sect and in particular the Dulfans who "at the time of the great festival of the winter solstice, when they are intoxicated with alcohol and religious frenzy walk on fire without suffering the least ill effects." The Kakaï of Irak occupy eighteen villages in the liwa of Kirkuk and a dozen villages in each of the *kazas* of Khaniquin and Kasr-i-Shirin.

The Yézidis live principally in Irak, the Ahl-é-Haqq Kurds on the Irak-Persian border, while the Kizilbash, another heterodox sect, are to be met with mainly in Anatolia, in the provinces of Siwas, Diarbekir and Kharpout. They speak the Zaza dialect, and as a natural bastion they have the mountains of Dersim where their spiritual chief resides. They probably number about a million. The Turks include with them other heretics, such as the Nosairis and the Yézidis with whom they have no connection: but the Kizilbash, Red Heads, being very extreme Shiites call themselves Alewi, Worshipers of Ali. They account as intermediaries between God and Man five angels, twelve Ministers of God and forty Prophets, one of whom is Salman, known also to the Ahl-é-Haqq sect. Their religious chiefs, who are responsible for instruction and the collection of tribute, are the *Dede*, Seyid.

A *murshid* visits them once a year for religious ceremonies, which resemble the Holy Communion, and for the expounding of doctrine. They observe twelve days of fasting in honour of the twelve Imams and three other days before the feast of Khidir. In theory they must pray once a day. They are believed to worship the sun at its rising and setting, to venerate fire and to offer sacrifices at the sources of rivers. They have no special sacred book, but they hold in reverence the Thora, the Gospel and the Koran.

The information given by travellers concerning the Kizilbash is rather confused and sometimes contradictory, perhaps on account of the existence among them of several different sub-sects. Some claim to have discovered in their cult Christian beliefs and practices. On the other hand, they have still more in common with the Bektakshi, the only dervish Order in Turkey which openly professes Shi'ism. It is worthy of note that both the one and the other share many of the same places of pilgrimage.

Along with these sects, which are of a certain importance, there are also some smaller dissident groups differing more or less from one another, but with practices in common and remarkable for their extreme Shiites tendencies. They may be briefly noticed. There are the Shabaks in the neighbourhood of Mosul who number some 10,000 and appear to be the connecting link between the Yézidis and the Shiites extremists. Then there are the Sarli on the banks of the river Zab, who are connected with the Kakaï as are also the Bajorani who inhabit the same parts and the districts of the Persian frontier. Lastly there are the Shemsiyé so called because they worship the sun. These are known to have been in existence at Mardin at the beginning of the XIXth century, but seem to have completely disappeared. It is probable that they have become Jacobite Christians, at least to outward appearances.



## CHAPTER IX

### On the Fringes of Religion: Superstitions

In the preceding chapters more than once there have been described customs associated with birth, marriage and other festive occasions, which have no connection with religion and yet are scrupulously observed by the mass of the people as if indeed they were sacred rites. If it is a fact that the sects of which we have spoken have degenerated and have departed from orthodox Islam, it is perhaps because they allowed their followers too much liberty in religious practices in which, what one may call for want of a better term, magic or sorcery plays a part. The Kurd is not particularly religious, but many travellers are in agreement that he is superstitious. This is shown in widespread superstitious beliefs, in the universal use of amulets and talismans, in magical usages and in curious rites and customs which are believed by some authorities to be survivals of pagan cults.

#### Superstitious Beliefs

The Kurd, who is often a poet, is impressed by the natural beauty which surrounds him. But if he finds this beautiful, it is because it is peopled by denizens of the other world who animate it: the fairies, *péri*, who haunt the mountain springs. As for the jinns, everyone believes in them, the Assyrians as well as the Kurds and Yézidis. There are good ones and evil ones. They also have their own religion. The benevolent, and sometimes mocking, jinns wear a red cap which renders them invisible, and roam about in the depths of valleys; the malevolent spirits hide in the hollows of the rocks and in the recesses of caverns. Some daring souls out of curiosity have tried to penetrate these retreats but have emerged madmen, a consequence of course to be expected. The threshold of the house is a haunt beloved of the jinns, and one must be careful not to spill hot water there lest it harm them. Although the jinns are composed of fire, they must eat like men in order to live. A Yézidi sheik of Sinjar has succeeded in attracting a jinn who follows him about everywhere. An

Assyrian lady of Tal has done likewise with a jinn, who thereafter has assisted her in the housework. Some jinns are united in marriage with ghouls. History assures us that the Emir Muhammed, Prince of Botan, who died in 1750, married a fairy by whom he had several children. A Yézidi fakir of Sinjar more recently had the same experience, but this turned out badly for he went mad. Some sheiks are famous for the power which they have over the jinns, and it is to them that one repairs for exorcisms and talismans.

The belief in ghosts and phantoms of the night is universal and so deeply rooted in some that it has driven them crazy. Dreams also make a strong impression on the imagination and are most firmly believed in. Some find in them a light which reveals to them their future; others crazed, like Sheik Gamo the Yézidi, are impelled by them to commit suicide. The *Koçek* Yézidis are specialists in the interpretation of dreams, which, of course, gives them a great ascendancy over the simple masses.

One cannot doubt the existence of sacred animals. Some are respected, such as the cock who causes the sun to rise and brings good luck to the newly-married pair, or the peacock who, for the Yézidis, represents the angel of light. On the other hand, there are those who are feared, like the serpent who appears so often in Kurdish tales. Also, there are to be found among the Yézidis not only snake charmers but snake swallows, and there are also the sheiks of the family of Sheik Mend who are experts in catching snakes and taming them. Others of the family of Umar Mandan, near the Kirkuk-Taqtaq road, have the gift of curing snake-bite. Another mysterious creature to the Kurds is the chameleon, which they call *mara ezman*, serpent of the sky. They maintain that no one has ever seen this animal eat, drink, sleep or perform the least action. They believe it is a beast which was born in the sky and one day fell down. The fact that this reptile can change colour only confirms them in their beliefs about it.

There are also to be found in Kurdistan mysterious plants

possessing strange powers. First of all comes the mandrake, well known even in the Bible, as an aphrodisiac. "It is a plant which shines at night and seems to have silver leaves. As one approaches it it draws itself into the ground and hides from the person who is looking for it. It is said that it will remain still if a few drops of a woman's urine are sprinkled on it. To render it immobile certain superstitious rites are performed at a fixed distance away from it. Its leaves are rather like those of the vine, and the root is a perfect likeness of the body of a man or woman; it is flesh-coloured. The Kurds say that when it is being pulled up the root whistles like the wind, and the person who is uprooting it drops dead. To avoid this peril the Kurds begin by digging around it; then they attach one end of a cord to the root and the other is tied round the neck of a dog or goat. Then they get away as far as possible and from a distance they throw stones at the animal which in its efforts to escape pulls up the root and then falls dead" (Campanile). It is also said that in the mountains there exists a wonderful herb which has the power of instantaneously blinding anyone who inhales its perfume. Close to it there grows another herb which is an antidote.

Some natural phenomena are also explained according to strange beliefs. Everyone knows in Kurdistan, as also do the Bedouins, that an eclipse of the moon is caused by a huge whale or a dragon who is trying to swallow it. To chase away this evil monster it is necessary to make as much noise as possible by firing off guns and beating on all the copper saucepans available. Earthquakes are due to the fact that the earth rests on the back of a red bull who from time to time pricks up his ears or swishes his tail. There is, however, another school of thought that says that a fly circles round the bull and that when it approaches an eye, the bull blinks and the earth trembles. If one day the fly should light on the bull's back, he will shake himself and the whole world will be destroyed. It is God who sends the rain employing Solomon, the ruler over all animals, as His intermediary. Solomon conveys the order to Humāï, a fabulous bird

like the Phoenix, who summons all the birds together and orders them to collect water from the sea or the ocean, to rise into the air and sprinkle the place concerned. If there are big and small rain-drops, this is because the birds are not all of the same size. "When I look at the sky, it reminds me that the Kurds have the most extraordinary ideas about the heavenly bodies and all natural phenomena. For them the moon and the sun are brother and sister in eternal pursuit of each other. The moon is the brother of the sun with whom he is in love (sic). Eclipses of the sun are caused by this coquettish sister who hides her face from her dear brother so that he may desire all the more to see it again. The Kurds also believe that each man has his own star shining in the heavens, which dies when he dies. They regard eclipses and comets as presaging misfortune" (Madame Chantre).

Women especially believe in fortune-telling, *déri*, and have complete confidence in the gipsy women who brazenly manipulate the shoulder-blades of sheep, sand, and have recourse to other methods of divination.

But if all the superstitious beliefs, that which seems most deeply rooted is belief in the evil eye. Like all Orientals, Kurdish women fear the evil eye, but contrary to the belief generally held in the East they do not consider blue eyes to be maleficent, and they have a proverb: "The yellow eye is the evil eye." Those who are most exposed to this evil influence are undoubtedly children and women in childbed. Similarly a woman who has given birth less than forty days beforehand should not visit another woman who has just had a child for she will consider such a visit to be harmful. So too, if two women who have given birth less than forty days before, should happen to meet outside, they must exchange needles and babies and then return home without one preceding the other.

### **Amulets and Talismans**

Therefore, especially as a defence against the evil eye and as an insurance against sorcery or, on the other hand, to attract

good luck, it is necessary to have recourse to the mysterious powers of nature — the spirits — by means of amulets, of which, it may be imagined, the efficacy has been proved.

Some amulets are real jewels the work of craftsmen of the bazaar and mounted in necklaces, *bermura* and *milwanka*. Their protective virtue resides in their colour (blue), their shape (shells) their sound (little bells) or their composition (cornelian, agate, onyx). But there are also talismans sewn up in sachets which are manufactured for a monetary consideration by wandering pedlars, who, apart from this activity, have little to recommend them. These talismans consist of pieces of paper with little squares in red ink in which the "magician" has inscribed figures and words. On the other side of the paper there are drawings, a sabre for example, or simply red dots. The papers are folded in triangles. Often a needle broken in two is put inside. The whole is enclosed in a little sachet. If some hairs of a married man are added, his wife can be sure of winning his love. Some of these talismans, *gulabend*, are a protection against bullets. It need hardly be said that some sheiks are experts in the manufacture of talismans designed to produce this or that result.

Anything or almost anything can serve as an amulet. It is only necessary that it be something not in general use, as for example, the teeth of a wolf, mandrake root, pieces of certain woods or certain stones, pearls and especially cowries.

Some young children are actually covered with amulets — on their caps, on their shoulders, round their arms etc. The women, of course, but even the men, will not do without them, especially in the villages. The educated people of the towns and villages reject such superstitious practices.

### **Magic Rites**

It is not always enough to carry about an amulet on one's person; it is necessary also sometimes to perform certain positive acts, often very curious, in order to obtain by methods known to the initiated what cannot be achieved by one's own powers.

This is then a matter of purely magical and superstitious practices. For example, a woman will believe that she will be able to control her husband indefinitely and direct him according to her liking, just as if he were a donkey, by causing him to eat the brains of a donkey, which she has secretly introduced into his food. This is a Bedouin practice and is of much rarer occurrence among the Kurds. A rather curious phenomenon with the Kurds is the use of the magic circle. It is well-known that many people believe that the circle is sacred and seems to have magic virtues. That it symbolizes protection and the way of entrance to another world has been known in all times and places, and of course in Kurdistan. Thus the Kurd having drawn a circle round himself, will lie down in a remote and secret place and thus protect himself from the machinations of evil spirits. If he spreads tar around, the devil can stick in it and so be caught. Some sheiks, when engaged in the practice of ascetic austerities, will also trace a circle, *mendar*, with the blood of a sheep, which has been sacrificed, in order that devils and jinns may be kept from tormenting them. Other sheiks more or less given to magic will stand in a circle to recite their incantations. The Yézidis also believe in the magic power of the circle. If one of them as a joke is enclosed in this manner, the wretched fellow will wait until some kind soul breaks the fatal circle, nor will he otherwise dare to escape from it even if one should curse the Devil before him!

Then there are the magical rites in which the Kurds engage to bring rain or on the other hand to cause it to cease. In the event of a drought they are not satisfied with merely reciting the customary prayers. These prayers, *noja barana*, Tewfik Wehbi tells us, are recited outside the towns and villages at a place where there is a monastery of Dervishes or *Diwana* who are the fanatics of the Order. These with blackened faces repair to the tomb of a famous pîr (Mullah) of the district and often having recited the prayer *noja barana*, engage in a *Zikr* (Derwish Dance). The women also do their part in combatting the drought. They

go to the well where they give one another douches, or they harness themselves to a plough, drag it to the stream and plough the water. They also, having donned their finest clothes, go together in a band into the country to an ancient and venerable tree in the shade of which they install themselves. Having taken with them the necessary kitchen utensils and provisions they dance round the saucepan until the meal is ready. After the meal they pour water over the prettiest dress of the company and await the rain. If no rain falls before it is time to return, they pour water over one another's clothes and go back to their homes completely soaked. In Kirkuk the women collect in the street under a rain-water spout, and after a meal has been distributed to the poor, they are drenched with water from the spout. In the country a pious man is plunged into a pool. In other parts they are content simply to throw into the pool a stone from the grave of a *pîr*, which will remain there until the rain comes. The children in their turn engage in the proceedings to their hearts' content. They make a sort of doll of two pieces of wood in the shape of a Latin cross. This *bûka baran*, Bride of the Rain, they dress up and put a turban on its head. Two children holding it by each arm and accompanied by their companions go from house to house singing:

Pomegranate and jam  
 God let the rain fall  
 For the sick and the poor.  
 God let the rain fall  
 Bald head of the spring,  
 O Bride of the Rain  
 Pray water the crops,  
 Give us meals of past days.

The children plunge the doll into the pool at every house, the mistress of which throws a bucket of water over the puppet and distributes sweetmeats to the children.

On the other hand to get the rain to stop when there is a

risk of its spoiling the harvest, the children in the same manner parade a similar doll, singing *kodu, kodu*, and presents are also given them. Another procedure, a little more elaborate, consists in taking a cord and making with it seven or nine knots each corresponding to a bald-pate. This is then thrown into the fire to the chant of: "I've set fire to the bald ones, may the sun burn me." Sometimes the names of forty bald-pates are knotted in the cord and it is then hung on a rain-water spout facing towards Mecca. But this can be still further simplified by writing the names of the bald-heads on a piece of paper which is hung on a tree.

### **Have Pagan Cults Survived?**

All these superstitious beliefs and practices of magic are not peculiar to the Kurds, but are to be found to some extent among the neighbouring peoples of Anatolia and the Caucasus. But there are also among the Kurds other practices which some believe to have come down through the centuries.

On the assumption that the religion of the ancient Kurds was Zoroastrianism some orientalists and the Kurds themselves are inclined to believe that there is a survival of sun and fire worship among the Kurds in general and among the Yézidis in particular. This is by no means at all certain. Nothing can be deduced from the fact that the Shemsiyé and the Yézidis turn towards the rising and the setting sun to pray. Many Christians also pray facing the East. As to the worship of fire there is something to be said here. It is, of course, undeniable that the Kurds consider the hearth as sacred. The permanence of the hearth-fire is a symbol of family continuity, and ashes of the hearths of some mystics and of the Ahl-é-Haqq in Kurdistan, Muh. Mokri tells us, possess magical-religious virtues believed in by some populations. This is substantiated by Madame Chantre who adds a good many details: "The Kurds," she writes, "possess an unbounded respect for the paternal hearth, both their own and their sheiks." The hearth, consisting of a few stones, is sacred



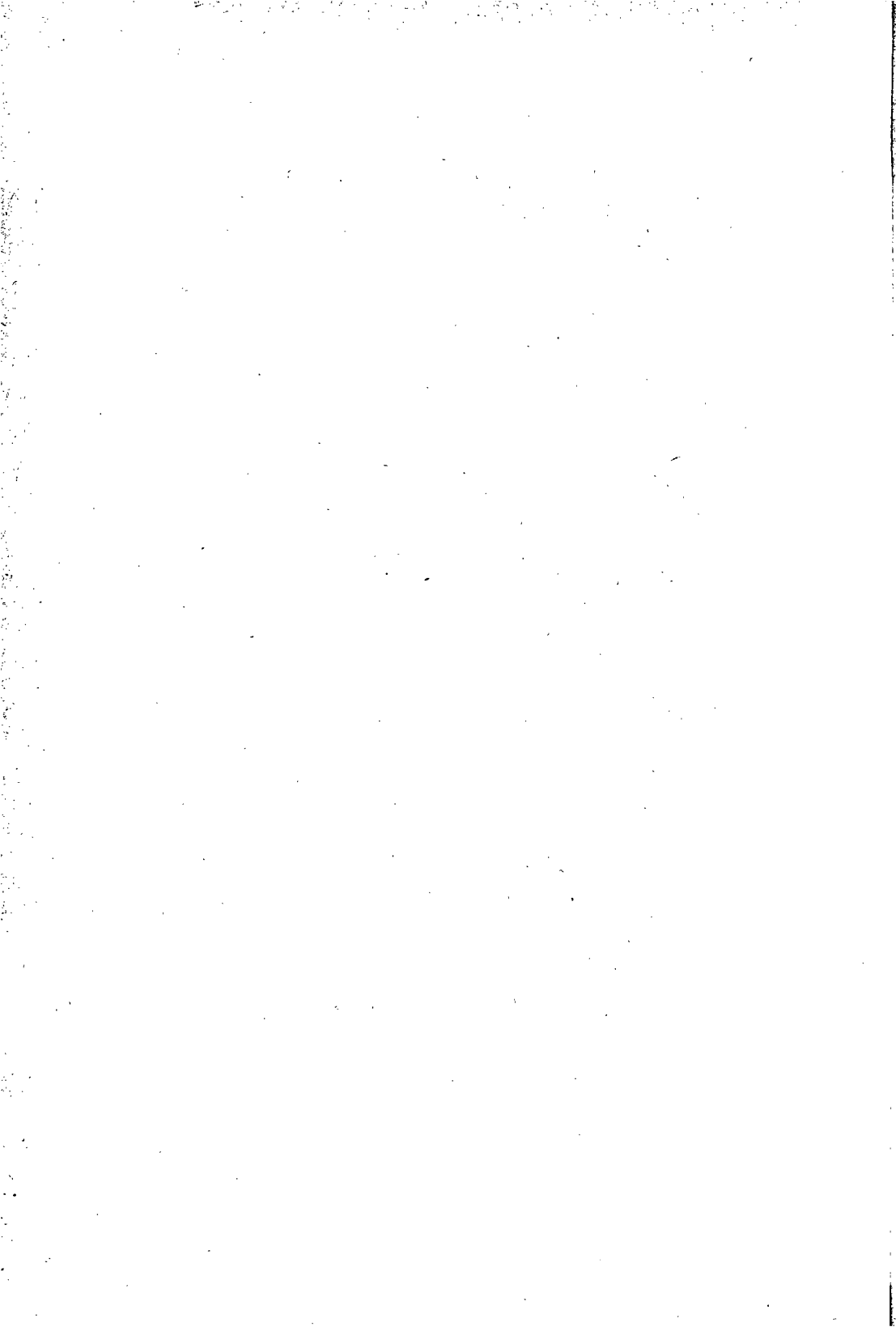
and the fire burning in it is considered to be a pure element. To spit on it would be a deadly insult. The Kurd swears by his hearth. The new-born baby is paraded round it. The girl about to be wed walks round it before leaving for her new home. When a mother is marrying her son, she kindles the hearth of the young couple with fire taken from the paternal house. But neighbours do not like to borrow fire from one another; this is considered to be unlucky. The fire is tended day and night throughout the spring until the lambing time." Moreover, one must not take a light from under a saucepan in which milk is being heated, nor pass through a flock of sheep with a light or fire. The same reverence for light and fire prevails among the Yézidis and the Kizilbash. Yet these people have nothing in common with "Fire Worshipers." In all these practices there are no signs of a cult, properly speaking, for there are no prayers nor even a simple invocation nor any gesture of making an offering. During the First World War a Cossack officer believed that he had found in a Kurdish encampment on the Turkish-Persian border vestiges of fire worship. He found in a tent "a cauldron on a tripod and a rusty chain one end of which was hung under the horns of an ibex and the other stretched under the cauldron. Round this fireplace were placed stones bearing drawings, signs and letters. No one lived in this tent, which was tended by the community. It was visited only on special solemn occasions when the elders of the clan sacrificed animals on the stones" (Nikitine). Is all this evidence of an altar? Are not the charred horns of sheep lying among the hearthstones really the remains of the shepherds' meal? Even if the stones do carry inscriptions, the material evidence amounts to very little. In those areas there are so many ancient ruins of which the stones are used for any purpose at all that the writer personally remains doubtful. On what does the Armenian interpreter base his statement that this was in fact an altar? It would be a very different matter if the people concerned had come forward to explain to us what exactly they intended to perform.

There seems to be more evidence for the worship of the powers of nature. As is known, the ancients to some extent in all parts of the world believed that guardian spirits, either good or evil, haunted certain trees and springs. These beliefs have not altogether disappeared, and there are today in Kurdistan many trees and many springs which are considered sacred. But no matter what Mr Driver and others may have written, the worship, if worship it be, is directed less to the tree itself (dendrolatry) than to the spirit which dwells in it. Sacred trees are usually to be found in the vicinity of the tomb of a holy personage, a sheik or a pîr. They also often have a name. For example, the Yézidis call a fig-tree in the village of Ba'ashîqa, Sitt Nafisa, and at Kha-rabek a mulberry tree is thus honoured. Anyone passing by a sacred tree attaches to it a rag as a votive offering or when making a prayer for good health. Madame Hansen correctly observes that these rags tied to trees are to be distinguished from those hanging from the top of poles near the tomb of a holy man. The former are a pagan survival but not the latter.

A holy spring is often to be found near a sanctuary, *ziared* or *tekké*. Pilgrimages are made to such places to obtain cures. The spring Kani Zerké or yellow spring at Sheikan as its name indicates is believed by the Yézidis to cure jaundice. One does not need to mention the spring of Zem-Zem at the tomb of Sheik Adi which comes directly from Mecca and is used for the baptism of children. Many of these waters contain fish which are also sacred and may not be caught. Examples of these are the springs of Bahzani (Sheikan) near the shrine of Sheik Beko, and that of Sheik Abd al-Qadir at Turunde in Jebel Sim'an.

Caves, rocks of dolmen shape, fish-inhabited clear springs, groves in ancient cemeteries and sacred trees from which it is forbidden to cut even the dead branches — all these, haunted by the guardian spirits of vegetation and of the waters, are to be found everywhere in Kurdistan where they receive the same veneration accorded to them in the most remote pagan times. The worship of saints, perhaps often substituted for the worship

of the powers of nature, has not been eliminated from the hearts of the mass of the people, despite the stern prohibitions of orthodox Islam.



## CHAPTER X

### Literature

This chapter may perhaps surprise some readers who not only have never seen a Kurdish book but will wonder if such a thing exists. Needless to say they are mistaken. True there are some who have gone so far as to deny that the Kurdish language exists and say that the Kurds speak a kind of dialect borrowed from Arabic, Persian or other languages of their area, such as Armenian and Chaldean. This, as one might suspect, is pure fantasy. The Kurdish language exists completely and has been much studied for over a century by scholars who have recognized its separate identity. It will suffice to cite the most recent authorities: E.N. McCarus, in the U.S.A. in 1958, D.N. Mackenzie of Oxford, in 1961 and 1962, and in the U.S.S.R., I. Tuskerman, in 1964 and K. Kurdo in 1961. The latter has also published in Moscow a Kurdish-Russian Dictionary of 30,000 words!

Let us first say a little about the Kurdish language before expatiating on the oral and folk literature and then on the written or learned productions.

#### **The Kurdish Language**

The Kurds speak an Indo-European tongue related to modern Persian with which it must not be confused in respect of vocabulary, articulation and syntax. There are two main dialects; *kurmançî* in the North and the West spoken by the Kurds of Turkey, Syria, the Soviet countries, and northern Irak; and the *kurmançî* of the South still called *soranî* and used by the Kurds of Iran and of eastern Irak. It is the country between, the basin of the Great Zab, which delimits the two varieties of speech. Some Kurds, including those of Zaza, speak a special dialect, the *goranî*. Each of these dialects, moreover, includes an infinity of variants so that it is possible to say that every tribe and every valley has its own dialect. This is a phenomenon common to all mountain peoples. In any case it is nothing to be surprised at since, when the national dialects are used, the Arabs

of the Moghreb make themselves understood with difficulty by the Iraklis, and the Egyptians do not understand the Lebanese very well. The Kurdish vocabulary is basically Iranian, but it has been influenced by Arabic as has Persian and Turkish, particularly in the department of religion since these peoples are all Moslems for whom the language of the Koran is essential.

Originally, like the Persians and the Turks, the Kurds used the Arabic script to write their language. But Arabic characters perfectly adapted to a Semitic language are much less so for other languages used by Moslems, which not only lack the Arabic emphatic sounds but have additional labials unknown to the Arabs. The Persians have also added to the Arabic alphabet new characters to represent certain phonemes, J and V, for example, which do not exist in the language of the Prophet. The failure to indicate vowels is another difficulty of Arabic script. On this account the Kurds of Irak, in particular, have added certain alphabetical signs as did the Turks in the past, but reading is none the less difficult in consequence. This is why Kurdish intellectuals, and notably the Emirs BedirKhan, have not hesitated to follow the example of Kémal Atatürk, the Father of the Turkish People, who had the inspiration of Latinizing the script of his people's tongue. The Kurds, therefore, have also Latinized their alphabet using a single sign for each definite sound so that a sound can only be transcribed by that sign. This constitutes a simplified phonetic alphabet which is satisfactory and has proved its efficiency for more than forty years. One may say that it has the force of law for the Kurds of Syria, Lebanon and Turkey.

Twenty-six characters now suffice to write the Kurdish language. There are five for the vowels: A E I O U, two for the semi-consonants: Y, W, and nineteen for the consonants: B C D F G H J K L M N P Q R S T V X Z. Three vowel letters carry a circumflex accent: ê î û, two consonantal letters have a cedilla Ç, Ş, and two others take a diaeresis: H, X. These letters have roughly the same pronunciation as they would have

in French except for the vowels: A = A long, E = A very short, I = E mute, U = OU. Regarding the consonants, G and S are always hard as in "gâteau" and "saucisse," C = DJ, Ç = YCH S = CH; X = KH Arabic, X = Arabic ghain. Kurdish words in this text have been transcribed in accordance with this system.

In the beginning the Kurds of Soviet Armenia transcribed their works in Latin characters with certain modifications of the letters. But a short time before the Second World War they adopted the Cyrillic alphabet with some adaptations. But at any rate, this transcription is simpler and clearer than the Arabic system which the Kurds of Irak have in the main retained. It is to be hoped that eventually all the Kurds will agree to adopt Latin characters which will make reading and writing easier for young children. Such a reform would automatically further the unification of the language, and also no doubt a unity of thought.

### **Oral and Popular Literature**

As among many peoples whose formal education is little advanced, the oral literature of the Kurds is rich and extraordinarily abundant. It has even been possible to refer to the hypertrophy of its folklore (O. Viltchevsky). And indeed we have to do with a large accumulation of documents collected and published by foreigners: Jaba, Lerch, Prym and Socin, Makas, Mann, Hadank, Nikitine, Lescot, Mackenzie etc. Some of these texts are comparatively old, going back as far as the XVth and XVIth centuries. The Kurds themselves, especially in the Soviet Union, have set to work, and for the last thirty years have been taking down from old people with good memories, story-tellers and minstrels, songs and old legends of the people: Haji Jindi, Amin Avdal and Jasim Jalil have done good work in this sphere.

This richness in folklore is first of all apparent in the proverbs, the common sayings, the puzzles and conundrums, the songs and stories and finally in the epic tales.

Kurdish proverbs are many and are often racy and vivid. We have had occasion to quote some of them in the course of this

work. The Kurd indeed likes to adorn his speech with maxims in rhyme or rhythm which reveal a keen sense of observation. The spectacle of nature, the daily tasks, especially the character of the domestic animals which he raises, the wild animals which he hunts, all these are objects of curiosity from which he has created a treasure of practical wisdom.

There are no lofty peaks without snow, and no deep valleys without water.

The heaviest rocks press only on the place where they lie.  
When water runs in a narrow channel it makes itself heard.

The hungry chicken dreams of corn.

The limping chicken looks to God.

The magpie's friend will ever have his beak in the mire.

The pot which the mistress of the house breaks makes no noise.

He who sits near the forge is likely to get sparks.

The popular sayings refer to the seasons:

In summer

The birds cry: Meydan! (sand)

Gone are the days of Ramadan.

In the month of May

The vine-dresser is full of fears and forebodings.

In Autumn get inside quickly.

In Spring hasten outside.

The April shower,

Is the treasure of Khorasan.

The Kurds are also fond of setting riddles and conundrums, for example: A pointed cap full of little fleas? — A fig. The ass brayed, the dung flew? — A bullet from a gun.

What of the songs? As has already been observed in Chapter VI, these are infinite in number and variety. In the country, in the house, at work, everywhere is heard the song of the ploughman, of the milkmaid, of the mother. Songs of love and war,



laments and dancing songs are forever on the lips of the shepherd or the housewife. A first class authority on Kurdish lore, R. Lescot, gives a perfect description of the autumn song, *pehîzok*. "At first sight the *pehîzok* does not seem to be much different from other compositions inspired by the sentiment of love: the themes elaborated (unrequited passion, separation, midnight trysts) are identical as is the form, that of the dialogue between two lovers. It is the background and the natural setting to which it is referred which gives it its peculiar tonality. Each verse begins with a brief glance at the autumn landscape whose melancholy inspires in the poet gloomy thoughts. The mountains are veiled in mist, the torrents swollen by the early rains roll their thundering waters, already snow covers the highest peaks. Winter approaches and the nomads with their tents leave the summer pasture for the plain. Gone are the carefree days, finished are the flirtations scarce begun; now is the moment of farewells when one is sad for the avowals of love which dared not be made."

Here is a little song which the author collected thirty years ago in which a Meyramok or "Mariette" sings a part in which she displays her wit and shows that she knows how to deal with a presumptuous admirer. As frequently in Kurdish songs, **this is** a dialogue between the Fair One and a jeweller whom she has asked to carve for her a golden flower such as Kurdish women wear in the left nostril.

— Hola! Master Hanna make me a golden flower  
 But don't twist it with pincers  
 Nor lay it upon the anvil  
 Nor batter it with the hammer,  
 And I swear by God's might, you'll have naught to  
 regret.

— I'll make thee thy golden flower  
 And I'll twist it not with pincers  
 Nor it on the anvil lay

And it shall not be beaten with hammer,  
 And by God's might I'll have naught to regret  
 If a pair of kisses thou'lt give to me.

— So may it be; count not my kisses for aught,  
 If thou wilt give in exchange to me  
 Seven flocks of sheep  
 Seven flocks of goats with curly hair  
 Seven plots of land  
 Seven mills,  
 Seven wine-presses worked by an ass  
 Seven cups of the milk of a bird  
 What a good bargain! For nothing, indeed!

Kurdish folklore is no less rich in tales, *çîrok*, than in songs. Children love stories and untutored folk often remain children through force of imagination, and nothing pleases them more than a pleasant tale which makes them forget the cares of earning their daily bread.

We have thus the tales of wonder in which the curiosities of nature are explained or the origins of strange monuments. For example, there can be cited the story of the prince of Bahdînan who had Dalalé immured in the fabric of the bridge of Zakho, for without the sacrifice of a human being it would fall down. Or there is the legend of Bingol-of-the-thousand-lakes about the quest for the spring of eternal life. R. Lescot published in 1940 a whole collection of tales full of adventures and vicissitudes of all kinds, like the story of the gourd, Keçelok or the scald-head, Silêmanê Zindi, Herzem-with-the-long-ears, Beyrim the pilgrim etc.

The Kurds like to tell stories just for the sake of telling them. These are the anecdotal tales. But the Kurd is not lacking in humour, as all the travellers who have visited Kurdistan can testify. As humourists the Kurds therefore exercise their talent for satire in satirical tales about their own eccentricities and about the faults of those with whom they live or have close

relationships. As might be expected, the clergy, the sheiks and the mullahs, are targets ready to hand. The criticisms are sometimes harsh but more often are of a homely character. One instinctively recalls the *fabliaux* of the Middle Ages. The satirical spirit also finds easy targets in the chiefs and in the members of neighbouring tribes. To some extent, as everywhere else, every town and village carries justly or unjustly its own particular reputation. Thus in Kurdistan some tribes are famous for their valour and courage while others endure the mockery of their neighbours who tell stories about them, the truth of which is rather doubtful, but this does not matter if those who laugh are not malicious.

But there is one type of story in which the Kurds excel and that is stories of animals. All the animals in creation appear in these, and they are a veritable Noah's Ark in full activity, in which the Serpent retains something of the wicked rôle which Satan made him play in the Earthly Paradise. The Lion and the Bear, as also the Wolf, display their classical qualities and defects of strength, pride, cowardice and cunning. One could compile a whole anthology of nothing but the stories in which the Fox is the prime mover. He is to be seen in conflict with the Wolf or the Lion, the Cock or the Ass, the Owl or the Hedgehog, the Crane or the Mouse, the Tortoise or the Serpent, and in every case the cunning animal strives to get the better of another animal. He does not always succeed in this, or at least things do not always work out in accordance with his wishes and his artifices. Very often King Solomon comes on the scene and questions the animals about their doings and exploits. Birds serve as models of virtues and vices, and if one wants to know one's true friends, those who will always be faithful, it is no use turning to the Starling, the Stork, the Crane, nor even to the Partridge, but to the Magpie, who is no seasonal bird who flies away when bad times come. In all these stories there is often delicately implied a moral, after the manner of La Fontaine.

So far only what might be termed the lesser kinds have been

referred to: the little songs consisting of only a few couplets sung by everyone and the short tales, very short except for those published by R. Lescot, which are easily remembered. But Kurdish folk literature is much greater in range and extent. While love-songs will always be sung and stories told, actual happenings will always supplement what is purely imaginative; accounts of tribal battles will be put into song; epics will be composed in which legend will be mingled with fact. The great Kurdish legends and epics are sung or recited by professional troubadours who unfortunately become scarcer every day. These are the *çirokbêj*, narrators and the *dengbêj* or *stranvan*, troubadours or ballad-makers... In both prose and verse narratives the singer begins by relating the story, and when he has introduced the characters, he turns it into verse as he sings it. When there are several singers, one of them acts as the narrator, and the others take the parts of persons in the story and sing in their turn. The stories, *çirok*, and legends, *çircirok* are generally in prose, rhymed prose and here and there in verse. Rhymed prose is generally sung to a light melody. In pieces of this description the *dengbêj* commences with a rhyme which he maintains until the first stop. Every time the voice stops, the rhyme corresponding to the stop rhymes with that of the preceding stop and thus the singer continues (C. Bedir-Khan). In former times there were actual schools of singing and for the training of minstrels, which were supported by aghas and enlightened tribal chiefs. But life has changed now, and genuine troubadours are fast dying out.

Many texts have been published, which are an inexhaustible source of information on the anecdotal history of the tribes and on the manners and customs of the ancient Kurds. From these compositions we have gained abundant information on rituals, beliefs and superstitions, formulas for oaths, names of weapons and of musical instruments of the past. Proverbs illustrative of the most varied situations abound in them. B. Nikitine makes a similar statement: "Hunting and battle scenes, imprecations of love; the incompatibility of temperament between

the highlander and the plainsman; descriptions of landscape (swollen torrents, storms); curious traces of pantheism (prayers addressed to birds, to the horse, to the snow); here are to be found a great variety of themes each of which is worthy of attention and provides matter for study." Here is indeed a veritable treasure-house ready to hand as an introduction to the spirit of the Kurdish people.

It is not intended of course to list all the legends published. References will be confined to the most famous. These stories which are often very long can be divided into several categories.

First, there are the legends of wonders. In the depths of his daily misery the unfortunate wretch longs for his beggar's dreams to come true: to eat his fill, change his rags and his shanty open to the winds of heaven, succeed in his plans, marry the woman of his choice, have handsome children. Alas! the reality is cruel and he must content himself with hearing accounts of the happiness of those heroes who, thanks to the kindness of some beneficent fairy, see their desires fulfilled. So now there are magnificent repasts in heavenly gardens, garments of silk adorned with gems, palaces crammed with gold and riches, and laughter with the most beautiful girl in the world, once those obstacles, placed on the road to their felicity by fate or by the wickedness of men, have been triumphantly surmounted. Here in a few words is the substance of all our legends of wonder. One can imagine an infinity of variations on this theme.

There is then the very popular legend *Memozin* of which the folk version, *Memê Alan*, goes back as far as the XIVth or XVth centuries. There is also *Sevhajé*, the song of *Hozbeck* etc.

Then there are the purely idyllic legends. The Kurd who is fascinated by fairy-tales, by stories of riches acquired miraculously, happiness which is not of this world, delights also in those tales of less marvellous adventures wherein are expressed better his own human feelings of true love, inviolate honour, unflinching courage. In short, he enjoys enormously those love idylls in which at all events poetry is not lacking. Thus he will listen with

emotion to the recital of the loves of Zélikha and Fatoul, of Leila and Majnoun, of Siyabend and Khatché, of Khursid and Khawer, of Shirin and Khosrew, etc. The same stories are also to be found in Persian, Armenian and Turkish folklore.

Finally, we have historical epics (epics based on an episode from history). While he can be sentimental on occasion, the Kurd is nonetheless a warrior and indeed fundamentally so. With his head full of the glorious deeds of the heroes of Iranian history, which he has adopted, he still takes pleasure today in the recital of feats of arms. In past times every foray had its bard and every tribal battle was celebrated by *dengbêj*: if the mighty feats of a Sheik Mahmud or a Mullah Mustafa have not to any degree inspired real bards (however, there is the quite recent "War of Liberation," *Serê Azadî*, published in Beirut in 1964), the Kurds can always fall back on the ancient epics. That of Dimdim is one of the most famous, celebrating as it does the siege of that citadel sustained by the Kurds in 1608 against the troops of Shah Abbas, the First. Koroglu is also a legendary hero, the protector of the poor. Julendi is that mythical king who allied himself with the Devil in order to repel the Moslem invaders of the VIIth century. Rustum has many adventures with Zoraw, Cihangir or Zerdeheng. The valiant exploits of Nadir and Jopel, of the Twelve Cavaliers of Meriwan, of Abd al-Rahman Baban, Ezdinsir Bedir-Khan, in a more recent period are also celebrated. There is a long list of epics of legend and of history and legend combined in which figure historical personages: Caliphs, Sultans, Kings, Shahs, but whose adventures are purely legendary and belong rather to the realm of the marvellous. D.N. Mackenzie has recently furnished us with a good stock of these in a truly popular form, most interesting for the data of sociological interest which they contain. The Soviet Kurds systematically exploit this vein, reshaping these ancient epics on occasion in accordance with Soviet theories. Such studies are unlikely to produce any sociological or political effects in the land of the International, but they are hardly sufficient to bring about the renewal and the enrich-

ment of Kurdish letters.

The spread of education and literacy inevitably results in the decline of oral literature which will suffer revision and correction, and in the process lose in freshness what it may gain in style; it will be often more correct but less alive. The radio which, thanks to transistors, is spreading to the most obscure hamlets, abolishes the function of the troubadour. This is a consequence of progress which cannot be prevented and which it would be in vain to regret.

### **Written and Learned Literature from Its Beginnings to the First World War**

The abundance of oral literature must not make us lose sight of the wealth of written literature brought to light, hardly a century ago, by the Pole, A. Jaba, Russian Consul at Erzerum. Since then researches have continued and our knowledge has been extended. The attention of the author was recently drawn to the existence of a work on the subject written in Moscow, but until this is published, the most complete work is "The History of Kurdish Literature" by Aladin Sajadé, which appeared in Kurdish in Baghdad in 1953. It is a large volume of 634 pages in which the author, after an introduction on Kurdistan and its people, treats of the stages of development of Kurdish literature and of its forms. This is followed by ample notices of twenty-four poets and a collection of 212 other authors, all dead poets of Irak and Iran. Prose authors are not dealt with, this study being deferred to a future volume. The author has not the least intention of transcribing such a rigmarole, but he feels sure that none of his readers will be surprised to learn that in all that array of men of letters, representatives of religion figure largely. It is normal and a well-known fact that since ancient times and in every land, religion, learning and poetry have gone hand-in-hand among the "clerks." And so, although their religious affiliation is not always indicated in this long list, one can pick out from it, however, the names of 50 mullahs, 31 sheiks,

5 mewlana, and 4 feki. But there are also 9 khans, 3 emirs, 11 begs and the names of 5 women.

The origins of Kurdish literature are obscure and uncertain. Indeed, historians cannot always agree on the dates of some poets. In general, Kurdish authors tend to date works far back into the past, a chronology which cannot always be proved. It is the same regarding the authorship of some poems. For example, according to Mr Socin, the epic of Dimdim is by Mela Ahmed of Baté (1417-1495), which is impossible, since the events to which it refers took place as late as 1608. Similarly Fekiyê Teyran cannot have lived between 1307 and 1375, since he is the author of an elegy on the death of his master Melayé Cizrî, who died in 1481. Again it is very difficult to agree that Elî Jermukî, the Kurdish Ronsard, is of the XIth century. This is something which is unknown to many historians, and those who do refer to it only repeat one another. Only a serious study of the poet's vocabulary and style can clinch the question. But the original texts were lost at the time of the bombings of Berlin. And then some Kurdish editors have no hesitation in bringing up to date the texts of ancient authors in order to make them more comprehensible to modern readers, and by this very achievement preclude any critical study. Although the four Mystical Quatrains of Baba Jahir of Hamadan are in a mixed and archaic language, the Kurds consider them as belonging to their literature, something in the way that the Chansons de Gestes form part of French literature. But a real course of training is essential if they are to be read to advantage. What is certain is that some Gorani poets, like Sheik Ahmed Tekhti (towards 1640), and Sheik Mustafa Besarani (1641-1702) and others besides were of his school.

Whatever else may be in doubt, the classical age of Kurdish literature begins in the XVth century with a whole galaxy of excellent poets. At their head and clearly outclassing them, comes Sheik Ahmed Nishani better known by the name of the Mullah of Jezireh (1407-1481), whose mystical *Diwan*, very difficult to be understood by the uninitiated, treats of themes from Persian



Sufism. Following him and of his school, there are Mela Ahmed of Baté, already mentioned, famous for his *Mewlûd*, often republished, Elî Herîrî (1426-1495) and Mîr Muhamed of Muks or Fekiyê Teyran, known for his "History of the Sheik of Sinna" and his "History of the Black Charger."

After an eclipse of more than a century, a new star shone forth in the firmament of Kurdish literature: Ahmed Khani (1650-1706), originally of Hakkari. He is the author of what might well be called the Kurdish national epic, *Memozin*, in which he deals with the theme of Memê Alan adapting it to conform with the classic literary rules and with the spirit of Islam. His disciple, Ismaîl of Beyazid (1654-1709), as well as numerous *ghazel*, compiled a Kurdish-Arabic-Persian lexicon in verse, entitled "The Rosegarden," *Gulzar*. Siyapush is the pseudonym of another poet, his contemporary.

The XVIIth century is not particularly brilliant, but one can, however, mention the Hakkari Sherif Khan of Julamerg (1688-1748), Murad of Beyazid, 1736-1778) and the Mullah of Erivas, who in 1790 wrote a medical treatise, perhaps unique of its kind in the Kurdish tongue. At the same period there was a blossoming of religious verse in the Gorani language with Khana-é Khbadi (1700-1750) and his *Selewatname*, and the lyric poet Mahzûnî (1783).

With the XIXth century and up until the First World War there are poets in plenty. Two trends can be discerned. First, the religious and mystical current which continues this tradition in the writings of many sheiks and mullahs desirous of conveying their mystical teaching through the verses of their *Diwan*, not without a great deal of repetition and imitation. The influence of the classical Persian poets is manifest. Such are Mewlana Khalid (1777-1821) who introduces the Order of Nakshbendi to Kurdistan, Sheik Marûf Nûrî (1755-1837) with his twenty volumes of religious works, Mullah Khalil of Seert (towards 1830), Mullah Yehya Mizûri, the counsellor Mir Kor of Rowanduz (1826-1889), Nûredîn Bifirkî (died in 1846) and Evdereham

Akhtepi (1884), who imitated Khani and wrote in praise of the Prophet and of Kurdistan. There is too a whole group of Sheiks of Sulaymaniyah: Salem (1845-1909) who bewails the misery of life in the world here below, the Nakshbendi Mahwî (1830-1904), an exponent of Sufi theories, in which is imitated Herik or Mullah Salih (1851-1904). In Iran the poets were very prolific, Seyi Vako (1808-1881), for example, with his 20,000 verses; a polyglot like Fatah Jibarû (1806-1876) who wrote in four languages : Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and Persian; innovators like Mullah Rehim Tewagozî, called Mewlewî (1806-1852), who introduced new ideas and was the first to compose stanzas of alternative rhymes. Finally, may be mentioned the *defter* and *kelem* of the Ahl-é-Haqq mystics: Temur Qhuli, died in 1852, and his successor Teyfur, as well as Dervish Newrûz, towards 1875. We owe to Mullah Welaw Khan (towards 1876-1885) a Kurdish epic on the subject of Leila and Majnoun, and to Ahmed Beg Komasi (1795-1876) a moving elegy on the death of his wife.

A second trend becomes apparent in the XIXth century. Lyricism blossoms forth and patriotism makes its appearance for good and all. We may mention briefly Shah Pirto of Hakkari (1810); Muhamed Agha Jaff of the same period, known for his "Elegy of Love and Friendship;" Kurdi (Mustafa Sahibkiran 1809-1849); Salim (Abdirahman Sahibkiran (1800-1866); Mifti Zehawi (1792-1890), who was a master in many kinds; Wafa'î (Mirza Rahim 1836-1892); the subtle Edeb (Evdelah Beg Mishbah 1859-1912) are both renowned for their lyrical, mystical and patriotic verses. Nali (Mela Khizer) of Shahrizor (1797-1855) extolled his fatherland of Kurdistan, and the agnostic Haji Kadir Koyî (1815-1892) is full of the reactions, inspired in him by the progress of science, against the intellectual torpor of the mullahs and sheiks and the lack of adaptability of the latter to modern life. He charges them with selfishness, and with the intellectual laziness which is an obstacle to freedom of thought. His poems still arouse the enthusiasm of the young, and his spirit still influences many poets of the day, in spite of, or because

of his materialist philosophy. Sheik Riza Talabani must be dealt with apart (1835-1910), a strange character, rather an agnostic and nevertheless a fanatic. He had the talent of improvisation, not only in Kurdish, but equally well in Turkish and Persian. His short satirical pieces have a racy quality of attractiveness. He is often profound and even edifying, but he sometimes falls into coarseness and cynicism. However, he is still today one of the most popular Kurdish poets in Irak.

### **The New Era: From 1920 to Our Own Day**

The end of the First World War which brought about so many changes in the Middle East as the result of the formation of new states from the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire did not fail to have its effect on Kurdish letters. Previously, Istanbul had been the centre where many Kurdish intellectuals — and not the less important — met and published their works. Now Irak, especially, with its capital Baghdad, was to become an important focal point, but not the only one, of Kurdish literature. But the impetus on Kurdish literature could only result from the efforts, often entirely disinterested, of those who published Kurdish periodicals, in which the works of the old poets and young writers could display their talents. On the conclusion of hostilities, the Kurdish press and periodicals were able to develop freely in Irak with as centres Baghdad, Sulaymaniyah, especially, the home of Kurdish nationalism and also Rowanduz and Erbil. It would serve no purpose to give here a complete list of these journals and reviews since many of them had only a short-lived existence. But one cannot overlook, precisely for their literary and social value, the weekly *Jin* of Sulaymaniyah, which has appeared consistently since 1924; in Baghdad, *Gelawêj* (Sirius), from 1939 to 1949; *Hetaw* in Erbil, since 1954. In Erivan in Soviet Armenia, *Reya Taze*, since 1929. In Iran, *Kurdistan*, 1959 to 1963. The brothers Bédîr-Khan published in Damascus: *Howar*, 1932-35 and 1941-43 (57 numbers), *Ronahî*, 1942-1945 (28 numbers); in Beirut, *Roja Nû*, 1943-1946 (73

numbers). The Kurdish Democratic Party have been publishing, off and on, since 1958, *Khabat*. At the present time Kurdish literature can exist unhampered only in the U.S.S.R. and Irak. Let us now glance at it.

### **Prose**

This was for long the poor relation, and it has progressed only since the First War, thanks to its contacts with foreign literatures. This has resulted in many translations into Kurdish, thus enabling the vocabulary to renew itself, to be modernized and enriched. In this way Kurdish readers have become acquainted with accounts of journeys made to Kurdistan by foreigners : Rich, Millingen, Hobbard, Lord Curzon, Freya Stark etc., with scientific articles, in particular medical, and also with pages from world literature. In the Soviets, translations from Russian or Armenian are limited to extracts of only relative importance, even where Marx, Lenin or Stalin are concerned. There are thus a few pages of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, Gorki, Toumanian, and other Russian or Soviet authors of different nationalities. In Lebanon there are only a few extracts from Victor Hugo, Daudet, Lamennais. In Irak many texts have been translated from Arabic and English; but the translators have been more courageous and competent and have not always been satisfied with a few short extracts. In fact, they have not been afraid to translate, in their entirety, for example, Shakespeare's 'Tempest,' Voltaire's 'Zadig,' Gorki's 'The Overcoat' and 'The Life of Saladin' by Jorjis Zeydan. This is obviously more interesting and of greater educational value.

But there is one domain in which the Kurds have always been at home, and that is history. It is, of course, a fact that the old Kurdish historians Ibn Athir of Jézireh (1160-1234), Ibn Khallikan of Irbil (1209-1282) and Abdul-Fida (1273-1331) of the family of Saladin have written in Arabic their works of general history. On the other hand, it was in Persian that Sheref Khan of Bitlis wrote his *Serefname* (1596), "History of the Kurds." This basic work

was not translated into Arabic until quite recently in Baghdad, in 1953, by M.J.B. Rojbeyani, and in Cairo, in 1958-1960, by M. Eli Ewni (1892-1961). The latter has also translated into Arabic other Kurdish historical works. This heritage of historical scholarship has not been neglected by the Kurds. It is sufficient to mention three Iraki authors whose important studies have thrown a flood of light on the history of the Kurds and of Kurdistan: Huseyn Huzni Mukriani (1886-1947), M. Emin Zeki (1880-1948) and Refik Hilmi (1961), who has given an account of the revolts of Sheik Mahmud. Dr Nûrî Dersimi and Colonel A. Yamulki have written in Turkish the history of Dersim and an account of the Kurdish revolts (1957). For their part, it is in Arabic that the Kurds M. Brifkani (1953), M. Ciyawok (1954) and Hasan Mustafa (1963) have written about the Barzani movements. In Iran, the Kurdish historians: Rashid Yasimi (1940), Ihsan Nuri (1955) and Muhamed Makhdukh Kordestani have written in Persian their historical works which have only quite recently been translated, the first two into Kurdish, by Dr. A. Moftizadé, and the third partially into Arabic by M. Fida (1958). By way of contrast, this time it is in Armenian that N. Mahmoudov published in Erivan in 1959 his book on the Kurdish people. There may also be mentioned the religious and sociological studies in French by the Kurd Muhamed Mokri on the Ahl-é-Haqq.

A few Kurds made expeditions into the heart of Kurdistan and have published their accounts of them. Thus we have the account in Arabic by Eli Seydo in 1939 and that of E. Sajadé in Kurdish in 1956. But it is in Kurdish and in verse that Goran has given an account of his travels in Hewraman (1933).

In Soviet Armenia, two writers, with of course, undertones of propaganda, have given us their autobiographies, which for all that are not lacking in vividness and freshness. There is Ereb Chamo with his "The Shepherd Kurd" (1935) which, underlining his Communist tendencies, he undertook in 1958 with the title of *Berang*, "The Dawn." He has also written "The Happy Life" (1959), the beginning only of which was written under the Soviet regime.

Wazir Nadir, who died in 1947, also wrote a work of the same type with the title "Through Poverty We Learn." But unfortunately it is in Armenian that E. Avdal has made known to us "The Manners and Customs of the Kurds of Transcaucasia" (1957).

Literary criticism is very closely linked with the history of literature. It often takes the form merely of articles and notices, but this cannot be said of the writings of genuine quality of such authors as Celadet Bedir-Khan (1893-1951), Yûnis Ra'uf (1917-1943) and Jemil Bendi Rojbeyani, who have taken a special interest in the poets and writers Zengene, Kalhur, and those of the neighbouring tribes. M. Khaznadar has contributed prefaces to several anthologies of verse and has published a study on Kurdish poetry. In Soviet Armenia two young critics have begun to make their presence felt: Emerick Serdar and Ordikhan Jelil. But the palm in this field must be awarded to the Kurdish Iraqi writer, Aladin Sejadé, whose "History of Kurdish Literature" (1952), a real monument of scholarship and culture, has already been mentioned. Certainly this work is not free from defects and inaccuracies, but it has pointed the way and is a mine of information. Here is how this author goes to work. He begins with an eulogy of the writer concerned in poetic prose. Then he gives a short account of his life, paying special attention to chronology and details of time and place. Next, he quotes extensively from the works, especially from those still unpublished, and this is followed by a commentary which is sometimes really a translation, if the dialect in question is one not current in Irak, *goranî* for example. He concludes by naming, where necessary, the editions of the works presented.

And now we come to the genuine works of literature in prose: Narratives, Tales and Short Stories. These are very numerous, and the majority of them have been published in various of those reviews in which the talents of the young are displayed. The short story and the tale come completely naturally to the Kurds who frequently excel in these. One does not intend to draw up a

prize-list of writers distinguished in this field, and many names are not known to the author himself. However, among the Kurds of Irak there may be indicated M.M. Emin, M.J. Urdi, K.G. Baban and J.A. Nebez, who is also an excellent translator. Better known to the author are the past contributors to Kurdish reviews which have appeared in the Levant: M.E. Boti, the author of some pretty animal tales carrying a moral; Kedri Jan, whose themes open the minds of his readers to new ideas; Dr Nuredin Usif Zaza who, in Lausanne has written a doctoral treatise on the personalism of Mounier, and whose stories always have a patriotic tinge. A special mention must be made of Osman Sabri who has written some historical articles on Saladin and Napoleon, but who is never so much at his ease as in his relations of adventures or when he describes the customs of compatriots. His hunting stories have a specially picturesque quality. In his simple, direct style, full of imagery, he brings his scenes vividly before us. We consider him one of the best prose writers of the day. Cegerxwin, who will be referred to later as a poet, published in 1946 a long tale narrating the commonplace adventures of a young couple, Jim and Gulperi, which he is wrong in considering to be a novel. It is regrettable that Soviet Armenia is poor in prose writers. There may be mentioned, however, H. Jindi with "The New Morning" (1947) and "Stories of the Kurdish People" (1959), Evderahman with "Dame Khaté" (1959), and perhaps "The Awakening" (1960). Unique of its kind is "The Thread of Pearls" of E. Sejadé, a really fertile author, who has given us in three volumes (1957-1958) his Essays, composed of literary reports, tales, little stories in which are blended with philosophy, opinions, history etc.

From the foregoing a definite fact emerges: the absence from Kurdish literature of the true novel despite the existence of some insignificant sketches. By the same token, it may be stated that neither does the drama exist. There have indeed been some attempts under patronage but this has not progressed very far. Nevertheless, subject matter for novels or plays is not lacking. It

could be taken from the history of the Kurdish people, from their legends and epics or from a consideration of ancient customs such as feudal rights and the dowry, and indeed even more so, from sentimental cases of conscience or other moral conflicts arising from new psychological or social situations. But this transposal of real or legendary facts and their rational adaptation in the realm of artistic imaginative creation demand from an author greater efforts in psychology, art and technique than simply composing a few quatrains. And this has been the general defect up to the present. But the same remarks could be made regarding drama and the Arabs.

### **Poetry**

It would be a mistake to believe that because prose writers have invaded the field of Kurdish letters, poetry is on the way to disappearing. This is far from being the case. And if the sheiks continue to rhyme their mystical poems, some teachers have redressed the balance by turning attention to different poetical concerns and ideas. During the period between 1920 and 1939, especially in Irak, the works of poets of the XIXth century, the greater part of which remained in manuscript have been published. Thus there have been published Mehwi (1922), Nali, Kurdi and Haji Kadir Koyi (1931), Salim (1933), Talabani (1935), Edeb (1936 and 1938), Herik and Mewlewi (1938 and 1940). It will be remarked that Kurdish poets adopt rather expressive pseudonyms. During the same epoch, anthologies of ancient poets also saw the light, thanks to Emin Feyzi (1920), Eli Hemal Bakir (1938), Mela Ebdilkerim (1938), Rafik Hilmi (1941, 1956).

But like everthing else Kurdish poetry evolves. M.A. Khaznedar gave us in 1962 an excellent study in which he lays particular stress on rhythm and rhyme, and compares ancient or classical verse, which follows the complicated rules of the learned Arabic and Persian poetry with modern verse, in which there is much more freedom in metre and stanza form than in rhyme. The young people prefer the new style.



Be that as it may, if the purely mystical works are becoming rarer, they have not for all that disappeared, and Kake Heme Nari (1874-1944) still sings of the love of God and of solitude. Besides, the poets, whether they are of Irak, Syria or the countries of the Soviet Union, do not play on a lute of one string; but when they are in the mood, can show themselves in their poems to be sometimes lyrical, sometimes committed, sometimes patriotic. It is therefore not easy to classify them categorically.

Teachers have just been referred to. Many have published didactic works almost always in the form of animal fables. This is what Osman Sebri (not a teacher) did in Syria and what the new school of young Soviet poets is doing: They write with their pupils in mind, and the moralizing note is clearly sounded. This is not always very great poetry, but it often has a certain quality of simplicity and freshness.

The true poets give us their lyrical works and sing of love and the family, of nature and its glories, of work and of daily life. In Irak the chief poet is Piremerd, meaning "the old man," Haji Tewfik (1867-1950), who manages to communicate to the hearts and minds of young people his love for the beauties of the Kurdish land and its history. Evdaleh Muhamed, called Ziwer (1875-1948) is also interested in the young and his feelings are deeply moved, and also move ours, when he extols the charms of nature and his native soil. Kani' or Muhamed Sheik Edvel Kadir, born in 1900, describes the various enchanting scenes of the Fatherland through a series of short fascicles, the very titles of which are like perfumes to the heart and spirit; "The Rose Garden of Meriwan" (1951), "The Plain of Germiyan" (1955). He is quite a different character from Bêkes, "the Forsaken," Faik Evdalah (1905-1948), a tormented and unfortunate soul who, like Verlaine, lived only for poetry and, despite his physical and moral wretchedness, never ceased to urge the young to strive for justice, goodness and their country. Some of the younger poets follow with enthusiasm in the footsteps of their predecessors, as have Shahkir Fatar, Neriman (Mustafa Seyid Ahmed), born at

Kufri in 1924, Resul Bizar Gerdi, born in 1926, and Kameran.

In Soviet Armenia there exists a worthy group who have turned their hands to the collection of ancient legends and to writing for scholars before undertaking more personal works. H. Jindi in 1906 and Emin Avdal born in 1910 have themselves been teachers, and their poems always have something of a scholarly flavour. Mikhaïl Rashid would seem to be more youthful and his poetry, "My Heart" (1960) has a subtle quality. In fact, his verses show a variety of techniques, and his graceful triolets are full of tender feeling. But his poetry as a whole is tendentious and impregnated with Communist idealism. But he is nonetheless an excellent poet, just as is Jasim Jelil, born in 1908. He is official editor of the Almanacs or Anthologies of Kurdish Soviet writers, in which naturally his own works are represented. He has in addition more than one collection of verse to his credit: "Alagoz" (1954) and "My Days" (1960). In this connection it is rather interesting to compare the different editions because of the extensive retouching which has been carried out. His works have been returned to the loom as many as twenty times, a good testimony to his artistic conscience. These two latter volumes, although not always perfect in versification and craftsmanship, represent a vigorous attempt to escape from the commonplace, as in the following declaration by a sweetheart:

I am a wild rose with bud yet unblown;  
 The sun and the dew shower on me their brightness.  
     If thou touch me not,  
     I shall not bloom;  
     If thou touch me not  
     I shall shed no fragrance.  
 I am a wild rose, a rose of the mountains  
 Far from thee  
 Love blossoms with caresses.  
 Soften the soil round my roots with love.  
     If thou touch me not  
     I shall not bloom

If thou touch me not  
 I shall shed no fragrance.  
 I am a wild rose, a rose of the mountains,  
 Far from thee.  
 O heedful gardener, fond of the rose  
 Come, pluck me, bear me o'er the mountain (Refrain)  
 If you are brave, if you bear me away  
 I shall gladden thy heart  
 Like a bride just wed. (Refrain)

The Emir Kamiran Bedir-Khan, apart from his linguistic works and his political activities, has also written beautiful poetry. He has published several collections: "The Heart of My Children" (1932), for the use of school-children, "The Snow of Light" (1935), which has been translated into French and German, and "The Quatrains of Kheyyam" (1938), which is rather humorous. These lyrical verses which treat of love are written with great delicacy of feeling, originality of imagery and felicity of expression.

But along with these poems which are essentially lyrical, one need not be surprised to find works with a social orientation, "committed," for at all times the poet has been the true prophet who preaches regeneration, criticizes abuses of the past and perceives the possibilities of happiness in the future. Themes which often recur with Soviet poets remind us that it is first necessary to free women, put an end to feudal exploitation and also to work for the uprooting of religious practices and beliefs. It is not possible to find any collection in which the author does not stress these themes. Etar Sharo deals almost exclusively in his quatrains with the state of the Kurds in former times: ignorance, poverty, oppression, and he returns again and again to the custom of the dowry which he considers a mark of slavery to be abolished. This is a refrain which is repeated by other poets, from which one would conclude that the custom is difficult to eradicate. Usiv Beko in his poem "Sihid," describes the condition of social degradation of which the poor man is ever the victim, when

defenceless he is faced by the rapacity of the rich and the merchants. H. Jindi supports the class war against the unrestricted injustice of feudalism, and he succeeds in provoking passionate reactions on the part of the oppressed. Such is the subject of his long poem "Golizer." But love in the end prevails over feudal exploitation, clan vengeance, the vulgar question of the dowry, thanks to the national war, the struggle for liberty, as it is celebrated by Wazir in the pathetic adventures of Nado and Golizer. In Irak, Goran Evdalah Sulayman (1904-1962) renewed the true poetical approach. He was a champion of free verse and an exponent of it, as he was also a champion of liberty in life and in ideas. He also was in favour of those reforms of the social structure, which alone will permit the full flowering of the Kurdish people. Such ideas caused him to be acquainted with the prisons of Baghdad. It was there that he composed his "Fourteenth of July in Prison," written amid the clamour of the popular manifestations of that historic day, which, in theory, ought to have inaugurated a new era for the Kurds. Cegerxwin, Sheikmous Hesén, born in 1903, chief of the band of poets of the North, writing in the Kurmanji dialect, has the same ideas as Goran, but he pushed them to extremes. He believes, and he declares it in his collection, "The Revolution of Freedom" (1954, that salvation can only come from the North, i.e. the Soviet Union. He also was to taste of suffering in Syrian jails.

Is it necessary to deal with patriotic poems? Certainly, for they are innumerable; but this is a difficult poetic kind in which it is often easier to imitate the doggerel verse of *Déroulède* than the fiery stanzas of Victor Hugo. This poetry of love of country, of the cult of Kurdistan, has had its patent of nobility for a very long time, since the days of Ahmed Khani himself. Its style has been continued in the ardent verses of Nali and of Haji Kadir Koyi. Irak has maintained the tradition with Mullah Hemdi Sahibkiran (1876-1936) and with Ahmed Mukhtar (1897-1935) in the style of classical prosody. At the time of the Independent Republic of Mahabad (1946), two young poets distinguished

themselves by their patriotic ardour : M. Heyman and especially Evdirehman Hejar, born in 1920. But perhaps one must award the palm in this field to Cegerxwin himself for his first *Diwan* (1945) in which breathes a pure poetic afflatus. It is vibrant with an ardent patriotism. This unfrocked mullah is haunted by the thought of his lost fatherland which is to be rediscovered, and in his verses, often classical and sometimes of a more modern style, he seeks to forge the arms necessary for that restoration: devotion of the chiefs to the national cause, the union of all transcending tribal and religious divergences, and especially the equal education of girls and boys, to emerge from ignorance and poverty. We have seen above that Cegerxwin has thus passed the stage of purely nationalistic and patriotic idealism and now demands before all else social reforms which, as he presents them, often have a Marxist flavour, although this spirited poet has no personal experience, or very little, of real Communism. Skilful propaganda sometimes obscures the vision of the most intelligent.

In any case, through these new tendencies, Cegerxwin is drawing close to the Kurdish Soviet poets whom it is unlikely that he has ever read. If he had, his astonishment would be as great as ours. Certainly these men behind the Iron Curtain do speak to us of the Fatherland, but they are referring either to Armenia, which in spite of everything is very strange for a Kurd, or to the "Great Land" of the Soviet Union. This is a favourite theme of Kachar Mirad (1958), for example, whose verse celebrates the Red Fatherland and whose national days are the 1st of May and the historic days of October. The same leitmotiv recurs without exception in all the collections of poetry published in Erivan. It is the obligatory introduction to everything. This very soon becomes tiresome, particularly as the authors are forced into repetition and run the risk of lapsing into a stereotyped style, without taking into account that they sometimes have to go back on what they have said. Those poems, as sincere as they were rash, in which the names of Stalin and of Lenin rhymed so well, have disappeared from circulation. Pages have been torn out of anthol-

ogies, but socialism continues its onward march. Men, even those who were idols, pass away, but the Party remains... By contrast, the world Kurdistan, in the sense of "The Country of the Kurds," appears nowhere. The author has never found it once though he has read thousands and thousands of verses. The patriotism of the Soviet Kurds is the International. This is not where Kurdish nationalism can be refreshed. It is not on this soil that verses like these by an unknown poet could be composed and sung:

To die for thee, my Kurdistan, nothing is more sweet.  
To be master in one's home and proudly sing in Kurdish  
In the lustre of our arms celebrating the fame  
Of our age-old race, of our cherished land.  
To be free, to love, to think, to die.  
Ask of that fountain, it will tell thee  
That in its murmur there are a thousand sighs,  
A thousand tears, a thousand risings, a thousand hopes.

## CHAPTER XI

### **Kurdish Nationalism**

These few lines that have just been quoted remind us, if we should be likely to forget it, that Kurdish nationalism exists as a living force. One would have, indeed, to be blind to deny this. National feeling, love of country, of the native soil, of its history, its beliefs and its customs, are universal sentiments to be found among all peoples and are justifiable provided that such a spirit does not lead to attempts to dominate neighbouring nations of a different race, civilization and culture. The Kurds today have a deep sense of their nationality, like all other peoples. This keen awareness of their racial individuality certainly has not come into existence all at once, and it is at least as old — and as firmly established — as Arab nationalism, for example, or the much more recent nationalism of different new African states. No one, therefore, can have a complete knowledge of the Kurds who is unaware of this ardent sentiment which inspires the various activities and political reactions of the Kurdish people. We shall do no more here than give a bare outline of this phenomenon, sufficient however, to give a fair idea of its progress and depth.

#### **The Prehistory of Kurdish Nationalism**

Since the fall of Nineveh (612 B.C.) until the conversion of the Kurds to Islam, it can be said that the history of the Kurdish populations of the Kurdistan of today, has coincided with that of the Persian Empire. The Kurds are very well aware of this and attribute to their ancestors and themselves the epic legends of "The Book of the Kings," recognizing as their own heroes the Rustems and the Hatems and many others who are also the glory of the Persians. It is to be noted, however, that if as early as this period Iraki Kurdistan was already peopled by the ancestors of the Kurds, the habitat of these until the emergence of Islam, was much more to the East than it is at present. It may be definitely stated that before the Middle Ages the Kurds scarcely occupied at all the regions to the West of and to the North of the Tigris. But since the

beginning of the Caliphate, military colonies were established on the Byzantine boundaries, and the advance towards the West became accentuated from the XIth century under the pressure of the Turkish hordes.

The process of conversion to Islam was not effected without some clashes, without a conflict due as much to religious as to racial differences; but gradually the Kurds became assimilated to Islamic civilization. Certainly Islam did not suppress entirely Kurdish individualism, and at the time of "the Iranian interlude", as V. Minorsky calls it, independent little Kurdish kingdoms broke away from the excessively Arab authority of the Caliphs. In the Xth century and for a century afterwards several Kurdish dynasties arose. First the Chaddadids (951-1088), in Transcaucasia, at Dabil and Ganja. These were very enlightened, and Persian culture prevailed at their courts. About the same period the Hassanwayhids (941-1014) had gained power in the Jibal (Khuzistan) and extended their domination over Hamadan and Nahavand, Kirmanshah and Charizor. One of these, Badr (979-1014), is famous for having established fiscal justice, fostered education and protected the peasants. They were replaced by the Banou Ayâr or Banou Annâz (991-1117). But the most renowned of the Kurdish dynasties is that of the Merwanids (990-1096) which established its sovereignty in Ardjish, Amid (Diarbékir), Mayafarkin and Hisn Keif. The organization of the principality was closely modelled on that of the Caliph of Baghdad. Abu Nasr Ahmed had a very long reign (1011-1061), during which he caused commerce to prosper and constructed buildings which were as useful as they were artistic. His court, at which the poets were numerous and famous, was extremely brilliant. This monarch, who was very rich, had more than 300 women in his harem. But all these little kingdoms were swept away by the Seljuks.

Is it necessary to be reminded that Saladin (1137-1193), that knight "sans peur et sans reproche," founder of the dynasty of the Ayyubids, the truest hero of Islam, and the first to unite the Moslem people, was a genuine Kurd? He surrounded himself



with Kurdish troops recruited from the Hakkari, Mihrani and Hadhbani tribes. These Kurdish contingents, more numerous than the Turcomans and even than the Arabs, played an important part in the war against the Crusaders, particularly at Akka and at the victory of Hittin (1187). During this period, then, the Kurds showed themselves to be a match for their contemporaries as well as being brave soldiers, clever and honest administrators, builders and friendly to the arts. However, it cannot be said that they set up the Kurdish states. Just as in the West, where the idea of Christianity prevailed over that of nationality, without, nevertheless, ignoring it, so in the Near and Middle East, Islam absorbed the nations, and their kingdoms were Moslem kingdoms, which — except for their founders — have nothing specifically Kurdish about them. At all events, the fall of the Ayyubids was followed by one of the darkest periods of Kurdish history. The Mongol horde swept over Kurdistan, an enormous disaster for the regions they passed through, the Chahrizor in 1247, the Diarbékir in 1252. In 1257 Hulagu ravaged the province of Kirmanshah and Irbil; in 1259 he plundered the Hakkari and Jézireh, the inhabitants of which he put to the sword. For two and a half centuries (1260-1502) the power of the Ilkhans Mongols and that of Tamerlane and his successors was constantly resisted by the Kurds, aided by the Armenians and even by the Turcomans of "The Black Sheep" (Kara-Kuyunlu), who had established themselves in the district two centuries before. Once the tempest had passed, the native inhabitants rebuilt their ruins, and in a few years re-established their industrial and commercial concerns.

### **Feudalism and Nationality**

It must be to an eclipse of the sun that the East owes its particular political contour over a period of four centuries, which decided the fate of the Kurds. The Sultan's astrologers drew a happy augury from their observations of this phenomenon which signified the sun, symbol of Persia, paling before the Crescent. And in fact, in the battle of Tchaldiran (2 rejeb 920/23 August 1514),

which took place on the day following the eclipse, the troops of Shah Ismail, founder of the Iranian dynasty of the Séfèvids, were put to flight by the artillery of the Ottoman Sultan, Selim Ist, the Terrible. In order to conciliate the Kurds and to make of their territory a buffer state between their Turkish Sunnite coreligionists and Persid, Shiite, this astute Sultan, largely owing to the good advice and management of the Kurdish religious head, Hakim Idris of Bitlis, established five independent Kurdish principalities. The chiefs of these, who were descendants of local dynasties, minted coinage and had the *Khotba* said in their names. These five hereditary Emirates were those of Bitlis, Hakkari (Julamerg), Bahdinan (Amadia), Botan (Jézireh) and Hisn-Keif. In return for discharging certain fiscal and military obligations, often disregarded, the Emirs became masters in their own houses, to the satisfaction of all concerned. Moreover, in the region of Diarbékir, eight sanjaks were administered by their chiefs in the same manner. The Shahs of Persia proceeded in like manner, and in particular, the Kurdish princes of Ardelan also enjoyed extensive rights. We pass over the Turco-Persian rivalry regarding their respective frontiers and the wars which ensued, for which the Kurds nearly always had to pay the price.

But, as early as the XVIIth century, the Sultans, jealous of this autonomy which was reducing their effective control, wished to suppress the Kurdish Emirs and replace them by Turkish Governors loyal to them. They played on tribal rivalries, but enfeebled by the many wars in Europe, they were powerless. It may incidentally be pointed out that in Iran in the XVIIIth century, it was a Kurd of the Zend tribe, Kérim Khan (1750-1779), who put an end to the anarchy following the reign of Nadir Shah (1722-1747) and made of his capital, Shiraz, a jewel among cities. On the other hand, in Turkey, at the beginning of the XIXth century, the struggle to reduce the last foci of Kurdish autonomy was renewed intensively. There were numerous conflicts and bloody rebellions. Everywhere, both princes and people resisted to retain their liberties. Thus we have in 1805 Abd el-Rahman Pasha Baban

(1788-1812) in Sulaymaniyah; in 1830, Muhamed Pasha, known as Mir Kor, in Rowanduz; in 1842-1846 the famous Bedir-Khan, Emir of Botan, in Jézireh who was defeated only by treason. He was the last independent Kurdish prince in Turkey. But in 1880 it fell to Sheik Obeidullah of Nehri to try to carve out a fief independent of both Turks and Persians. He also had to yield. Henceforth it is a question both of feudalism and independence. The all-conquering state carried centralization to the death, the better to dominate and to sink racial differences in a common thralldom. The sons of the vanquished chiefs were graciously received and educated in Istanbul, so as to have them under control far from their ancient fiefs and to render them more pliant and more docile to the central power. Between 1889-1892, in order to canalize the warlike virtues of the Kurds, the Sultan Abd el-Hamid organized the *Hamidiés*, a light cavalry under the command of tribal chiefs, which were sent to fight on all the battle fronts, with the object of decimating them before employing them as executioners in the massacre of the Armenians, during the Great War, under the colour of Islamic solidarity. But the Kurds have since repudiated this slogan. In short, the Turks did everything possible to destroy that Kurdish nationality which feudalism had fostered and developed. But their efforts have served only to fortify and exasperate Kurdish nationalism.

### **Kurdish Nationality and International Law**

The movements of the feudal Kurds against the Sublime Porte may be regarded as the calls to a national awakening. But all such movements were made without any unified plan and without clearly defined aims. For example, a chief will wish to retain hereditary powers or carve out for himself a little kingdom to the detriment of the government and of his weaker neighbours. The idea had not yet emerged of a great independent Kurdistan. This dream took shape a little before, and with greater force after, the First World War, just like the idea of Arab independence and

for the same reasons. To achieve their objects the Kurd nationalists utilized in turn two tactics: the way of diplomacy and the highroad of insurrection.

The revolution of the Young Turks (1908) was to arouse the enthusiasm of all those in Turkey who had a love of liberty. Minorities, both religious and racial: Arabs, Armenians and Kurds, believed that the hour of their emancipation was at hand. The Kurds naturally were not behindhand in taking advantage of the new climate of thought.

Political, social and cultural organizations were formed in Istanbul in 1908 through the combined efforts of the Emir Bedir-Khan, General Sharif Pasha, and the senator Abd-el-Kadir of Shamdinan. They had as their organ the journal *Kurdistan*. Their association for education opened a school for Kurdish children of the town, but soon (1909) the Unionists closed the school, and the association now dissolved, became clandestine. In 1910 some students founded the movement *Heviya Kurd*, The Kurdish Hope, whose monthly publication *Roja Kurd*, "The Kurdish Day" in 1914 became "The Kurdish Sun," *Hatawé Kurd*.

On the entry of the Turks into the war on the side of the Central Powers, some Kurdish chiefs, who were agitating, were arrested and executed, among them Khalifé Sélim of Bitlis. In 1917 Sheik Abd-el-Kadir thought it prudent to take refuge in Mecca, near the Sherif Hussein, while his son, Seyid Abdullah, founded a society for the liberation of Kurdistan, *Istikhlasi Kurdistan*. For their part, some Kurdish chiefs, such as Seyid Taha, nephew of Abd-el-Kadir, and Kamil Bedir-Khan, tried to make contact with the Russians to interest them in their lot. For the Kurds, as a whole, had lost confidence in the Turks. Some Turkish officers, indeed, who had invaded the districts of Tabriz in Persia, where they had pillaged the Armenian villages and massacred their inhabitants, were said in the midst of their orgies to have declared: "On our arrival we exterminated the ZO (Armenians), on our return we shall rid us of the LO (Kurds)." In fact, Enver Pasha, in the middle of the war, with the pretext of evac-

uating the Kurdish population before a Russian invasion, ordered the deportation of 700,000 Kurds to the western vilayets, where a very great number of them perished. At the same time, other Kurds responding to the call of a holy war (Jihad), proclaimed by the Sultan, in their turn massacred the Armenians, who had also been deported.

As soon as the war came to an end with the armistice of Mudros (October 30th 1918), committees were formed. In Cairo, the Emir Suraya Bedir-Khan (1883-1938) founded the Committee for Kurdish Independence, while in Istanbul itself, the Emirs Emin and Kamuran Bedir-Khan and the senator Abd-el-Kadir set up an Association for the re-establishment of Kurdistan. Soon also there came into existence The Kurdish National Party and the Kurdish Society with social aims. These societies spread their ramifications throughout all the regions of Kurdistan. The occupation of Istanbul by the troops of Mustafa Kemal obliged the organisers to flee abroad, but for all that, they did not cease their nationalist activities, nor did the Arab committees of liberation. In 1919 even they assembled in Kahta, near Malatia, with the object of opposing, even by force of arms, the Kemalist movement. They were dissuaded from this by Colonel Bell of the Intelligence Service, who promised that Kurdish aspirations would not be forgotten in the peace treaties. Actually, the peace treaties did, for the first time in history, make an official international acknowledgement of the Kurdish problem.

The Armenians and the Kurds, equally desirous of freedom, both demanded their independence, but each, in part, claimed the same territories. Indeed, the vilayets of Bitlis, Diarbékir and Kharput were considered by the two peoples to be an integral part of their national soil. To avoid all misunderstandings which could only weaken the claims of both parties at the Peace Conference, an *Armenian Kurdish Agreement* was concluded in Paris, on September 20th 1919, between General Sharif Pasha for the Kurds and Boghos Pasha for the Armenians. This act of high policy soon had its reward. Actually the *Treaty of Sèvres* signed

on August 10th 1920 between the Allies and the Turks, founded an independent Armenia and a Kurdistan (Section III, art. 62-64). If such a decision was received with enthusiasm by the Kurds, it provoked an equally strong opposition and wave of protest from the French Radical pro-Turks of the Comité Dupleix. Mustafa Kemal, on his side, revolted against the treaty, and his victorious army, which had just thrown the Greeks into the sea, left him free to consider Sèvres a mere scrap of paper. A new agreement, the *Treaty of Lausanne* (June 24th 1928), in fact rendered it null and void. Europe thus betrayed the Armenians and the Kurds and "once more abandoned Armenia to its executioners" in the words of Le Fur, a professor of international law.

However, the Kurdish affair was not finished. It was taken up again at the League of Nations in regard to the *Question of Mosul*, a vilayet with a Kurdish majority, which had been claimed by both the Turks and the British, then the mandatories for the new state of Irak. A commission of enquiry was dispatched to the spot, and in accordance with its conclusions, the Council of the League of Nations, in its 37th session of December 16th 1925, decided the vilayet of Mosul should go to Irak. But the rights of the Kurds were guaranteed. With regard to this, it is interesting to quote some lines from the report of the commission concerning the Kurds of that area:

"If a conclusion is to be drawn from the racial argument alone, it would lead to sanctioning the creation of a *Kurdish independent state*, the Kurds forming five ninths of the population. If such a solution should be envisaged, it would be appropriate to add to this figure the Yézidis, Kurds of the Zoroastrian faith, and the Turks, who would easily be assimilated to the Kurdish element. On the basis of such an evaluation the Kurds would constitute seven ninths of the total population."

At the same time the government of Irak, thanks to the **British mandate**, was making every effort to extend its dominion **over the Kurds**, not without promising repeatedly, in its Declara-

tion of July 11th 1923, and the Circulars of the President of the Council (January 21st 1926) and that of the Minister of the Interior (February 18th 1926), that the rights of the Kurds would be respected, that their language would be taught in the schools and used in the courts and the administration, that the functionaries would be Kurds, or at least able to speak the language, in the Kurdish areas of the country. The British strove to make these regulations effective; but in June 1930, they signed an Anglo-Irakian treaty, which terminated the mandate without any provision being made for recognition of the rights of minorities, whether of religion or of race. This omission was to have unfortunate consequences for all.

### **Kurdish Nationalism Confronted with the Nationalism of Neighbouring Peoples**

To sum up, international post-war policy, despite some hopes soon to be crushed, only succeeded in making the position of the Kurds more precarious. Whereas before 1914 the Kurds lived in only two countries, Turkey and Persia, they were henceforth divided between five different countries: Turkey, Persia and Irak with a quite important minority in Syria and a smaller one in Soviet Armenia. This partition of Kurdistan could not be accepted by Kurdish patriots, and periodical risings were to disturb the tranquillity and threaten the very existence of the occupying governments.

There are some games which are dangerous. A child who excites his dog by offering him a bone which he continually refuses to give him, has only himself to blame if he gets bitten. And so, in politics, to dazzle the eyes of the Kurds with the prospect of an era of independence and then regard the treaties which proclaimed this as mere scraps of paper, to promise solemnly the Kurdish people that they were going to enjoy their natural right to their language, to their culture and to their own local government, and then systematically refuse to grant these rights, is a disastrous policy, which will henceforth be a perma-

ment cause of instability in this region of the Middle East, already unstable enough in itself. This game is all the more dangerous in that these same rights to independence and autonomy have been freely granted, especially after the Second World War, to peoples who, on the whole, are much less advanced than the Kurds. It is very easy, then, to understand that the Kurds should feel themselves defrauded and should seek to win their place in the sun like everyone else.

Let us briefly resume the situation as it appears in the three principal countries in which the Kurds dwell: Turkey, Iran and Irak. In Soviet Armenia, where the minority is minute and their cultural rights assured, there is hardly any problem for the Kurds diluted, as one might say, in the numerical, cultural and social superiority of the Armenians. The same may be said of Syria where, in principle, if the Kurds do not have their own community schools, they enjoy the same civil and political rights as all the other citizens.

### **The Kurds in Turkey**

We begin with this country, for it is here that the Kurds are greatest in number (5 to 6 millions at least) and where their movements, real military risings, have cost the Turks dear, in men, material and money.

The uprising of Sheik Said of Piran, in 1925, is the first sign of discontent. This was attributed to the fanaticism of Moslems who longed for the days of the Caliphate, abolished by Ataturk, and for the feudal privileges, threatened by the reforms of the Republic. Others, including Ataturk himself, saw in it the hand of England, for this revolt favoured her designs on the vilayet of Mosul. Tribunals of Independence were set up, which sent people to the gallows on the least pretence. The trial of the insurgent leaders took place in Diarbékir (April-June 1925). Fifty three of them were condemned to death and hanged because in the words of the President of the Tribunal, they were "all united on one thing: the creation of an independent Kurdistan" (June 28th).



A second revolt, that of Agri Dagh (Ararat) was conducted in accordance with all the requirements of military technique by capable officers, troops equipped with modern weapons and under the command of the National Centre (Xwebûn) which was fully aware of objectives to be attained. The Turkish government, in May 1930, concentrated two army corps under the command of Salih Pasha. Incendiary bombs were dropped on villages, without sparing women and children. All further resistance becoming impossible, the leaders of the insurrection fell back on Iran. The executive of the Second International in its session of August 30th 1930, in Zurich, at the request of the Armenian delegates, protested against the methods of extermination of the Kurds, which recalled the manner in which the Turks had exterminated the Armenians. The Turks accused the Persians of having helped the Kurds secretly. As "to him that hath shall be given," some imagined that the famous Lawrence was concerned in it. Finally some (Agabékof) have insinuated that the Soviets had a hand in the affair, while others still (Khondkarian) have affirmed that, quite on the contrary, the Russians were prepared to help the Turks to put down the rebellion.

Be that as it may, on May 5th 1932, the Turkish government decreed the Law of Deportation which authorized the Minister of the Interior to deport to the western provinces the Kurdish populations of certain zones, "for health, material, cultural, political, strategic and disciplinary reasons." Thereafter, officially in Turkey there are no more Kurds. There are only "Highland Turks."

The revolt of Dersim in 1937 soon refuted this statement. This revolt, led by Sheik Riza was more terrible. He wished to resist the brutal administrative measures. The movement spread and the army had to intervene. Here again the affair ended in executions. Eleven of the accused were condemned to death on November 14th 1937, by the criminal court of El Aziz and were executed the next day. In addition, the sinister name of Dersim was expunged from the map and replaced by Tunjeli (Tunceli).

Since then Turkish Kurdistan has been calm. Western journalists have thought they could conclude from this that Kurdish nationalism in Turkey had disappeared. Recent events have undeceived us.

### **The Kurds in Iran**

That the Kurds should rise up against Turkey is quite understandable; that they should kick against the Arabs of Irak to whom they consider themselves superior, is even more explicable; but one is astonished that good relations should be disturbed between the Kurds and the government of Teheran. Are they not both Iranians? Are their languages not close to each other? Are they not nourished on the same ancestral legends? Everything then ought to bring the two peoples together, and undoubtedly the situation of the Kurds in Iran is, on the whole, better than that of their neighbours. The Iranian government frequently emphasizes the features they share, but nevertheless, here also it is necessary for us to record conflicts; often smouldering and sometimes bloody political and social tensions arise from time to time. Thus, during the 1914 war, Imail Agha Simko, chief of the Shikaks, wished to make himself independent of Persia, relying sometimes on the Turks and sometimes on the Persians themselves, who, to subdue him, appointed him governor of Ushnu on Lake Ourmia. In the end they treacherously murdered him by the same means that they had used to murder Mar Shimun Benyamin, the Patriarch of the Nestorians, March 3rd 1918.

Since 1922, Riza Shah Pahlavi practised towards the Kurds a harsh policy, which consisted in deporting to Teheran the principal tribal chiefs after having confiscated their property, so that the Kurdish peasants, deprived of their chiefs, were left to suffer the corruption and the brutal policy of the Persian functionaries, as Elphinstone tells us. This policy was also condemned very severely by the American judge Douglas, who had witnessed it in action.

At the time of the Second World War Persia was occupied

in the North by the Russians and in the South by the British. Between the two, Kurdistan was a kind of *no man's land*, where it was possible to live more or less in freedom, in any case far away from the oppression of Teheran. The Kurds took advantage of the situation to form a political party, *Komala*, rather conservative but nationalist. A Kurd of an important clerical family of Mahabad, Kazi Muhamed, soon took over the leadership of it, and seizing a propitious moment proclaimed on January 22nd 1946, without any bloodshed the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, in the heart of the autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan, which had been established at Tabriz, in view of the chaos reigning in the central Iranian government. Kazi Muhamed was an honest and brave man. According to A. Roosevelt Jr., he was neither a Communist nor anti-Persian, but he desired an internal autonomy, within the framework of the Persian Empire. He organized his little state very well, opening schools and hospitals, publishing newspapers in Kurdish, striving to promote the development of agriculture, commerce, industry and hygiene. All of which, in short, had nothing revolutionary about it. Mullah Mustafa Barzani (whom we shall meet again), at that time a refugee from Irak, and very soon appointed General by the young republic, brought it the support of his small but well-seasoned army. The government of Teheran took advantage of the departure from Iran of the Soviet armies, which had supported the Republic of Azerbaijan, but not that of Mahabad, to indulge in bloody reprisals. The principal members of the autonomous government were hanged on March 31st 1947. These included three Kazis. The experiment had lasted for just a year. Barzani this time took refuge in the U.S.S.R. after a series of truly epic adventures. The tomb of Kazi Muhamed has become a place of pilgrimage.

Such methods of violence have never solved problems which rather require understanding and a social sense. On two occasions, for economic reasons, this time, the tribe of the Javanroudi, near Kirmanshah, in September 1950 and in February 1954, were taken to task by the troops of the Shah on the grounds that they

did not pay their taxes, refused to surrender their arms, and were growing hashish. The Soviet Union has been accused of supporting these rebels. According to P. Rondot, the effectiveness of their repression has been the first positive result of the *Baghdad Pact* (1955). This pact which replaced the *Saadabad Pact* (1937) had as one of its objects to come to the aid of the signatory powers: Iran, Afghanistan, Irak, Turkey, should they find themselves in difficulty with their Kurdish nationals.

Since these last disturbances, the Iranian government, anxious for constructive social reforms, has endeavoured to gain the sympathy and even the support of its large Kurdish population. Since May 1959, there has been published in Teheran and distributed widely abroad, a weekly paper, *Kurdistan*, in which appear competent articles on literature, religion, science, history and even politics. But at all events the unstable situation in Irak keeps the Iranian government on its guard.

### **The Kurds in Irak**

The life of the Kurds of Irak has been no less agitated than that of their brothers in Turkey and Iran for they too have had some revolts.

On May 1st, 1920, at San Remo, Great Britain received from the League of Nations the mandate for Irak and Palestine. But the Kurds did not wait for this official mission before getting in touch with the British who had been in occupation of their territory even before the treaty of Mudros. Indeed, since the occupation of Mesopotamia and Kirkuk (May 7th 1918), the English, who had two good men ready to start the work, Majors Soane and Noël, had entered into relations with the Kurds. These, in a petition signed by some forty tribal chiefs, had asked in December 1918 Sir Arnold Wilson, then Civil Commissary, for the formation of a Kurdish state under British protection and associated with Irak. Sheik Mahmud Barzanji (1880-1956) was appointed governor in May 1919. On March 11th 1920 the Emir Faysal was proclaimed King of Syria at Damascus while the

signing of the treaty of Sèvres was producing agitation among the Kurds. Faysal, driven out of Damascus by the French, was proclaimed King of Irak on August 23rd 1921. A year later, in September 1922, Sheik Mahmud, who in the meantime had been exiled to India, was authorized to return to Sulaymaniyah. But the Sheik who had been hampered in his government by English control, although he claimed to be their friend, could not bear to follow meekly in the footsteps of a Bedouin Arab. In October 1922, he proclaimed himself Hukumdar, King of Kurdistan, formed a government and issued postage and Inland Revenue stamps. Had the British any hand in this? At all events, on December 24th 1922, an official declaration said: "The Government of his Britannic Majesty and the Government of Irak recognize the rights of the Kurds living within the frontiers of Irak to establish a Kurdish government within these frontiers." But soon friction developed between King Mahmud and his protectors who this time forced him to flee to Penjwin, where he remained until 1930, the year in which the mandate terminated.

The British protectorship had hardly ended when the Hachemite monarchy clashed with the Kurds and the Assyrians (massacre of Semel in August 1933). The Iraki government, by wishing straight away to impose Arab functionaries and to suppress the use of Kurdish in the administrative offices of the North, produced a tension which developed into open revolt when Iraki soldiers opened fire on the civilian population of Sulaymaniyah (September 6th 1930). Once again Sheik Mahmud, returned to his country and assumed the leadership of the movement by demanding internal autonomy under British protection. The Arab army, showing itself incapable of crushing the rebellion, which lasted for nine months, it was the R.A.F. again which had to intervene to restore order, thus provoking indignant protests from former high ranking officials, like Wilson and General Dobbs, who declared that they had predicted such unfortunate happenings. Mahmud was placed under house arrest in Baghdad.

But the Hachemites were only at the beginning of their

troubles. In July 1931 it was Sheik Ahmed of Barzan who revolted in his turn in 1932, and again in 1933. In the end he was banished to Kirkuk, then to Sulaymaniyah where he remained until 1945.

Iraki Kurdistan was from now on quiet. In 1941, after the adventure of Rashid Ali Gailani, the British who were now firmly re-established in Irak, in order to make themselves popular with the Kurds, favoured their enlistment in the British Army, and some of them even officially indicated "autonomous districts" in Kurdistan.

In 1943, Mullah Mustafa Barzani, brother of Sheik Ahmed, in forced residence in Sulaymaniyah, dissatisfied with the food situation and other conditions prevailing among his tenants, succeeded in escaping to his territory of Barzan, accompanied by Sheik Latif, son of Sheik Mahmud, and there raised the standard of revolt. A Kurd, Majid Mustafa, appointed minister of state, intervened to settle the affair. Barzani gave in on condition that Kurdish districts received better food supplies and that Kurdish and not Arab functionaries should be appointed, and that schools and hospitals should be opened in Kurdistan. These conditions, accepted by Nuri Said, the prime minister, were unfavourably received by the Regent Abdulillah, and in the spring of 1945, the revolt broke out again, worse than ever. This time it was more serious. The Kurds obtained some spectacular victories, while the Iraki army sustained heavy losses in men, and the cost, according to a deputy, amounted to a million dinars. It was then that once more the R.A.F. entered to play its rôle of saviour of Irak and the Hachemite monarchy. By the end of August the operation was completed. Mullah Mustafa withdrew to Iran with some of his troops and his booty. Four of his officers who had faith in the promises of an amnesty: Mustafa Khoshnaw, Izzet Abdul-Aziz, Muhamed Mahmud and Khairallah Abdul-Kerim, were tried and executed on June 19th 1947. They were to be rehabilitated by General Abd el-Karim Kassem after the proclamation of the Iraki Republic.

After these events in which force had triumphed, there was

nothing for the Kurds of Irak to do but continue the struggle clandestinely. This is what they did. They founded the Kurdish Democratic Party, with left wing tendencies and published two bulletins: *Azadi* and *Rizgari*. In its second number (October 1946) *Rizgari* proposed with enthusiasm the formation of a *Kurdish-Armenian Union*. During this time, Colonel Elphinstone, head of the Intelligence Service, was wondering if these efforts were not going to lead to the formation of a Republic of the Soviet Union of an Armenian-Kurdish character...

At any rate, calm having been restored, the Kurds took advantage of what remained to them to work with a greater enthusiasm in the cultural field. Literary reviews appeared. Collections of poetry, and articles on the history of Kurdistan and on famous Kurds of the past were published. Sulaymaniyah then became an active centre of culture and a focus of nationalism.

The fall of the Hachemite monarchy, to which the Kurds had contributed, and the proclamation of the Iraki Republic (July 14th 1958) was to open a new era in Arab-Kurdish relations. Article 3 of the provisional constitution stated: "The Arabs and the Kurds are associated in this nation. The Constitution guarantees their natural rights as an integral element of the national being." Further, a decree of September 2nd 1958, amnestied Mullah Mustafa and authorized him to return to Irak. It is known how Kassem, by failing to implement this article of the constitution, provoked in September 1961 an armed conflict, which lasted until his fall, of which it was one of the causes. According to many witnesses and western journalists, who were there on the spot, the Kurds had never been so united and so intrepid in their struggle for their national claims. The Baath party and Marshal Abd al Salam Aref succeeded Kassem, but did not seem to realise completely the strength of this feeling and renewed the fight on June 10th 1963. Then was the Baath downfall; the party was overthrown in November 1963. A cease-fire was then decided on, which was very much desired by Marshal Abd al-Salam Aref, the victor of the latest coup d'état. Since then, the two sides have remained station-

ary. The sense of concrete realities, in which the reality of Kurdish nationalism must be included, must lead to an equitable solution of a problem which otherwise is going, for a long time yet, to disturb the equilibrium of the Middle East.

Le Kréyé, Lebanon, September 23rd 1964.



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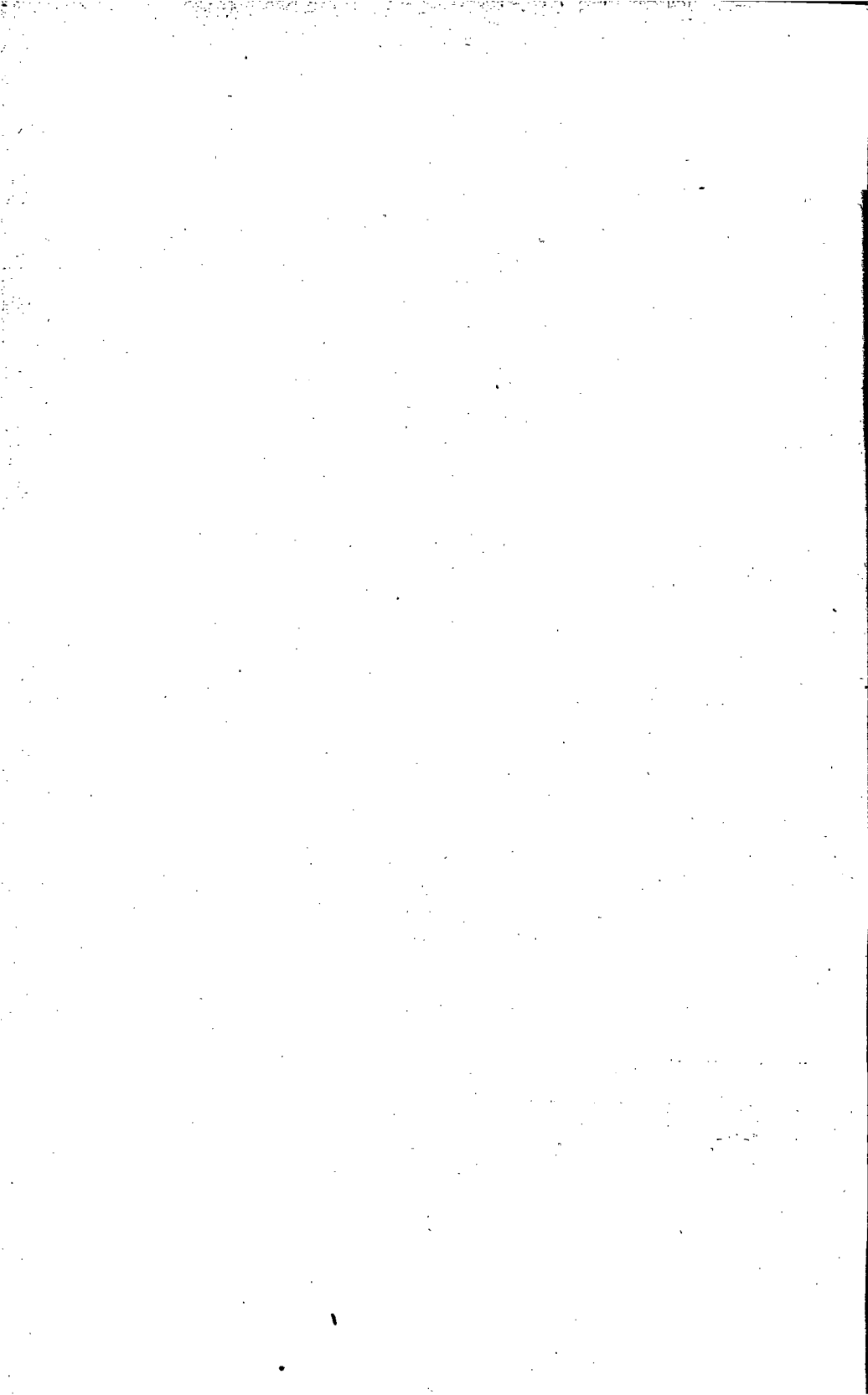
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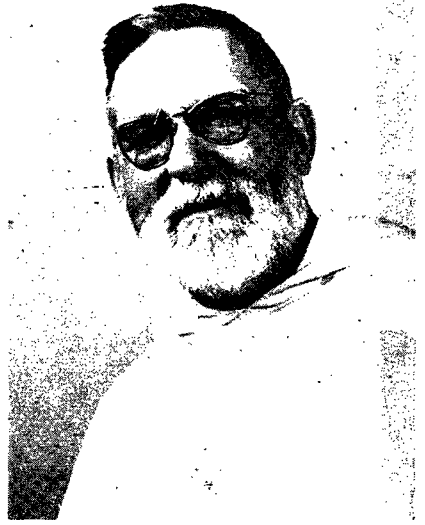
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