THE PEACOCK ANGEL IN THE SPRING

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I MUST confess at the start that I have not penetrated deeply into the Yezidi religion. Their secrets are still inviolate, and I feel tempted to think that a good many of them, even their priests, are not clear as to these secrets themselves. Indeed, one of the charms of the Yezidis is that they are very vague about theology. Lescot, in his book on the Yezidis, complains that each time he asked for a list of the seven angels he was given different names, and I could add fresh variants. However, they are all positive about one thing, and that is that the Peacock Angel, Taw'ūs Melké, is chief of them all, and, as you know, this Angel is supposed by outsiders to be none other than Lucifer himself, or more plainly, Satan. The Yezidis lend colour to this by forbidding the word Shaitān to be spoken, but when I talked with a qawwāl he was emphatic that the Peacock Angel was *not* the Prince of Evil. "We say," he said, "that evil comes from men's hearts," and went on to add that men who do evil are punished in their next reincarnation. They believe firmly in reincarnation, and I was told by a Yezidi woman that in dreams it was possible to know something of past lives.

Of one thing I am convinced, that they do *not* look upon their worship of the Peacock Angel as a propitiation of evil. They are a pious people: the name of God is always on their lips and prayer and reverence to the shrines an essential part of their daily life. Prayer should be said five times a day, facing the sun, and particularly at sunrise and sunset. Every time a Yezidi passes a holy place he kisses the stones of the walls and threshold and every Tuesday and Thursday evening lights are placed at the shrines.

Their practised religion is a kind of pantheism. God, for them, is in the sun, the moon, the planets, the mountain spring, the green tree, and his mystery in caves and bethel stones. The most common form of shrine is a tree and a spring together, and wherever the white spire of a Yezidi cone arises you may be sure that these are not far away. Sometimes a fluted spire marks the tomb of a saint, sometimes it is a mere cenotaph named after one of the so-called companions of Shaikh 'Adi.

This may camouflage nature-worship. Here is a slide of the shrine of Shaikh Shems-ad-Din at Shaikh 'Adi. That means, of course, Sun-of-the-Faith, and a shaikh of that name is, they say, buried beneath. It may be so, but a bull (not necessarily a white one, by the way) is slaughtered there once a year, and on the spire is a golden ball placed where the first rays of the rising sun strike it: moreover, on many mountain tops in Yezidi districts one finds a flat rock, enclosed by a wall, which is considered holy and called Shaikh Shems, Shaikh Sun. There is one such near Shaikh 'Adi.

The object of my going north this spring was to see the Yezidi spring festival, and for this purpose I selected the village of Baashika, not far from Mosul. The 'Iraqi authorities most kindly placed a small house at my disposal, and I lived there some time before the feast in order to get acquainted with the people of the place and see something of the pattern of their lives.

I had an introduction from a Yezidi friend to a young man there, Rashid ibn Sadiq, and my first call was on him. His father was away in the Jebel Sinjar, so Rashid did the honours, preparing tea for me himself as I sat under the pergola in his courtyard. I told him what I wanted, and he promised to help in every way that he could, and was as good as his word. He sent there and then for one of the qawwāls, and that evening two of them visited me. I must explain what qawwāls are. They are the third grade of the Yezidi priesthood, and it is they who travel with the sanjak, the image of the sacred peacock. Their chief duty is to chant, and their chants are transmitted from father to son and never written down. They must also be able to play the shebāb and the daff, the sacred flute and tambour. Above the qawwāls are the pīrs, and above these the shaikhs. All three orders are hereditary, and a member may only marry within his own rank. A fourth hereditary order is that of the faqīrs, who are ascetics and wear next their skins a black woollen tunic which is considered very holy, also a sacred thread and belt. Then there is a lay order, the kocheks, who wear white and are often made custodians of the shrines.

I became friendly with the qawwāls, particularly with one of them who had served in the Levies when he was young. Ever since then he has polished his teakettle and Primus with Brasso and talked of the English. When he joined the force he was told that he must cut off his long hair and beard. He was horrified, and was taken before an English officer. He explained to this officer that a qawwāl may not cut his hair, and the Englishman, he told me, "asked me about my

religion, and talked to me as a friend." He was allowed to keep his hair.

Rashīd sent me a Yezidi midwife. She was far from clean, and her hair straggled over her old face. People called her Mama, or Hajjīa, but my name for her was Sairey Gamp. From her I heard about childbirth and the customs of Yezidi women at such times. She took me to a Moslem patient directly the baby arrived, and to a Yezidi woman who had just had a miscarriage, and at both I learnt a good deal. No Yezidi woman obliged me by having a baby, but I heard what happened both from a Yezidi woman and from Sairey. A visitor told me one day that it was believed in the village that I wanted to take a photograph of a woman having a baby because women in England did not have their babies naturally, but by surgical operation. She brought her daughters to see me. One was a tattooist, and as I had examined many of the tattooings on Yezidi women I was glad to hear from her exactly how it was done. A thick paste is made from sheep's gall, black from olive-oil lamp smoke, and milk fresh drawn from the breast of the mother of a girl-child—if the baby is a boy the punctures fester. The design is drawn in this and then pricked in with a needle, or two needles tied together. I noted the most common designs, amongst which were a comb, the sun, the moon, a human figure called " the doll," and various forms of cross.

Another of our friends was the headman of the village, a farmer, who told me many interesting things—for instance, of the dance performed when there is a drought. A boy and girl dance round the village, and the villagers throw water on them.

We became friendly, too, with a delightful old lady of shaikhly family, Sitt Gulé, who had had a tragic life. She was living here in exile, and her elder son was in prison because he aided some Yezidi youths to evade military service by crossing the frontier from the Jebel Sinjar into Syria. The younger son was imprisoned, too, because a few months before he had stabbed his sister, who wished to marry outside her caste. She was the only daughter, and he had murdered her in her mother's presence. Sitt Gulé was a very dignified old woman, who always wore white, and had a hard struggle to keep the household going, for it consisted of three daughters-in-law, eight children and two servants. She was broken-hearted about her elder son, and begged me to help to get him released.

Sitt Gulé took me one day to see the shrine of her ancestor, Shaikh Sajaddin. She told me as we came away, " The angel Gabriel is of our

family, too," in much the same tone as someone might mention that they were distantly connected with the Duke of Norfolk. The explanation is that the companions of Shaikh 'Adi are by legend supposed to have been incarnations of angels, so that she could, quite legitimately, claim angelic descent.

I must stop telling you about our friends in Baashika and describe the village itself. Layard mentions the cleanliness of the Yezidis, and I endorse every word he said. It was a delightfully clean village. No rubbish was thrown down in the streets, there were no dead dogs or donkeys left to decay, and, above all, there was no litter. Because few could read there was no newspaper of any kind, and when one went to the bazaar, one wrapped one's purchase in a kerchief. There was no post-office, no telephone or telegraph and no radio; in fact, it was the most blessed escape from the war that you can imagine. The scent of flowers and herbs blew through the streets from end to end, and the spring grass came right up to the village. When we climbed the hills we could see the plain for miles, and just below, the mound of Tel Billi, where the Americans were excavating till a year ago.

Baashika is close to the village of Bahzané, the road between the two being bordered by hilly graveyards, amongst which rise many Yezidi cones. Some are shrines, some are not. On this road is one of the sacred stones. It is surrounded by potsherds. Pilgrims to the shrine bring water in a vessel, pour it on the ground, and scrape up the mud to apply to sores and skin-diseases. The dust or clay from every shrine has medicinal value. Dust from Melké Miran is good for constipation, from Sitt Nefīsah (a sacred tree by a stream) for fever, and so on. There are shrines all round the villages and in the hills. In one, shown to me by the old shaikha, a cave in which there was a spring, I discovered three panels carved on the rock, showing a deity and a procession bearing offerings. I reported these to the Department of Antiquities on my return to Baghdad, and they have now been photographed and noted by Mr. Seton-Lloyd for the Department.

I shall now describe the spring festival. It began on the evening of the sixteenth of April, the first Tuesday of Nisan (Old Style). As I was walking down the valley I heard the sound of a pipe and the hollow thud of a drum, and a whiff of incense drifted towards us.

We came on a group of women standing round a grave, weeping noisily and beating their breasts or slapping their faces to the measure of a plaintive little tune played by two qawwāls, one with his pipe and the other with a tambour. The tambour was like a large tambourine,

and was surrounded by jingles. After a few moments the music ceased, and when they had received a small fee, the qawwāls moved off to another grave. The women they had left sat round the grave chanting lamentations and sobbing aloud. These women were matrons and did not wear the gay headdresses of the younger women. On most of the graves bundles had been deposited and were opened up to show food within, crushed wheat (burghul) and eggs dyed bright orange. Any passer-by is offered food from these bundles, as we were, and the next day a number of gypsies, leading a bear, came to cadge what they could.

At the washing-pool below, where women beat the family washing with clubs, we saw newly slaughtered meat being washed, for on this evening every household should kill a lamb or a kid, or, if too poor, a chicken.

The feast proper began the next day. The Yezidi girls must have risen very early, for when we got up we saw that every house-door was decorated. Only one flower is used, the scarlet ranunculus, a bunch being fastened above every door, and one on either doorpost. The flowers are plastered on, stems upwards, with wet clay, and into the clay fragments of coloured eggshell are inserted. Many doorways were also smeared with the blood of the sacrifice. Not only house-doors, but the doors to rooms were decorated, and even the bees had red flowers plastered above the openings in the clay-plastered hives. Graves, too—each headstone was decorated—and the girls put tight bunches into their turbans. Everyone was making gifts of coloured eggs. The favourite colour was orange, a bright vegetable dye which women use for their woollen meyzars, but we saw also purple, green, and a madder hue produced by boiling onion skins with the eggs. None were blue, for blue is a colour forbidden to Yezidis as it is to Mandæans.

It was a general holiday, and in the square boys and men were gathered playing the egg-game. You hold your egg in your fist with one end showing, and tap it against your opponent's held in the same way. The loser is he whose egg cracks first. For a farthing one could glue one's eye to a small hole in the peepshow, set up close by. We did, and enjoyed seeing highly coloured pictures of the German Emperor and his family, the Czar of Russia, a marvellous mountain scene which the man said was London, and so on.

In spite of the general merrymaking, the weeping at the tombs continued, and when we passed near them we heard the thump-thump of

breast-beating, the loud sobbing, and the haunting little tune played by the qawwāls. We had many visitors that day, who brought us gifts of coloured eggs, kleycha (a kind of mincepie made for the feast), some of the sacrificial meat, and so on. That night water was heated in every Yezidi house, for, after the Big Sacrifice comes the Big Wash, when every Yezidi takes a bath. That this is a ritual bath I do not doubt as the feast follows the ancient pattern throughout.

The next day was more or less a day of waiting. The people still kept holiday, went visiting and gambled for eggs, and we still heard the weeping at the tombs. That evening, all the chief men of the place would go to the shrine of Shaikh Muhammad al-Huneyfi, the largest Yezidi shrine in Baashika, to hold there an all-night vigil. We heard a great deal about this vigil, and outsiders hinted that horrible doings took place in the shrine. "There is one thing you will never see," one of the Jacobite monks told me, "and that is what goes on at Shaikh Muhammad the second night of the feast." An Assyrian missionary told me the same thing. "Not a Moslem or Christian is allowed near the place," he said.

So, late in the afternoon, my friend and I wandered down towards the forbidden ground, the shrine of Shaikh Muhammad. The door stood open and the green courtyard and shrine beyond looked inviting. We peeped in. Men sat round the courtyard and when they saw us they called to us to come in. The aged kochek who acts as custodian, dressed in spotless white, smiled at us, and waved us in. So in we went, took seats on the ground like the rest, and coffee was brought to us. A few women were busy in an ante-chamber preparing food, and on the grass before the shrine there was an iron stand supporting a four-lipped lamp in which four wicks were laid. I asked about this lamp and was told, after a little hesitation, that the lips represented the north, south, east and west, the road of the sun. Later on, about sunset, the kochek stood solemnly before the lamp, poured olive oil into it, then lit it with a piece of flaming wood.

We removed our shoes and entered the ante-chamber and laid an offering there, but did not go into the interior lest it might grate upon their feelings.

We could see, however, that the tomb was covered with green and red drapings. Then we resumed our seats. Yezidis arrived constantly. They walked straight up the paved path to the shrine and, stopping halfway, touched the breast with both hands, then the mouth and forehead, bringing the hands downwards strokingly over either cheek and

down the beard. At the shrine they knelt or bent and kissed the threshold, doorposts and stones by the doorway, then entered. From time to time a small procession arrived, headed by the kochek. Once it was a child in its mother's arms veiled in green silk which was left in the shrine, once an old man, hugging a cone of sugar. These were votive offerings. Coffee was brought at intervals, and most of the Yezidis sitting round, dressed in white and wearing red turbans, were smoking long pipes—qaliūns.

Presently four qawwāls who sat in a corner by the shrine drew out their instruments from brown bags, warmed the tambours over a brazier, and began to chant. The melody was less folk-like than the tune at the tombs. The rhythm constantly changed, and the beating of the tambours was led by the senior qawwāl. The tambours were not always held still, but were swept upwards, outwards or sideways, like a flock of birds wheeling together, and at certain points in the chant were shaken violently so that the jingles clashed and the drumming became violent. Prayer followed in which all joined, then, after an interval, another chant, and so on.

It was getting late and we did not wish to outstay our welcome, remembering all we had heard, and I said so to Rashid, rising to go. He then made us a charming little speech, said so that all could hear. He said that never before had outsiders been admitted to the shrine on this night, and they would never be admitted again. They had invited us in, and now invited us to stay, as a mark that they appreciated our friendship. Had we been men, even that wouldn't have let us in, but as women, and their good friends, we were welcome. Would we please not tell anyone we had been here.

We were deeply touched, and said so. I did not mention in the village that we had been admitted, and I hope that no one will ever presume on the favour shown to us.

A little later there was a shrill joy-cry outside and all rose to their feet. It was the Baba Shaikh, the religious head of the sect, a tall, stately old man dressed in white, his son walking behind him. He went the round, offering his hand to be kissed. When he reached us he checked, and then passed us over. However, when he had taken his seat, I could see explanations going on, and he sent for us. As he spoke nothing but Kurdish, an interpreter was necessary. I told him that we were greatly honoured by the permission to be present, and so on, and he was gracious to us.

Large bowls of harīsa were then served—a kind of wheaten por-

ridge, and bowls of meat. These were set round the courtyard, several eating from each bowl, and we ate like the rest. After the meal the Baba Shaikh washed his hands and called for his pipe, four feet long, with a huge amber mouthpiece. His son lit it for him, and then the Shaikh's tobacco bag, beautifully embroidered, was handed round to certain honoured guests. I must not indulge in too much detail. The chanting and prayer continued, but we did not stay all night. We were tired, and were assured that what we had seen and heard continued till dawn, and that nothing else took place. So we went home to sleep.

The next day was sheer Bacchanal. As luck would have it the sun was shining brightly, and we went straight down to the shrine again. The large grassy space before the building had become a fairground. Every moment people arrived, and more and more. There were pedlars sitting in long rows, tents, gypsies, fortune-tellers, and so on. We again entered the shrine, for it was there that the first ritual dance would take place. The roof was already crowded with women who, with the exception of ourselves, were not allowed to sit in the courtyard below. As we sat, other women came in; they arrived constantly, and joined those on the roof. The dresses, the jewellery, the chains, the amulets, the embroideries, the rainbow colours were so incredibly brilliant that my friend and I kept saying to each other, "Oh, look, look!" till words failed us. Solomon in all his glory certainly was not arrayed as one of these. The headdresses alone were magnificent. Above shining helmets of silver coins they wore turbans of silk kerchiefs of several colours decorated with silver and gold chains, jewels, and large-headed pins. Huge silver buckles to their belts are worn by Yezidi women, and in addition they wore festoons of bright beads, silver and gold. On their arms were amulet boxes, and their hair, artificially prolonged with black sheep's wool, was fastened with chains and baubles of gold or silver that reached their feet. As for colour, orange, scarlet, green, violet, purple, daffodil yellow, lemon, there was every possible combination you can think of. When no more colour could be put into the dress, it was added in the shape of multiple-coloured tassels.

They were not all Yezidi women—numbers of them were Kurds from the villages, some were Christian. But all went and paid reverence to the tomb, for a saint is a saint whatever his religion. Many girls had flowers in their turbans, and some of the Yezidi girls were as fair as English women. The difference in racial type between the

laymen of these villages and the hereditary priesthood is very great: the laymen might almost pass as Scandinavians with their tawny shocks of hair and blue eyes, whilst the religious orders are all dark.

At last there was a stir without. The men in the courtyard stood up in rows, and there were shrill joy-cries outside and on the roof. The great moment was near. In the next minute the piper and the drummer entered. We had already seen them in the village, followed by a crowd. Their instruments were not like those of the qawwāls. The drum was a big ṭabal, the pipe a wide-mouthed wooden flute called the zurna or zurnaya. As soon as they had come into the courtyard both these men fell on their knees, facing the shrine. The piper played one long shrill note that sounded like a cry to wake the dead, and the drummer beat a prolonged roll. They swayed backwards and forwards. This lasted a full ten minutes, while the women kept up their fluttering cry from the roof. Everyone else was as still as death. I cannot tell you how stirring it was. Then the two rose to their feet and entered the shrine, and as soon as they came out the men in the courtyard linked arms for the dance. The piper and the drummer stood in the middle and struck up. The tune they played is that which is always played at the opening of the spring festival, and it is gay and inspiring. To dance in the shrine is an honour which brings a blessing, and the right to dance here is sold previously by auction.

It was hot in the crowded courtyard as the men shuffled round in the dance. It was the debka, which many of you no doubt may have seen. When it stopped, everyone streamed outside to the fairground, and the dance started there again, but this time anyone could join in, women as well as men, and the circle grew wider and wider and the dancing grew more abandoned as the day went on. The men stamped and leaped and waved their long sleeves; the women danced more stolidly. There was a pause at noon, but dancing began again in the afternoon and was continued at night by moonlight, though the piper and his mate had gone to sleep by then and the rhythm was supplied by clapping.

Well, that was the spring festival, and I fear I have not much time left to tell you about Shaikh 'Adi.

That was, I think, one of the loveliest experiences I have ever had. The temple of Shaikh 'Adi, with many subsidiary shrines, lies in a valley in the Hakkiari Mountains and is reached by an extremely bad road from a village called 'Ain Sifni. The valley lies in a deep pocket of the hills, almost a gorge, and the white cones of the shrines rise

above the green of the many trees which grow there. It is a very lovely place, and as one goes up the pilgrims' path the murmur of water gets louder and louder till at the shrine itself the rushing is perpetual and almost drowns the song of the many birds. I walked up, and came suddenly upon the first archway of grey stone, and there, standing beneath it, were two ladies dressed in white, wearing white woollen meyzars, white turbans and wimples, with spindles of white wool in their hands. These were two of the permanent attendants of the shrine, one was a novice and the other the abbess or kabana. She was a woman of late middle age with an expression of singular sweetness and dignity. These white ladies never marry once they are vowed to the shrine. There was one more, an aged nun to whom I never spoke. She used to sit spinning, spinning her white thread all the day, looking like one of the three fates as she sat on her grey wall. Unfortunately for me the Shawish, the permanent guardian of the place, to whom I had a special recommendation, was absent. His subordinate only holds office for a year and lives by what he makes out of the pilgrims. The privilege is sold by auction, and Faqīr Reshu, the present servitor, paid the Mīr £350 for his post, so that, obviously, the sum made from the pilgrims is considerable, and most of it is made during the great Feast of Assembly, when the whole hillside is dotted with camping pilgrims, pedlars open shops, and at night the debka is danced in the courtyards. In normal times the servitor has only to look after the shrine, keep it clean, and see to the lights. My room, the guest-room, was just by the baptism tanks, and from its windows I could see the faqīr every evening going on his rounds with the sacred fire. He carries a large bowl of olive oil. This bowl has a wide lip, upon which lay a bundle of flaming wicks, and in his other hand he carries a ladle. I could watch little flames leap up as he placed the wicks here and there on rocks and corners, speeding up the rocky paths, sometimes disappearing up an arched passage. Now and again he stopped to ladle oil into a lamp and kindle it. He was barefoot, so were the nuns, and every Yezidi who comes to the valley removes his shoes whilst he is there. We were not allowed to use petroleum lamps; nothing but olive oil must be used for lighting. I was permitted a candle as a concession.

The temple, with its forecourt and courtyards, its paved ways, arches and stone steps, is very like a mediæval monastery; indeed, probably was one originally, and was almost certainly a sanctuary before the Christian era. The temple, with its famous black snake by

the door, has been rebuilt, probably many times. The blocks of stone of which it is built are unmortared, and on the western face are several carvings in low relief and some inscriptions. Above the door is the flaming sun-disc, enclosing a crescent moon and a five-rayed star. On the walls are the usual Yezidi symbols, found again and again on other shrines. They are the shaikh's gopal, like a walking-stick; the comb, teeth upwards; the lion; the moon, crescent and full; stars; flowers; a gurgeyza or mace; and the five-stopped pipe of the qawwāls. The serpent, too, is found on other shrines in the holy valley, mostly in a vertical position, but on one shrine coiled.

I did not enter the temple until the last day. I had already paid flying visits to Shaikh 'Adi in previous years and had been inside it. But I noted carefully the other shrines, and of these there were many. The dust of each was used as a remedy, and Jiddan told me that some of the shaikhs keep pots of shrine dust by them just as chemists keep pills and powders. Muslims, too, go to the shrine for cures, and I saw the abbess one day interviewing a Kurd who came habitually to get rid of rheumatism. He asked her what he should do for stomach ache, and she gave him excellent advice as to diet coupled with an injunction to rub the seat of the trouble with Shaikh 'Adi clay. One of the shrines, Pīr Hajjāli, is famed for curing madmen. They are chained within the building till their reason returns. If not, after a time they are removed.

The peace and quiet of the place were enough to cure anyone whose wits were not wholly gone. Wild flowers grew everywhere and the birds sang all day long, especially the blackbird, and one day I was delighted to hear the cuckoo. Trees were thick in the valley—mulberries, oaks and others, including the qazwān (a species of pistacchio) a fine tree considered especially sacred. It bears a jade-coloured edible berry and becomes very large. May trees were in blossom and the whole place was scented with herbs. There was really an atmosphere about the place—a kind of happy sanctity reminding one of Assisi.

I have no time to tell you about the shaikh who carved spoons there, a gentle and charming person, or of my talks with the faqīr, or of many pleasant times I had with the white ladies. At dawn and at dusk I saw these ladies praying before the temple and devoutly kissing the walls, then setting off barefoot up the rocky paths to visit and salute all the many other holy places round the valley. They had only just heard, by the way, that there was a war on and that a person called Hitler was upsetting the world.

The last day arrived. I took off my shoes and went with the faqīr into the building itself. It is very dark, divided into two naves, with two chapels on the north side containing the tombs of Shaikh 'Adi and Shaikh Hasan al-Basri respectively. The floor is dirty with droppings from the olive-oil lamps. The temple has often been described, so I shall not dwell upon it here. My purpose was this time to see the crypt below the temple. Here is the sacred spring they call Zemzem, and it flows through a cavern in the natural rock. Mr. Wigram entered it during an attack by the Turks and the absence of the Yezidis, and Miss Bell was taken into it by the Mīr's aunt, then the abbess.

Well, I was disappointed. The faqīr, who was a fanatical, dour, pale, pock-marked little man, first strenuously denied that there was such a place, then he tried to palm off as the crypt a cavern used for storing oil, and, finally, faced by my accusing knowledge and in the presence of several people who tried to make peace between us, he admitted it. He admitted he had lied, he admitted the crypt, he admitted everything, but he would not admit me.

"I will not let my own wife enter," he said, "nor the Mīr himself. Only the Shawish, and these ladies, and the Baba Shaikh may go in there, and when I enter to clean it the lamp in my hand trembles because it is so holy that I am afraid."

At the time I was annoyed, but when I reflected I saw that he had really done me a service. It was not so much what was there that was important, but the attitude of the Yezidis towards it. The tombs and temples above were revered, but were not holy as this was holy. The spring and the cave were the real sanctuaries, older, far older, than the saint who lived and died here and left his name to the valley; old, perhaps, when Nebuchadnezzar sat on his throne.

So I forgave him, and when we parted he called down the blessing of Shaikh 'Adi on my head, while the white ladies said they would pray for me at the shrine. I hope that they did.

Mr. HUMPHREY BOWMAN, after paying his tribute to Mrs. Drower for her admirable lecture, said that in 1918 Colonel Leachman, the first British Political Officer of Mosul, opened a school, soon after the occupation, in Jebel Sinjar, one of the Yezidi strongholds. He was asked by Colonel Leachman to visit the school and try to persuade the Yezidis to send their children there. On arrival he found Muslim and Christian children, but no Yezidis. It appeared that soon after the opening of the school, which was at first attended by a few Yezidi

boys, an earthquake had occurred, in which several people had been killed. The earthquake was followed by the flooding of the stream that flowed through Jebel Sinjar, and two Yezidi boys had been drowned on their way to school. This, said the shaikhs, was the result of disobeying their canon law, which forbade learning except to the priests. The Devil was offended and had taken his revenge. A conference took place between the speaker and the shaikhs, and after some discussion they agreed to send their sons to school on two conditions, both of which were readily conceded. The first was that a Yezidi priest should teach religion to boys of that faith; the second was to eliminate the word "shatt" (river) from the Arabic wall maps supplied by Government and substitute the word "nahr," which meant the same but did not offend by having those fateful letters which appeared in the name "shaitân." Thereafter Yezidi boys attended in some numbers, and he was able to report to Colonel Leachman that the wish then dearest to his heart had been fulfilled.

Mr. Bowman also recalled the story related by Gertrude Bell in her famous Review of the Civil Administration of 'Iraq, published as a White Paper in 1920. The head of the Christian monastery of Alqôsh had indicated one of the monks to a Political Officer. "That man," he said, "was born a Yezidi. As a boy he was ploughing his father's fields. He had heard that anyone saying the name 'shaitân' would be struck blind, and he made up his mind to put it to the test. Very slowly he said 'sh-sh-shai-shaitân.' Nothing happened, and on returning home he told his father what he had done. 'Father, I have said that which is forbidden, and I am not blind.' 'Aren't you?' said his father, reaching for his gun; 'then you soon will be.' The boy fled, hotly pursued by his father, and sought refuge in the monastery of Alqôsh, where he was brought up as a Christian and became a monk."

The meeting closed with a very warm vote of thanks for a delightful lecture, which had been illustrated by excellent lantern slides.