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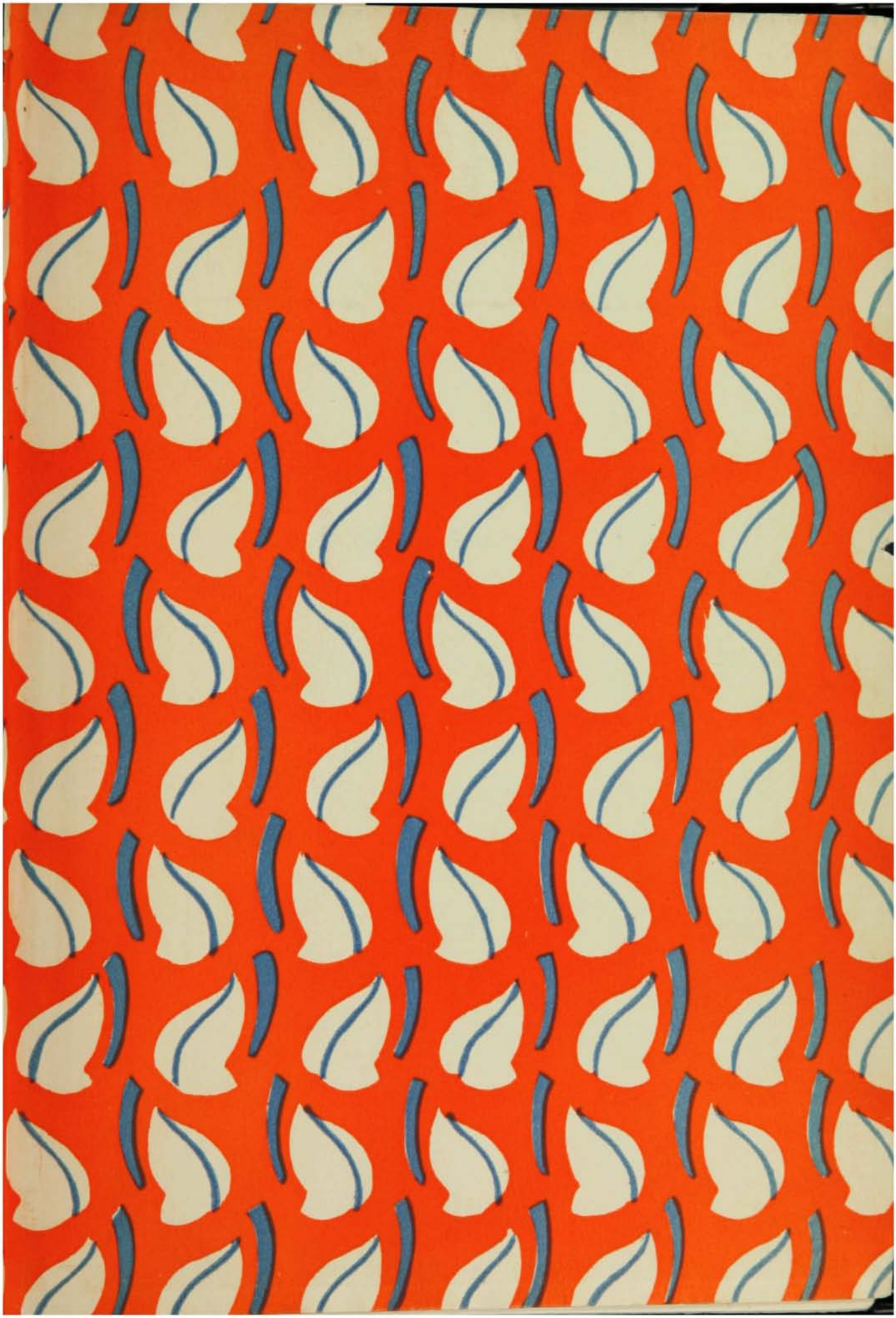

MYSELF WHEN YOUNG

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BY

YOUEL B. MIRZA

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TO

A. B. M.

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Y. B. M.

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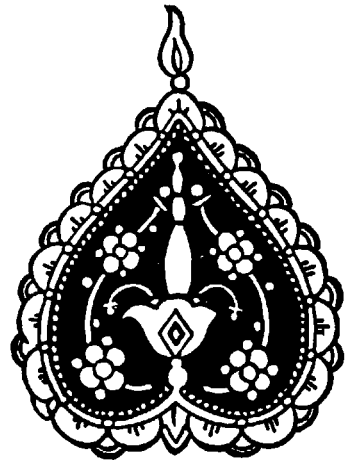

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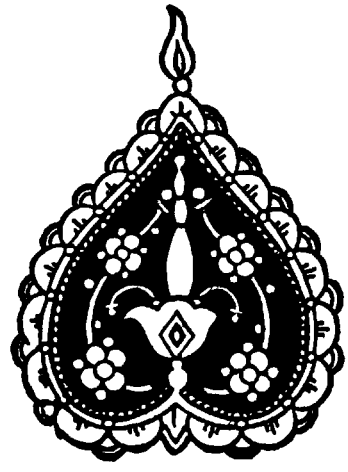


CHAPTER I

The New Year

I WAS awake before the sunrise, dressing excitedly in the spring dawn. It was a great day—*Nurooz*, the New Year. We celebrated two New Year's days, the New Year of the Christian calendar, which was one of our church festivals, and the Persian New Year, which all the village kept, Christian and Mohammedan alike. The Persian New Year comes in the spring when the sun enters the sign of the Ram at the spring equinox, the time when life begins anew in the world of nature.

I went out into the gray mists of the morning. The ground beneath my feet glistened with a fairylike tracery of frost work that would soon vanish with the rising of the sun. Above the crowings and bleatings and stirrings of the farmyard I heard a swelling, rushing sound. It was the spring song of the Nazlie Chie, the swift river that skirted the edge of our meadow. I ran through our orchard and down through the meadow to the river bank.

The stream had risen steadily during the night, fed by the recent rains and the melting snows from the mountains. The Nazlie Chie could be treacherous. It had been known to flood the countryside, sweeping houses and bridges before its rushing descent. We often called it the "Giant," believing it, of course, to be the mightiest river in the world.

I ran along the river bank a little way to a point just below the mill. Here stood the tallest *chinnar* (sycamore) tree in all the village, and in this tree for a season or two past a stork had built his nest. He came always a few days before the arrival of his mate to have the nest

ready for her. A certain harbinger of spring was the *hadji legleg*, called by the coveted title earned by the pious Mohammedan who makes the *Hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Mecca, for the stork winters in that sacred city.

For a week I had been looking for my friend the stork, and this morning my eager eyes beheld him in the top of the tree. He stood in his characteristic pose, one leg folded up under his body. With dignified manner he seemed to be surveying the morning landscape as the sunrise brightened the eastern sky.

"*As-Salaam-alai-kum!* (Peace be to you) *hadji legleg*," I called.

A voice hailed me from the direction of the mill. Davod, the miller's son and my playmate, was also up early to look for the arrival of the *hadji legleg*.

The sun came up, the glorious Persian sun, mounting like a king into the clear blue heavens. It has always seemed a natural thing to me that the ancient Persians should have worshiped the sun as the giver of life, and that they began their new year with the day that ushers in the

half of the year in which the days are longer than the nights.

My friend the stork came down from his lofty perch. Davod and I watched him as he waded through the river marshes for his breakfast. He had no fear of us. Storks are greatly respected in Persia. The Mohammedans in our village considered the storks holy birds because of their migrations to Mecca, and we all were grateful because they destroyed the snakes which infested the river swamps and marshes. Often I have seen the *legleg* flying high with a good-sized water snake dangling from his bill. No boy in my village would attack a stork. Whoever stretched forth his hand against the *legleg* we believed would surely die.

II

"The *hadji legleg* has come to the *chinnar* tree by the mill," I announced when I went back into the house to breakfast.

"Then the spring is come indeed," said my grandfather. "Soon the swallows will come and then the golden-throated nightingale."

My grandfather was very old. It was said that he was already a hundred years old when I, his youngest grandchild, was born. He was very feeble now, but he still held, through the force of his indomitable will, the headship of the village. Our chieftains were not elected, nor was the office hereditary. The power belonged to the head of the largest clan, or to the man whose strength of arm and force of personality could grasp and keep it.

This was the day when my grandfather, the *Katkhoda,* received homage and tribute from the village men. They would come, each bringing a

present, to smoke the water pipe with him. He wore his fine blue coat with the brass buttons, and reclined upon the cushions near the warm oven to receive his guests. For several days my mother had been busy preparing the rich confections of nuts and raisins and pastry for the feast of *Nurooz*.

My grandfather loved my mother very much. She was his favorite daughter-in-law, and he chose to live with us rather than with his eldest son, as was the custom. He lived with us, too, because my uncles had large families, and our house, where I was the only child, was quieter. My uncle Benyamin lived in the big house which my grandfather had built, and my uncle Namatoe, the second brother, and my father, the youngest, lived in smaller houses opening on the same court. It was rather like three separate apartments in the same building, for the houses were built wall to wall, and in the summer time when we almost lived in the yard we were like one very large family.

To-day my mother had on her best dress, her velvet trousers, and the silken blouse embroid-

ered in silver and gold. She wore the necklace of carnelians and gold and silver coins. Some of the coins in the necklace were very old, worn almost smooth so that one could no longer read the date or the inscription. It was a family heirloom and had been given to my mother by my grandfather, the *Katkhoda*, who delighted to give her presents. Always he used to bring her gifts from the city, and now that he was too old for journeys any more my mother took care of him and made him comfortable.

My mother could not remain in the house when the village men came to pay their respects to the *Katkhoda*. After she had attended to all the preparations and instructed our manservant Sadig about serving the sweetmeats to the guests she would go to the home of her mother, where there was to be a party of her women friends. In our village men and women were never seen together in society. The women had their parties and the men had their own gatherings. When my mother wished to entertain her friends my father and my grandfather left the house to her and went elsewhere.

III

After breakfast I went out into the village street, which was filled with men and boys shouting and making merry over the New Year and the coming of the spring. Davod and I, our pockets stuffed with nuts and raisins at which we nibbled continually, wandered from group to group. There were two or three cock-fights in progress.

"I wish I still had Shah Abbas," I said. "He could whip any of these roosters."

My pet fighting cock, named for the mighty Persian king, had died the year before, and because my preacher grandfather frowned upon such sport, my mother did not wish me to train another fighting rooster.

What interested me most was the wrestling matches. The young men of the village tried their strength in throwing one another. My grandfather, the *Katkhoda*, in his youth had been a great wrestler, like his own father, who had performed his feats at the court of the king.

I edged my way into the crowd, Davod close

beside me, until we had a good view of the wrestlers. I watched, fascinated, as the great muscles bulged out on their shoulders, and as the wrestlers gripped one another until I felt sure their bones would crack.

Young Ishmael, the merchant's son, threw three wrestlers in succession, and the other contestants hesitated.

"They are afraid," boasted Ishmael, striding proudly up and down. "I can throw them all. I can throw any man in the world."

I saw my cousin Lazar standing back in the crowd. How I wished that he would step out and put an end to Ishmael's boasting. But alas, neither Lazar nor any of his brothers were wrestlers. The great strength of the *Katkhoda* had not descended to his sons and grandsons.

But Ishmael boasted too soon, for a youth of our clan, which had never been friendly to the family of Ishmael, took up his challenge and threw the braggart. It was the turn of our clan to be jubilant, and Ishmael and his clan, goaded by our taunts, started a free-for-all fight.

"*Ashik ochla ashik* (Ass son of an ass)!" cried

my father's cousin Sirkhush, wading joyously into the fray, while Davod and I clapped our hands. Wrestling matches usually ended in a fight in which the unfortunate losers were made to "eat sticks" by the victors. This time, however, the fight was never finished, for suddenly sharp hoofbeats sounded down the street, and the fighters gave way before a strange-looking cavalcade.

Riding into the village came a band of tall, fierce-looking men on horseback. Each man fairly bristled with weapons. Round their waists and slung across their chests they wore cartridge belts. They carried long rifles and sharp-edged swords. From under their gay-colored turbans their flashing black eyes looked out. We all stepped aside from their path and were careful to salute them respectfully as they passed.

They were Kurds, fierce outlaws from the mountains, who stole cattle and plundered villages and even kidnaped children and young girls now and then. They would descend stealthily in the dark of night upon a lowland village and carry off everything upon which they could

lay their hands. And here they were riding through our village in broad daylight. But I knew that they came peacefully. It was New Year's Day and they were coming to pay a visit to my grandfather *Mirza Katkhoda.* They respected him because he had never been afraid of them. He used to go boldly into their mountain camps to buy their rugs, which he sold again in the city where the Kurds did not dare to go because they would be arrested for the taxes which they always refused to pay and which the officials did not dare go into the mountains to collect. The outlaws called my grandfather their friend and often showed him honor. I wondered what present they had brought this time. Nearly all the rugs in our house were presents from the Kurds.

I ran down the village street after them and slipped quietly into our door. The fierce-looking guests had stacked their firearms against the wall and were seated, cross-legged, in a semi-circle before my grandfather. Sadig was just bringing in the water pipe. Sadig was himself a Kurd and he appeared delighted to see some

of his tribe. He took the first smoke, as was the custom, to determine whether the pipe had been properly prepared to present to his master.

Sadig always took pride in preparing the water pipe for my grandfather. He washed the tobacco in sugar and rose water and pressed it nearly dry. Then he put it into the brass container that also held the burning charcoal. The smoke passed through a glass jar of water before it reached the smoker's lips. Sometimes my grandfather, if Sadig was not about, would have me start the pipe with a few puffs to have it drawing well.

Sadig handed the water pipe to my grandfather, who smoked for a few moments and then passed it to the leader of the Kurds, who sat next to him, and thus it passed from one to another of the whole company.

My eye caught the gleam of polished steel. Beside my grandfather on the cushions lay a pair of Kurdish swords. This time the present was not a rug. The swords were beautiful. I saw myself parading before my playmates with

the swords of the emir of Kurdistan, for it was he who had sent them. But needless to say, such a thing never happened. My mother would not allow me to have such dangerous playthings, and the beautiful swords were hung upon the wall out of harm's way.

When the Kurds rose to depart my grandfather clapped his hands and Sadig appeared with the present to be taken back to the emir. It was a huge loaf of sugar, something very precious and highly prized. Sugar was even a great luxury in our village and practically unknown among the Kurds. Sadig brought out nuts and raisins, also, and the Kurds filled their pockets.

"The favor of Allah abide with you," they said to my grandfather.

"Peace be unto you," he responded.

They gathered up their rifles, mounted their horses, and rode off again down the village street.

IV

During the afternoon my grandfather's friends came to see him. Our house was always the fa-

vorite place for the older village men to gather on holidays and on the long afternoons of winter when there was nothing else to do. They smoked with my grandfather and told their great *naghals*, or folk tales. Zia the barber came, and Rustom the blacksmith, Iskender the master dyer, and Osman, a Kurdish basket maker who lived in our village. Agha Hady the musician came with his *kamanja* to play and sing for the company. Kasheasha the village priest came, a tall man in long black robes, wearing a silver cross about his neck. But my other grandfather, the Presbyterian minister, did not come. He was not friendly with my grandfather the *Katkhoda*, and had tried to prevent my mother's marriage to the *Katkhoda's* son.

Even Doomba came to-day, and because it was New Year's Day, he was welcomed. All the small boys in the village made fun of Doomba. That was not his name, but we called him Doomba, which means "cock without a tail," because he wore the short European coat instead of the long-tailed native garments. Doomba could tell interesting stories if anyone would

listen. He had traveled as far as England. It was this trip to England that had aroused the contempt of his neighbors. Doomba had gone about among the good English church people begging money for the poor Persians. He had great plans for founding a school. He collected quite a sum of money and returned home. But he built only a small clay schoolhouse and with the rest of the missionary money he purchased acres of vineyards and erected a fine house for himself.

Zia the barber was the best story-teller in the village. I curled up on the cushions behind the oven to listen. Zia always said that when a story was finished three apples descended from heaven, one for the story-teller, one for the listener, and one for the person about whom the story was told. I used to watch carefully but I never saw the apples.

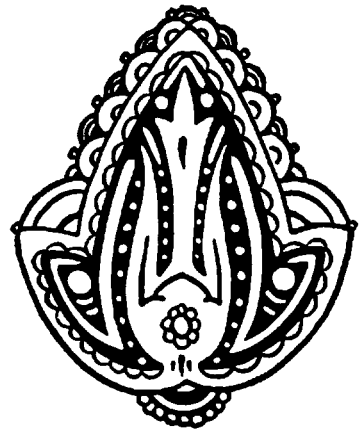
Agha Hady tuned his *kamanja*, the sweet-toned stringed instrument made of mulberry wood, for that wood produced the clearest and softest tones. Agha Hady's *kamanja* was round like a melon and hollowed out on one side. This opening was covered with lambskin, and the

melon-shaped dome was ornamented with pearls and engraved with gold and silver. The *kamanja* had three strings. The bow was made of polished wood and was strung with hairs taken from the tails of white horses. Agha Hady sat on the floor with his feet folded under him and rested his instrument on an iron rod. Instead of drawing the bow from string to string, he turned the *kamanja* around so that its strings touched the bow. Agha Hady said that the harp which King David played was our Persian *kamanja.*

So with games and feasting and merry-making passed the first day of the year and the first day of spring, and the New Year's sun descended in a splendor of crimson and gold behind the purple Kurdish Mountains. But with nightfall the merry-making only increased. This was the hour for which Davod and I and all the small boys of the village had been impatiently waiting.

As soon as it was dark fireworks began to blaze and sparkle from housetop after housetop. All the night was full of beautiful lights and shooting stars as bright as the stars that glittered in the clear heavens. Drums beat and the young

men sang and danced on the flat housetops to celebrate the New Year. Everyone was happy because the spring had come again after the long, hard winter.



CHAPTER II

The Days of Spring

NEXT morning there was school again. Davod and I dragged our unwilling feet toward the schoolhouse. The school to which we went was one of the first built by American missionaries in Persia. It was supervised by my mother's father, who had left the old Nestorian faith to become a Presbyterian and was now the Presbyterian clergyman in our village.

The schoolhouse adjoined the Presbyterian church. It was built of sun-dried bricks and was two stories high. The first floor was used as a

storage room for wood and fuel brought and placed there as a part of the price of tuition. When we went to church on Sunday mornings we left our sandals in this room, for we thought it most irreverent to wear shoes into the church. We noticed with horror that the American missionaries who now and then visited my grandfather's church did not remove their shoes.

Davod and I climbed the winding stairway to the second floor of the schoolhouse. This stairway, the only one in the village, was a novelty to everyone. A master carpenter had been brought from the city to build it.

The March weather was still chilly and there was a fire in the stove which stood in the middle of the room. The stove, which was also an object of curiosity, had come from Russia. There were two big windows in the schoolroom, but they had no glass and in the winter the teacher pasted oiled paper over them to keep out the cold.

The teacher had made our school equipment with some of us to help him. We made a blackboard of a few smooth boards nailed together. We smeared the surface with oil and charcoal,

rubbed it in well and let it dry. We had no chalk, but we wrote on the board with sharp pieces of limestone which we picked up on a hill near our village. We made our pens out of reeds which we sharpened and trimmed to the size we wished. And we made ink by boiling a metallic substance until we obtained the desired shade and consistency.

On the wall of our schoolroom hung a large map of the world. It was the most valued article in the school, and we were allowed to touch it only with a long rod. The names of the continents and countries were written in the English language, which even our teacher could not read. I used often to look at this map when I should have been studying my lessons. My eyes sought out the country that lay to the west of us, far across the "Big Sea." I did not think of it as America. We called it *Yeni Dunya*, the New World. My grandfather the minister often received letters from this wonderful country. My uncle Shimuel and my aunt Sara, his youngest son and daughter, whom I could scarcely remember, had gone there to study. They sent us

presents and wrote to us about the marvelous sights to be seen in that wonderland.

We had no furniture in our schoolroom. We would not have known what to do with desks and seats. We sat cross-legged on the floor, as we did at home, while we recited.

Every week or two my grandfather the minister came to visit the school. The teacher bowed before him.

"May your foot be blessed," he said, and my grandfather gravely entered the room to observe the progress and discipline of the pupils. I was proud of him because of his position, which gave me standing in the eyes of the other boys, but I was never truly fond of him. Indeed, I was always half afraid of this stern holy man, and he looked upon me as one of the most unruly boys he had ever known. It was vain to complain to him that Rabi Machiel, our teacher, was cruel and switched us for the least mistake or bit of mischief. The only answer my grandfather ever made was, "'He that spareth the rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.'"

"How doth thy pupil Youël, my grandson, progress in the path of learning?" he asked my teacher.

"God bless him," answered Rabi Machiel. "He is not doing so badly. Occasionally he is in need of reproof, but I have hope that he will be a learned boy before I have done teaching him."

"Teach him first of all obedience," said my grandfather. "'Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.'"

II

Late afternoon released us from the school-room, and once outside we raced and shouted down the village street. Our way home from school was sometimes beset with delay and difficulty, for we met the pupils of the other schools and we always regarded them as our enemies, as they likewise looked upon us. With the Mohammedan boys we had no trouble, for they kept to their own part of the village and we to ours. But there were at this time three Christian schools in our small village of about three hundred inhabitants. The Presbyterian school

ranked first and best and our teacher, Rabi Machiel, was known as the most thorough and also the most cruel of the schoolmasters. He seemed quite to agree with the proverb of the poet Sadi which says, "When schoolmaster is gentle and sweet, the boy will play at leapfrog in the street."

The Nestorian school gave courses only in reading, writing, and memorizing prayers. Then there was the Church of England school, founded by Doomba, which was languishing from lack of pupils and indeed was closed within a year or two.

These three Christian schools fought each other continually for pupils. Parents and teachers united in dragging boys from one school to another, and sometimes before the school year was over a youngster would have attended all of them. We were but reflecting the attitude of our teachers when we boasted of our school and made disparaging remarks about the other schools. The battle of words which raged back and forth across the street frequently led to rock fights, and many a pupil returned from school

with a bleeding face or blackened eye. But I cannot remember that the teachers ever punished a pupil for thus defending the honor of his school. My grandfather the minister deplored the situation, but I believe that my grandfather the *Katkhoda*, who was ever a fighter, secretly delighted in the trouble it caused him. The *Katkhoda* had never had any patience with the introduction of Presbyterianism. He looked upon it all as foolishness and remarked that the Mohammedans showed better sense in having but one school and one schoolmaster for their boys.

III

The buds of the almond and apricot trees in our orchard burst into bloom and the trees appeared white as when covered with their winter snow. The peach orchards showed a blush of pink. The sky was blue and cloudless. A soft breeze blew from the south, warm with the glow of the golden deserts. The grass of the meadows was fresh and green and overnight the water channels were bordered with forget-me-nots and irises. The countryside became a vast carpet of

flowers. The tulips and bluebells, which had pushed up their first green shoots from beneath the melting snow, opened to the sun their blossoms of crimson and blue and gold.

The nightingale hung his bag-shaped nest from the topmost branch of the great poplar tree in our courtyard. The swallows came again to make their home in our rafters, thereby bringing good luck to all the house. The house which was not visited each spring by swallows we thought unlucky. Something was sure to happen to the people who lived in it. Every boy in our village knew the legend of how the swallows had once won a battle for the Persian hosts. The swallows picked up pebbles from the ground and flew by thousands high into the air, dropping the little stones upon the heads of the invading enemies and killing them. It was against the village law to kill a swallow, and the swallows in our house had no enemy but our cat, whom we watched to prevent his catching the young swallows.

Though swallows brought blessings wherever they made their nests, owls were birds of bad

omen. The appearance of an owl in a house would drive the family into distraction, and no one could rest until the unlucky bird had been driven out and charms employed to ward off the disaster that the owl's appearance had foreboded.

Spring was the busiest season in the year in my village. Early dawn found everyone astir, for there was much work to be done. The rice and wheat fields must be planted and closely watched by the farmers. If certain spots appeared bald more seed was sown before the ground became dry. My uncle Benyamin and my uncle Namatoe were farmers. On spring mornings before school I would run across to their fields to watch the interesting things happening there.

All planting of grain and seed was done by hand. My uncle Benyamin's grown-up sons tied big canvas bags about their necks and walked through the fields, scattering a handful of wheat at every step. My uncle Namatoe was famous for his fine vegetables and melons. His honeydew melons were known all about the countryside. He planted the seeds early in the spring and carefully watched the young vines.

While my uncles were occupied with the planting of their fields, my father was busy in our orchards and vineyards. We had four tracts of land: from two of them we gathered grapes and the other two were apricot, plum, and peach orchards. The grapes we raised were the finest I have ever seen. When my preacher grandfather read from his Bible about the wonderful grapes of Eshcol which the spies of Moses brought from the land of Canaan I knew they must have been like our grapes. My father hired helpers each spring to work in our vineyards, spading the ground and pruning the vines.

My uncle Benyamin raised sheep, and shear-

ing time always found me in his meadow. My uncle's sons did the shearing, one holding a trembling little lamb firmly in his strong hands while his brother's shears went snip, snip, cutting away the lamb's fine soft coat.

Once when I was a very little boy my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had given me a pet lamb for a playmate. At shearing time I was persuaded to take my lamb to my uncle Benyamin to be sheared. At the first frightened bleatings of my pet I begged them to stop, and my cousin, who always liked to tease me, laughed.

"See," he cried tormentingly, "I shall cut off his tail."

I rushed upon him, beating furiously with my little fists until my grandfather dragged me away and comforted me, telling me that the shearing did not hurt the lamb, and that his coat would be too heavy when the hot summer came. They gave me the wool from my lamb and my mother spun it into yarn and wove me a fine winter suit.

I liked to watch the little lambs when they had been sheared. They looked so funny and naked

as they frolicked about in the warm breeze that tickled their shorn sides. The wise old sheep stood quiet for their shearing and walked away afterward to nibble at the sweet grasses and herbs that grew along the brook. When the shearing was over they were led out to pasture up and down the fertile course of the Nazlie Chie until the chill winds of autumn would drive them back to their folds.

On the next bright warm day when the wind blew from the right quarter my uncle and his sons carried the baskets of wool down to the little stream that rippled through the meadow. They dipped the wool into the water, and after it was thoroughly wet they placed it on a large stone and pounded it lightly with a thin board. The beating loosened the dirt, which was then washed away by the flowing waters of the brook.

My uncle Benyamin dried his wool on his flat housetop, spreading it out on a cloth and leaving it to dry in the sunshine and the fresh breeze. But he went up now and then to examine it, for it should dry only to a certain degree, not enough to dry out the natural oil in the wool.

Spring was the time of the year when the master dyer Iskender, who lived in our village, went out to gather the herbs and plants to make his precious dyes. He was a kind-hearted old man and did not mind having a troop of small boys at his heels. We trudged behind him over the hills in search of the buckthorn berries and the wild larkspur and the leaves of the thorny henna tree. Old Iskender dug the roots of the madder, from which he distilled many shades of red. In the early spring he would hunt for a peculiar insect that feeds on the oak tree at that season and from which he made a crimson dye.

But the master dyer would not allow us to watch him as he prepared his dyes. That was his secret, how to mix the plant juices and the dried bodies of insects, the juices of tree bark, the blood of animals, and the crushed petals and leaves of flowers to obtain the marvelous colors that made famous the rugs of our village weavers. Old Iskender's secrets had been handed down to him by his father and his father's father before him, and they were jealously guarded.

Spring was the time, too, when the wise old

village women gathered their herbs and plants from the meadows and the hillsides to brew the simple remedies that had been used for fevers and ailments in our village for untold ages. The old women boiled their herbs in clay dishes, and stored away the medicines until there was an illness in the village.

Along the Nazlie Chie the willows drooped their waving branches. Here Davod and I came on spring evenings after school to gather the slim willow wands that sprouted in the marshes. We cut the osiers for Osman, the Kurdish basket maker, who told us fairy tales while his skilled fingers wove the pliant willow wands into baskets.

IV

As the days grew warmer school became a burden. I lost my interest in my lessons. There were so many things happening out of doors, things to be learned more interesting than the lessons of the schoolroom. My grandfather the *Katkhoda* had never gone to school. He could not read or write. He counted on his fingers, but he had more wealth to count than my preacher

grandfather who read many books. The *Katkhoda* knew nothing of books save a bit of the Bible and the wise proverbs of Sadi. But he knew the legends of the stars and the secrets of nature. His school had been the great outdoors and each day of his life had been a leaf in the Book of the Seasons.

I grew restless sitting still in the schoolroom. Rabi Machiel had taken off the oiled papers that covered the windows. The breeze, sweet from the flowery meadows, drifted in to call us out to play. A gorgeous dragon fly floated in, droning his monotonous buzz. All the boys were restless; even the schoolmaster, we noticed, smoked more cigarettes than usual, and he was a great smoker. It was well that the American missionaries who had built the school did not know that.

I did not know my arithmetic lesson. Rabi Machiel reached for his switch. He kept one always at hand, for there was not a day that some unlucky boy did not get a switching. I had often felt the sting of his switch upon my bare palm. But now as the switch struck across my hand a

visitor arrived in the schoolroom. It was my uncle Yousoph. I looked at him appealingly, and not in vain.

My uncle Yousoph was my mother's eldest brother. He was a big man and not at all solemn like his father the minister. Of all his family he was the only one who was not educated. He could not even read and write. He was hearty and jolly, and his visits to our school delighted all of us except Rabi Machiel. He would not obey any of the rules of the school. He talked loudly and laughed heartily. He was very fond of me and he had never before seen me punished by the schoolmaster. He immediately objected, and Rabi Machiel ordered him to cease interfering with the discipline of the school, and raised the switch to strike me again.

That was entirely too much for my uncle. He grabbed the schoolmaster by the throat and threw him down the stairs, while we all danced for joy. That put an end to school for that day, and also, unfortunately, put an end to my uncle's visits to the school. My grandfather the minister was greatly distressed. He apologized

to the schoolmaster and assured him that Yousoph would never trouble him again. Within a few days Rabi Machiel had recovered his pride and self-importance. The new switches he cut were heavier than before and we felt their sting quite as often as before my uncle Yousoph had kicked him down the stairs.

We were glad when Rabi Machiel began to dismiss school early in the afternoons. Our schoolmaster's salary was only a few dollars a month, and in order to keep body and soul together he was compelled to have another source of income. He was also a brick maker and often he took advantage of the fine spring weather and closed school early in the afternoon to follow his other trade.

CHAPTER III

Nazie the Proud

THE name of our village was Nazie, which means "proud." It lay in the fertile province of Azerbajin in northern Persia, nestling its sixty doors in the shadow of the mountains. We counted the size of a town, not by the number of people but by the number of doors, for as each house had but one door they represented the number of households.

Just how old our village was no one seemed to know. But there was evidence that people had

been living there for many hundreds of years. The trees and vineyards, some of them, were of very great age, and surrounding the village were great hills of ashes, thought to be relics of the Fire-worshipers.

The province of Azerbajin is in the northwest corner of Persia. It was long ago the land of the Medes, whose blood was in the veins of the fierce Kurds who were our neighbors. It was in those distant forgotten times when the Medes ruled northern Persia that the people sacrificed to fire and there arose the great prophet Zurdish[1] in our neighbor city of Urumiah.

But my people came of a race even older than the Medes. Although my ancestors had lived for centuries in Persia they were not of Persian blood. West of Azerbajin, between the Kurdish Mountains and the Tigris River, lies a rocky land that was the home of an ancient people called the Assyrians. They were the greatest warriors of their time, cruel and strong. Nimrod,

[1]Zoroaster, founder of the religion that flourished in Persia until the time of Mohammed. He is supposed to have lived about 1000 B.C. The truth of the legend that he was born in Urumiah has never been satisfactorily established or disproved.

"the mighty hunter before Jehovah," was an Assyrian. They grew too large for their country, hemmed in by the mountains, and they did just what people in crowded countries do to-day. Some of them moved. They moved in different directions. Some moved eastward across the mountains into the fertile plain of Lake Urumiah. This is a beautiful land, and here and there throughout the plain there grew little villages of Assyrian colonists, and one of these was Nazie, my own village. I do not know how long ago my Assyrian ancestors moved into Persia, nor why they moved east instead of westward, but I know that they chose for their new home one of the most beautiful spots I have seen on this earth.

On three sides my village was surrounded by the Kurdish Mountains upon which, from our housetop, I could see snow all the year round. On the fourth side we were cut off from the neighboring towns on the north by the Nazlie Chie. Only in summer, when droughts checked its quick descent, could we ford the river at our village. At other seasons of the year we had

to take a roundabout route, some twenty-five miles out of our way, to reach the city of Urumiah, which was only six miles distant.

Our village was supplied with water by three brooks which flowed down from the Kurdish Mountains. These brooks were our laundry. On wash day my playmates and I helped our mothers carry the soiled clothes down to these streams, and while they washed we youngsters would strip off our clothes and bathe and splash in the water. This was ever so much more fun than being given a bath at home, where my mother used to scrub me with a rough sandstone, for we had no brushes nor wash cloths. In summer we bathed in our courtyards and sometimes from our housetop I saw women bathing as King David saw Bathsheba, the wife of the Hittite captain.

II

Our village was divided into two parts, or wards. We Christians lived in one and the Mohammedans in the other. My people had been Christians for centuries. Indeed, there was a

legend that St. Thomas himself had visited northern Persia, preaching and healing the sick and converting the Assyrians who had settled there. He went also into India, so the legend says. When he came to the great Lake of Urumiah, near our village, he found no boat to carry him across. But he walked safely upon its waters to the other side, and there he was picked up by a whirlwind and carried into India. Most of the Christian churches around us were named Mar Toma (St. Thomas).

The Assyrians in northern Persia clung to their faith when nearly everyone around them became Mohammedan. Many of the Parsees, the descendants of the Fire-worshipers, fled into India, but my people remained, living quietly and managing to get along with their Mohammedan neighbors, by whom they were in time entirely surrounded.

To live peacefully together we found it wise to keep to ourselves and our own part of town. There were three times as many Christians as Mohammedans in Nazie, and we could easily have whipped them in a fight or driven them

out, but that would only have brought the vengeance of the Mohammedan officials of the city upon us. The Mohammedans barely tolerated us. We knew they prayed in their mosque for a *jihad*, a holy war in which it would be lawful to raise their swords against all Christians. And we prayed in turn for the extension of the power of Russia into Persia. Men of our village sometimes went to Russia in the summer to work. They returned with tales of how the Mohammedans in Tiflis were persecuted, the mullahs, as they called the followers of the Prophet to prayer, occasionally being the targets for Christian bullets, while the Russian government officials closed their eyes to the evidence of murder. We heard these tales with joy, not thinking that the Mohammedans thus put to death were very likely innocent, but then many of the Christian victims of Mohammedans in Persia were likewise innocent. In our own village we avoided much trouble by letting the Mohammedans strictly alone and never venturing into their ward except on necessary business.

The Mohammedans called us *Nasroni*, the

followers of the Nazarene, and made fun of us. They believed, and no one could make them think differently, that they had the only true religion, while my people were quite as firm in their belief. And yet I found the few Mohammedans with whom we had contact to be kind and pleasant men.

I went to the Mohammedan ward two or three times a week to take lessons in Persian from the Mohammedan priest, Mullah Shoker. Mullah Shoker was considered a man of great learning. He had studied under the greatest imams in Urumiah. He was the only person in our village who could speak, read, and write the Persian language. We spoke the Syriac tongue, the language of the early Christians, and we knew Turkish as well, for that was the language of our Mohammedan neighbors and of the government officials of Azerbajin, and all business was transacted in Turkish. Our everyday speech was a mixture of Turkish and Syriac. It was a distinction for anyone in our province to know the Persian language.

My grandfather, though a Christian minister,

and very strict in his theology, wished me to be well educated and so had my parents send me to the mullah, who was willing to tutor me. I was not enthusiastic about the arrangement. It seemed to me that I had to go to school nearly all the time anyway, and this would deprive me of two or three play hours a week. But I soon found the mullah a fascinating teacher, much more kind and patient than Rabi Machiel. I found the Persian language beautiful. When the mullah recited passages from the "Gulistan" of Sadi in his clear pleasant voice, it was like music.

The mullah was a big tall man. He always wore a white turban. His beard was black and curly. His dark eyes were kind and twinkling. In the summer time he would take me into the fields for my lesson. Everyone knew that I was the mullah's pupil and I could come and go through the Mohammedan ward without being molested. Had I gone there without reason my presence would have been considered an insult and there would have been a fight. The Mohammedan boys would have beat me and spit upon me, just as we would have treated any Moham-

medan boy who hung around our part of the village when he had no business there.

But Monat, the youngest son of a large and very poor Mohammedan family, was my friend. He hired himself out in the summers as herd boy to my uncle Benyamin. The Mohammedans in Nazie were, with one or two exceptions, quite poor, and they often worked as servants for the well-to-do Christian landowners. They were willing and patient workers and there was rarely any trouble between a Mohammedan servant and a Christian master.

Monat used to play with me while the cattle grazed quietly in the meadows along the Nazlie Chie. There was never enough to eat in his house, where there were so many children, and I often took him bread and cheese. Monat ate it gladly, though there was a law forbidding Mohammedans to eat bread baked in a Christian oven. But Monat was hungry and did not trouble about the law, though he did not tell his parents that he ate our bread.

Monat told me many interesting things. The Mohammedan Sunday was Friday, which was

the most important day of the week. All great events happened on Friday. Adam was created on a Friday and it was on another Friday that, after eating of the forbidden fruit, he was banished from Eden. The end of the world would come on a Friday and there was a certain hour on Fridays, known only to Allah, when a Mohammedan, no matter what his sins had been, might always be forgiven.

The Koran, which was the Mohammedan Bible, had been written by the fingers of Allah, Monat told me, and Allah had given it to the angel Gabriel, who had given it to Mohammed. Not to be outdone by Monat I told him about the twelve tables of the law which God had written on blocks of stone and given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

The Mohammedan graveyard in our village was filled with flat tombstones all alike and all without any name. There was nothing to tell which was the grave of a rich man or a poor man. They were all equal in death. Monat told me that when a Mohammedan was buried his coffin was placed on its right side and facing Mecca.

When the day of resurrection came the dead man could rise more quickly than if lying on his back.

There was only one well in our village and that happened to be in the Mohammedan ward. Here was a difficulty. The Mohammedans were afraid that Christians coming to fetch water from the well would contaminate it. And yet they could not see us thirst, for that was against the Mohammedan law. Houssen, the grandson of Mohammed, had once been tortured by thirst at the hands of his enemies, and ever since then good Mohammedans have been taught to give water to the thirsty. To avoid the possibility of contamination of the well and still to stay within the law, they arranged that a pious Mohammedan should take his stand at the well each evening and give water to us. He carried the water in a jar fifteen or twenty feet from the well and there poured it into our pitchers.

III

The government of our village was very simple. My grandfather was both mayor and judge.

The only other officers we had were the *parash*, or policeman, who punished those guilty of small crimes, and two night watchmen. Our law was the old law of Moses, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." The person who injured another was turned over by the *Katkhoda* to the man or family whom he had wronged to be punished according to what was thought right and just.

We sometimes had trouble with the villages close to us. Disagreements concerning cattle which crossed from one village border into another were frequent. When the cattle of a neighboring village wandered into Nazie my grandfather the *Katkhoda* kept the animals prisoners and held them for ransom. The *Katkhodas* of the adjoining towns would do likewise with our cattle. Should the ransom be thought too high, the owners of the cattle invaded the village which kept them. They would come armed with guns, daggers, and clubs to rescue their cattle. Sometimes these battles were bloody, many heads were "broken," and men might even be killed. The fight would last until the

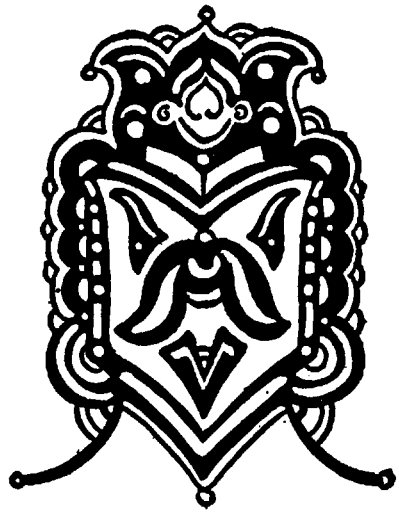
Katkhodas of the two villages had made a peace covenant between themselves.

We employed our night watchmen to protect the village from sudden attack by marauders like the Kurds. Our village, because my grandfather the *Katkhoda* was the friend of some of the Kurdish tribes, was seldom attacked, and our house and the houses of our kinsmen and friends were always safe. But some of the villages around us were in constant fear of the brigands.

We had a proverb which said, "A man once bitten by a snake fears a rope." It was wise to be suspicious of Kurds. The night watchmen walked from one end of the village to the other all night long, shouting from time to time, "I am here, I am here; everything is well; be not afraid!" Should any attack come during the night the watchmen roused everyone and prepared for battle.

Each family kept at least one gun and a dog, and our dogs were trained to attack any stranger. A stranger coming to Nazie on business would arrange to be met and conducted into the vil-

lage by a man known to our dogs. The Kurds feared our savage dogs more than our weapons. Our big watchdog, Lotie Bashie (leader of sports), died from eating bread filled with needles that had been left about by the Kurds. I wept for a long time over him and we buried him under our big plum tree with all the dignity due a good and faithful friend.



CHAPTER IV

The Faith of My Fathers

WHEN school closed for the week on Saturday noon, Rabi Machiel assigned the Bible verses which we were to memorize and repeat the next morning in Sunday school. Rabi Machiel was not only our schoolmaster; he was assistant to my grandfather the Presbyterian minister, and he required his pupils to attend Sunday school each Sunday morning. The boy who was absent without excuse, or who could not repeat his Bible verses, was made

to "eat sticks" when school opened again on Monday.

The shadow of Sunday fell across my Saturday half-holiday. Because I was the minister's grandson I was always given twice as many verses as the other boys. I was made to attend not only Sunday school but the long sermon that followed, and I was supposed to conduct myself in such a manner that I should be a model for all the boys in my school.

I was brought up in two churches, and my two grandfathers, who differed in their faiths, continually fought over me. My father, whose only desire was to keep peace in his family, took no part in the argument, but my mother, who had been educated by the Presbyterian missionaries, naturally wished me to attend her father's church. My grandfather the *Katkhoda* could not object to my mother's wishes in the matter, but he insisted that I should not be taken away altogether from his church. The result was that I often attended both services.

My people were called Nestorians. A few hundred years after the founding of Christian

churches among the Assyrians in northern Persia there was a division in the early Christian Church. Nestorius, the Bishop of Constantinople, was banished because he did not agree with some of the ideas of the more powerful leaders of the Church. The Christians in northern Persia and Kurdistan believed as did the persecuted Nestorius, and so came to be called by his name.

For centuries my people clung to their faith. They believed that the Nestorian church was the only true church in the world. Then, some years before I was born, American missionaries came into our part of Persia. My mother's family were the first in our village to change to the new ideas, and my mother's father became a Presbyterian minister. In time several other families withdrew from the old Nestorian church to follow my grandfather and build their own church.

But my other grandfather, the *Katkhoda*, and all his family refused to leave the old church. My two grandfathers were no longer friends, and the *Katkhoda* said many mean things about

the Presbyterians. He used to tell me that my grandfather the minister was crazy and that he had turned Presbyterian because the missionaries paid him a salary of seventy-five dollars a year. The faithful Nestorians naturally looked upon the new church as a house of wickedness. They knew no greater sin than forsaking the church of their ancestors.

At first my preacher grandfather had great difficulty with his new church. My father's cousin Sirkhush, who might have been the *Katkhoda's* son instead of his nephew, for he was like him in strength and fighting spirit, tried to break up the church. He insisted that the Presbyterians were not Christians, for there was nothing about them in the Bible. He attempted once to keep the people from entering the Presbyterian church by whipping them. He always made fun of the missionaries, calling them scornfully "white-faced angels" and other names.

But by the time I was born things had settled down. The Nestorians had learned that they could not prevent people by force from becoming

Presbyterians. They were compelled to admit that the Presbyterian school was the best in the village, and several Nestorian families sent their boys there because of its greater advantages.

But though my grandfather the minister called me a Presbyterian, my grandfather the *Katkhoda* stubbornly insisted that I was a Nestorian like all our clan. It may have been because I was so fond of him, or it may have been because I was not forced to attend its services, but I found the ancient church of my ancestors more interesting than the new church. There was a mystery about its dim, musty atmosphere that was not to be found in the warm, clean, sunny brick church of the Presbyterians.

II

Very early of a Sunday morning the bell of Mat Mariam (St. Mary's) called the Nestorians to worship. Sweet and clear it sounded, calling us to prayer. The Mohammedans said there was a devil in the bell, but I knew that was because they were jealous. They had no bell in their mosque. This was the only bell for miles

around. Even the Presbyterians in the new brick church were called to their service in the old way, by sharp raps with a mallet on a wooden plank.

Some of our men had brought the bell from Russia, where they used to go each spring to work. The bell of Mat Mariam was our village clock. It was rung in the morning to send the villagers to work and again in the evening when it was time for them to cease their labors. It was rung, too, as a charm to prevent damage from a hail storm or from lightning. The bell was not hung in the church. We feared that the Mohammedans might come and steal it away. It was kept in the yard of Kasheasha the priest, suspended between two stout poles, where it could be guarded night and day. My cousin Yocob, my uncle Benyamin's son, was the bell ringer. He was in training for the priesthood and would one day be the successor to Kasheasha. As the *shamashah* (understudy) he was learning the priestly duties and was also altar boy and janitor. He swept the path that led to the church, rang the bell, and collected the presents of

shawls, fruit, grain, and money which we gave to the priest in place of salary.

I rose before sunrise, washed my face, and dressed. In the darkness of the early morning I made my way to the church with the other worshipers, while the clear notes of the bell rang through the still air. On the way to church I repeated my prayers, the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary, which every good Nestorian knew.

The church of Mat Mariam loomed up huge and dark in the dim light of dawn. It stood in a wooded spot at the edge of the village. Its walls were made of mud, five feet thick and gradually tapered toward the top. The flat roof was dotted with goats' horns. These were the horns of goats that had been sacrificed to the Lord. We looked upon them as emblems of strength and plenty, and believed that they protected our church from the devils and wicked genii.

The roof of the church was of dirt, and grass grew upon it, showing green after a shower or when the snows melted in the spring, but drying up in the hot sun of summer. "Let them that hate Zion be as the grass upon the housetops

that withereth before it groweth up," my grandfather the minister used to read from his Bible, and I would think of the grass on the roof of Mat Mariam.

Past the ghostly shadows of the dark burial ground where the gravestones were almost overgrown with thick shrubbery, we came in the gray half-darkness to the church. At the door I slipped off my shoes, made the sign of the cross, and reverently kissed the lintel over the door. Then I bowed my head and entered.

We had to stoop to enter the low and narrow door of Mat Mariam. I had been told that the door was made so small so that in time of attack by enemies the people could take refuge in the church and stop up the narrow entrance with heavy stones. It was also said that the door had been made small and low to prevent cattle and buffaloes that grazed near by from wandering into the church. But Kasheasha the priest said that the door had been made low and narrow to compel all who entered to bow low in reverence to God and Mat Mariam.

Within, the church was darker than without.

Save for the faint light that came from a small hole in one of the walls we would have been in utter darkness. One of the duties of my cousin Yocob was to stuff this "window" with straw after the service was over and to open it again just before the next service. I looked up at the small round hole and a cold chill shivered up and down my back as I thought of the stories I had heard about it.

Once upon a time a thief had entered the church to steal the silver cross and the embroidered shawls that draped the altar. With the holy objects in his arms he began to make his way out of the church, but he found the door blocked by a stone which he could not move. Then he saw the little window and decided to escape through it. He squeezed and pushed himself into it and managed to go halfway through the hole. But then a terrible thing happened. The hole grew smaller and smaller and the robber could not move. Still smaller and smaller the hole grew until it closed up the opening altogether and the body of the thief was cut in two. Never after that was there any attempt to rob the

church whose door could easily have been opened at night. Even the thieving Kurds avoided Mat Mariam, afraid of the miraculous power of the window.

III

The great high-ceiled room was filled with dusky shadows and the air was damp and musty. I shivered as I stood barefooted on the cold reed matting which covered the dirt floor. I looked toward the far end of the room, toward the dark ghostly place where the priest waited. Not a sound came from that place, though I knew that both Kasheasha and my cousin Yocob were there, behind the hangings of rich shawls and rugs, engaged in some mysterious and holy preparation. There the holy cross was hidden which was brought out on certain holy days when we trembled in its presence. This place was forbidden. None but Kasheasha the priest and Yocob entered it. We believed that to step foot into it would mean instant death.

Suddenly a light flickered behind the embroidered hangings. Kasheasha was lighting the candles and we heard his voice, solemn and

mystic, fill the hushed gloom with the chant of the ancient Syriac prayers. We could not understand what he said. Through the long centuries the language which we spoke had become changed, but the prayers and chants handed down from priest to deacon had remained the same as in the days of Mar Toma, and their meaning was lost upon the ears of the congregation. In a singsong rhythm Kasheasha's voice rose and fell, and at intervals we heard the clear boyish voice of Yocob chanting the responses.

Kasheasha came out from behind the curtains. He did not wear the black robes in which we saw him every day. He was dressed now in long white robes that were unearthly spotless and shining against the blackness behind him. His hair and beard, which had been dyed with henna and anointed with olive oil, shone golden in the wavering candlelight. We fell on our faces and kissed the ground before him.

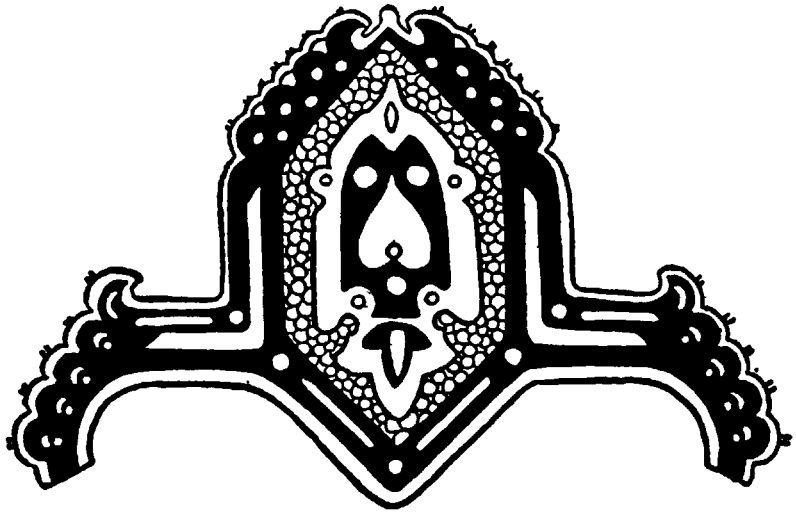
Kasheasha said the mass while we stood. I could hardly believe this white-robed man was the same whom we nicknamed Kashavu, who came to my grandfather's house and laughed and told fanciful stories. Kashavu was no saint, that I knew, for his conduct was sometimes a scandal to the neighborhood. He once displeased my grandfather the *Katkhoda* very much by taking a wife twenty-five years younger than himself and deeding to her his vineyard. Land was the most treasured wealth in our village, and to give land to a woman, my grandfather said, was the height of foolishness, for women had no sense about managing property.

But when I looked at Kasheasha in the dark,

still church with the candle shine upon his golden hair and his white robes, I trembled as before the Lord's anointed. I could well believe that Kasheasha was the holy man of God. I stood very still, my arms folded across my breast, through the long, monotonous service.

Yocob, chanting, swung the burnished censer before the altar. Kasheasha raised his hands in benediction. We knelt before him as he chanted the prayer. When his voice had ceased we arose and crossed ourselves. Kasheasha was no longer there. The candles had been extinguished. The holy place behind the curtains was dark and silent.

Quietly we went out from the church. The sun had risen. I ran quickly home to breakfast and to review again my verses before the sharp raps on the board announced the time for Sunday school in the Presbyterian church.



CHAPTER V

One Day

MY FATHER always rose first in the morning. He poked the fire in the oven with the *badowa*, the long narrow stick always at hand in the Persian house to stir the coals or punish the disobedient child. I had more than once felt the strokes of the *badowa*. Then my father went out to the stable to wake Sadig, our Kurdish servant. Sadig slept on a bed of straw, but it was as comfortable as our beds, and with his warm blankets and with the cows

and buffaloes around him he slept quite as snugly on cold winter nights as we did close to the oven.

My mother rose next and began preparing breakfast. Often she pulled me out of bed, for I was a sleepyhead. When I was dressed I rolled up my little bed neatly. I understood the story in the Bible about the sick man who was healed and who took up his bed and walked. His bed was like mine, nothing but a thin cotton-stuffed mattress that was laid flat on the floor at night. I had a pillow but no sheets. We had soft warm blankets to cover us. I rolled my blanket and pillow inside my mattress, and when my father came in from the stable he placed my mattress with the others on top of the great long chest that stood against one wall of the large white-washed room that was our house.

This big chest was the most important and practically the only piece of furniture in our house. It took the place of the cupboards and closets that are built into American houses. We kept many things in it, at one end our clothes, and in other sections provisions such as rice, flour,

tea, coffee, salt, sugar, and wheat that had not yet been ground into flour. The family that did not have such a chest was a very poor family. Indeed, the wealth of a family in my village could be judged by the size of the chest that held its provisions. Ours was big enough to hold a whole year's supply of flour and sugar and salt. It was twelve feet long and five feet high and nearly four feet thick. It was made of walnut wood and was beautifully carved. When my father had placed our beds on top of it he draped over them a handsome striped cover which we called a *kelim* and our house was all in order.

My father and Sadig came in to breakfast. We all sat on the floor and ate from the same dish, a large glazed bowl. We had wooden spoons and pretty colored glasses from which we drank our tea. My grandfather had brought the glasses from Russia, where he had likewise bought the great shining brass samovar in which we made our tea over a little charcoal fire. The poor people in our village did not have glasses. They drank from cups made of hollowed gourds.

We did not put sugar in our tea. We drank it

dishlama, sipping it through a lump of sugar which we held in our teeth. This was not so wasteful of the sugar, and sugar was hard to obtain. It had to be brought from Russia and was very costly.

Before I drank I always spilled a drop of water on the ground. This custom had been followed in Nazie as long as anyone could remember. My grandfather the *Katkhoda* said we did this for the sake of our ancestors. If they were forgotten by the living their tongues would parch from thirst.

When the meal was finished my grandfather

said "*Al-ham-dallah,*"[1] and we all rose. Sadig brought my grandfather's pipe and my mother arranged the cushions comfortably for him.

There were no dishes to wash, only the one large bowl, the wooden spoons, and the glasses. My mother put them away in a deep niche in the wall. The walls of our house were of mud, three feet thick, and a space had been hollowed out in the wall to form a shelf to hold our few dishes.

I picked up the crumbs that had fallen to the floor and fed them to my uncle Benyamin's chickens. We believed it was bad luck to step on crumbs of bread and I was careful to gather them all up.

II

I ran out to play. I climbed the wooden ladder that stood against the wall of our house. From our housetop I looked down upon the village street and across to the other housetops to discover my playmates. I was never allowed to bring the boys to play on our housetop because my grandfather could not endure the noise. I could step from our housetop to my uncle's

[1]God be praised.

housetop and then to the next, because our houses were built so very close together.

Our skylight window was simply a hole in the roof. We had a flat stone that we placed over it when it rained. The stone could be removed from within the house. My father would take a stout pole and with it shift the stone away from the hole. The roof was sloped up slightly toward the center, so that the skylight was on a higher level than the rest of the roof, and when we ran about over the roof we were not likely to fall in. We could not have fallen clear through, for the hole was not large enough, but I have stuck a foot or leg through the skylight in our barn roof when playing there.

Looking about over the village I discovered a game of marbles not far away and ran to meet the other boys. We used the housetops for a sidewalk. It was pleasanter to climb to the housetops and walk from one to another than to walk through the mud or dust of the street.

There were three or four places in the village where we could walk right up to the house-

tops without using a ladder. Where a house was built against a hillside we could walk up the side of the hill and step to the roof of the house. These inclined paths were very convenient and we all used them often instead of our ladders. But they were a danger, too. Hungry wolves sometimes visited our village on summer nights when we slept on the housetops. They would creep stealthily up one of these sloping paths to our housetops and steal children from beside their sleeping parents. One summer a baby cousin of mine was stolen from her cradle and I was nearly carried away some nights afterward. But our great watchdog woke and barked a fierce alarm that wakened my father, who reached quickly for his gun. A shot sent the wolf back to the mountains. The wolves were afraid only of our guns.

Our stable was a pleasant place to play. Sadig, our servant, said that it was haunted at night by ghosts and fairies and genii who came and braided the manes of the horses and milked the buffalo cows. Sadig never struck his switch on the ground without first saying the names of

Allah and several of the prophets. He was afraid of hurting an unseen spirit, who would come at night and choke him in revenge. But when he said the holy names, if there were evil spirits about they would disappear. I never ventured into the dark stable after sunset.

Davod had told me of a curious thing, and with the other boys I went to see it. We approached the wall that overlooked the graveyard, and there it was, a piece of mutton fat nailed to the wall. The piece of fat was pricked all over with tiny pin pricks.

"My uncle Ali put it there," said Davod, "and he comes every morning and sticks a needle into it."

"Why does he do that?" we all asked.

"Because," and Davod's voice was only a scared whisper, "my uncle has dreamed for three nights of being bitten by a dog, and that is a certain sign that he has an enemy somewhere who is trying to harm him. In forty-one days the fat will be wasted away and then his enemy will die."

There were many ways to lay spells on one's

enemies. Sadig told me that a never-failing charm was to offer forty prayers upon a Wednesday.

III

The roads leading into our village, which had been almost impassable with snow and mud during the winter, were open again and traveling merchants began to make their summer visits.

"Here comes old Ishaq," called a boy, and we looked up to see the familiar figure of the cloth merchant, staff in hand and a pack of goods on his back. Ishaq was beginning to grow old. His long beard was turning gray, but his legs were sturdy and he still carried his pack easily on his broad shoulders. He never carried weapons to defend himself as most travelers in Persia did. He was often mistreated, but he seemed to pay no heed to his tormentors. It may be that was why he managed to get along and even do a prosperous business among a people who were hostile to his race.

"*Yohoda!* (Jew) Killer of Christ!" cried the boys, picking up stones from the road and throw-

ing them after him. But Ishaq kept on his way down the village street. He did not call upon the Lord, and no bears came out of the woods to devour us as in the time of the children who laughed at the bald head of the prophet of God.

Ishaq was going to our house. He always went there first, for my mother never failed to buy from him. She was kind to him as she was kind to everyone. She once punished me for mocking him and made me promise never to do it again. I left the boys to their sport and followed Ishaq to watch him open his pack and spread out his wares. He had bright colored cottons and beautiful silks, from which my mother made her choice, and my grandfather the *Katkhoda* was sure to buy the handsomest piece in Ishaq's stock and give it to her as a present.

"Tell thy aunt Almas that Ishaq is here," said my mother.

I went to a small hole in the wall of our house and pulled out the roll of cloth that was stuffed into it. I put my eye to the hole and could look as through a telescope right into my uncle Ben-

yamin's house. I called to my aunt and told her that Ishaq had come.

This hole in the wall was a means of quick communication with our neighbors. A piece of news could be quickly sent from one neighbor to another through the whole village. A family attacked by robbers could in this way summon the assistance of their neighbors. We boys used the hole in the wall when we wished to call a meeting of the village gang. I had never heard the saying that "walls have ears," but it was true in our village. We did not talk about our neighbors, for we never knew when someone might be listening at the hole in the wall.

My aunt Almas came. She did not stop to put on her *yashmog* (veil) which she wore like all the village women in the presence of men not of her family. Ishaq was known to be a good man and my mother did not think it necessary to hide her face from him. He came upon business and not to look at her.

Ishaq measured the cloth with his outstretched arm. He held his arm straight out from his shoulder and the length from his finger tip

to his nose was the unit of measure. He took his scissors to cut the cloth and always gave a little more than the measure, adding two or three inches of cloth as *artach ticka* (extra bite).

My grandfather the *Katkhoda* asked Ishaq for news of the city and the road. My grandfather used to travel among our near-by towns and through the Kurdish camps buying rugs, and now that he was too feeble to walk even as far as our vineyard he recalled with longing the days when he traveled the open road, and the name of Mirza Pachow was known throughout the province for honest dealing and fearless courage.

"They miss thee," answered Ishaq, "in the market places. When I speak of Nazie the merchants inquire of Mirza Pachow. They send greeting and the hope that thou shouldst remain yet a long time to bless thy noble sons. It is a misfortune indeed that none of thy sons hath chosen to follow in thy trade. Who knows but this lad may grow up to take thy place?" and Ishaq smiled kindly at me.

But I shook my head. I was meant for some-

thing else, my grandfather the minister said. I was not sent to school to become a trader. And yet the stories of the *Katkhoda's* journeys fascinated me. But to speak the truth, I was too young to think long on what trade or profession I was to follow. I filled my pockets with raisins from the little storeroom where my father kept the earthen jars of wine and ran off again to join the boys in the meadow beyond the mill.

IV

We played *Oudji-ben-Onogh.* Oudji-ben-Onogh was a giant who used to come into this meadow and steal cattle long ago. An ancestor of Zia the barber had killed him. Oudji-ben-Onogh was so powerful and strong that he could take a cow from the field, lift it up with one hand before the sun, and after roasting it well in the sun's heat, eat it with one bite. The ancestor of Zia the barber had been a very brave man. He learned from the good genii that Oudji-ben-Onogh could be wounded in but one spot, his ankles. So up he crept to him, so close that the giant could not bend low enough to pick him

up, and clubbed his ankles until the terrible giant fell dead.

The sun sank low in the west. It was the hour to look for the hen that laid golden eggs. This wonderful hen had her nest in a hill near our vineyard. For fear of being caught she never showed herself in the daytime. But just as the sun sank behind the western mountains of Kurdistan she would come out with all her golden chicks to see the sunset. If one should see her then and touch her tail she would immediately lay a golden egg.

We crept quietly toward the hill and hid in the bushes to watch. Lower and lower sank the golden sun until its rim rested upon the rocky peaks. Now was the time. We waited, scarcely breathing. The sun disappeared, leaving only the rosy afterglow, but the golden hen was not to be seen.

"She has gone to the other side of the hill," said Davod. "Do you really believe, anyway, that we could touch her tail?"

We hurried home, for the wicked genii would soon be abroad. They appeared as soon as the

last glow of the sunset faded, and it was not safe to be alone in the fields in the darkness. Somewhere a dog howled and we stopped a moment to look toward the sky. Dogs howled only when they saw angels. We thought we saw the angels, but it may have been only the fleecy cloud against the fading blue of the sky that we took for angels' wings.

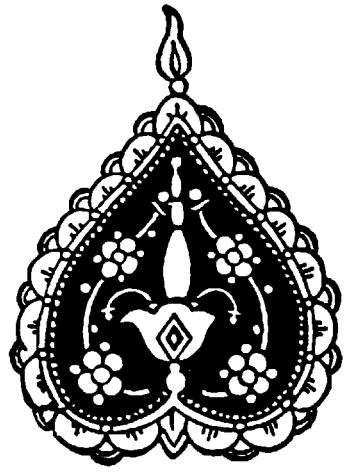
At home the lamps were lighted. Lamps were always lit at sunset, because genii would not come near a light. When we struck a match we always first said, "Praise be to God," to avoid bad luck.

We ate our supper by the light of the lamp. It was as ancient in style as the lamps of the wise virgins in the Bible story. We put a cotton wick in a clay dish filled with linseed oil. The wick had to be constantly pushed out and trimmed. It seemed to me, when I studied my lessons by lamplight, that I had to attend to the lamp every five minutes.

The twilight deepened into darkness and our little family sat in the circle of the lamplight. Behind us the corners of the house were dim

and shadowy. Pasha, our faithful dog and the successor of Lotie Bashie, ate his supper at my side, and Shahzadah the big and peevish Persian cat sat beside my mother eating his supper daintily. Pasha knew his place in the house and was quiet. But Shahzadah was spoiled. He always occupied a soft corner near the oven in winter and the coolest spot in the house in summer. When teased he would arch up his back and become fearful to look at. He was Mother's pet and would obey no one but her. Even Pasha was afraid of him.

Sadig went to his bed in the stable and Pasha trotted obediently after him. My father took down our beds from the carved chest. My grandfather went first to bed; then my mother tucked me in. Soon everything was quiet. My father extinguished the lamp with a stick, for we never blew out a light. A moonbeam shone in through the skylight overhead, and glittered on the brass samovar and the shining Kurdish swords. All the village was quiet. Soon everyone was asleep save the watchmen who walked up and down guarding us until the dawn.



CHAPTER VI

The Persian Summer

THE hot months of summer came when the sun rose bright and blazing every morning and very little rain fell. Now and then a thunderstorm rolled over Nazie from the Kurdish Mountains, but it passed quickly, leaving a brilliant rainbow arching across the sky.

My grandfather the *Katkhoda* sat in the courtyard in the shade of our great poplar tree in which the nightingales sang at evening. I made fans for him of willow branches. I dipped the leaves in water and waved them in the air. It

was not unpleasantly hot if we stayed in the shade, for our climate was very dry, making the heat not so noticeable as in a moist atmosphere.

My uncle Benyamin and my uncle Namatoe and all the farmers of Nazie divided the village brooks into tiny arteries to flow into their fields and orchards to water the fruit and grain. Each farmer took his turn and was allowed only his just share of water. Stealing water was looked upon as a great crime.

Even the Nazlie Chie, which ran so deep and swiftly in the early spring, was shallow now. We could wade it easily. Now was the time when my uncle Namatoe watched his honeydew melons carefully. The little melons appeared on the vines and when they were as big as apples my uncle covered each one carefully with a leaf and buried it in the ground to keep bugs and insects from attacking it. He did this three times during the summer, and then when the melons were so large and the outer skin so thick that the worms and insects could not harm them, he let the melons lie out in the sun to ripen. My uncle Namatoe's melons grew to be as big

as watermelons, and I have never anywhere tasted any melon that had the sweet flavor of our Persian melons.

I looked forward to summer because there was no school. I was greatly disappointed when a summer school was opened in Cousi, a village about a mile and a half from Nazie, and my grandfather the minister said that I must go. A few other families decided that such a great opportunity for their boys should not be neglected, and there were four or five of us who started out one bright morning. We went rebelliously and when we were out of sight of our own village we decided that we would not go to school. We left the white dusty road and wandered off to the river bank, where we played all morning and ate the lunches that our mothers had prepared for us. We did this for several days until my grandfather the minister went to visit the Presbyterian minister in Cousi. He inquired about the progress of the pupils from Nazie, and learned that we had never been there.

That afternoon when we returned home each

boy was met by a stern parent with a stout switch. I was particularly made to feel disgraced because I was the minister's grandson and should have been an example to my playmates. Next morning we were escorted to Cousi by my uncle Lazar and delivered safely to the teacher of the summer school.

Though we never became reconciled to having to go to school in summer we enjoyed our walks to and from the neighboring village. Cousi, like Nazie, lay beside the beautiful Nazlie Chie and was surrounded by fields and meadows in which cattle and buffaloes grazed peacefully, watched by ragged herd boys like little Monat, who looked after my uncle Benyamin's cattle. Before the ancient Nestorian church in Cousi there was a fountain, and we always stopped to drink of its sweet, cool waters. All the people of Cousi were Nestorians or Presbyterians. There was not a single Mohammedan family in the village.

II

One day our teacher took us to see the famous Bible of Cousi. They believed it was the oldest

Bible in the world and felt that its presence protected the village. Missionaries had attempted to persuade the people to allow them to take it to Europe and America to exhibit it, but the men of Cousi were terror-stricken even at the thought of letting the sacred book out of their hands. Some dreadful calamity would happen to Cousi if the Bible were taken away. Although it may not have been fifteen hundred years old as the priest declared, it was nevertheless a very old book. It was written in the ancient Syriac language on pages of yellowed parchment. No one dared open the book without first putting money on its cover. People were so afraid of its mysterious power that a guilty man brought face to face with it would confess his sin immediately.

But the sacred book was not able to save Cousi from attacks by the Kurds. I remember well the battle of a summer midnight. We were asleep upon the housetop when suddenly came the cries of the people of Cousi. The guns began roaring and the dogs barking and then came the "*Ha-wa-r! Ha-wa-r!*" distress signal. The men of

our village forgot that the *Katkhoda* of Cousi had often held our cattle prisoners. They hurried to the aid of the stricken village while all the women and children watched from the housetops. We could see the flashing of the guns. The shouts and cries made the night dreadful. We waited in terror, huddled together. The tiny children whimpered and clung to their mothers. They did not know what was happening, but they were frightened to see their mothers afraid. The women said that their hearts almost "cracked" as they waited in suspense the outcome of the battle. But our men returned safely. Their number had finally overcome the band of robbers. We had to hear the story of the fight told again and again, and there was little sleep that night. When I did fall asleep again near dawn it was to dream of battles with the Kurds.

There was an old man in Cousi named Oshana. Everyone believed that old Oshana had the "right stone." We had no standard system of weights and measures. We used a stone of a certain size as our unit of weight and both a buyer and seller would have each his own stone

which he would insist upon using. If, as often happened, the two stones were not the same size there was trouble. I have even known men of our village to send for old Oshana of Cousi and his stone, for everyone was willing to accept its weight as true. And to make sure there was no cheating even with the right stone, old Oshana or another not related to either the buyer or seller would hold the scales and do the weighing.

We lingered on the homeward way from the summer school, playing along the river bank instead of walking the dusty road, blazing hot in the bright sun of midafternoon. We followed

the curving Nazlie Chie, wading where the water was shallow and keeping to the shade of the drooping willows and the tall *chinnar* trees. Our roundabout way brought us back to Nazie through the pastures as the cattle were being driven up to their stables. They were not left in the meadows even on summer nights, for the danger from robbers and wolves was too great. Up from their separate pastures along the river the herd boys brought their herds of cows, buffaloes, goats, and sheep. Little Monat and the other boys of poor families who were hired to watch the herds during the day rode behind, sprawled comfortably on the backs of the buffaloes, whistling and singing as they rode. I almost envied Monat. No one cared whether he went to school. He could play in the meadows through the long summer days while I must study my lessons.

III

As the summer term drew near its end my father decided that I should be rewarded with a holiday. Accordingly, a trip was arranged, a

long-promised trip to Lake Urumiah. My father had been busy all the summer in his orchards and vineyards, and he, too, was glad of the chance for a holiday. Davod's father would go and two or three of the other village men who could leave their fields for a day. Davod and I and the other boys who had gone to the summer school were wild with delight. The long hours of school seemed nothing in the anticipated joys of the morrow.

We set out very early in the morning before the day should grow warm. The distance to the lake was "a morning's walk." We never reckoned distance in miles but by time. I would judge that we traveled about eight miles through fertile valleys and pretty villages that looked much like ours. The journey was made exciting by our encounters with the village dogs who guarded their towns as fiercely as Pasha and the dogs of Nazie protected it. We carried with us our lunch of bread and cheese.

At last we saw before us the beautiful blue waters of the lake. It was my first sight of a limitless stretch of water and it thrilled me

more than the sight of the oceans I was one day to cross. Far away stretched the bright blue waters until they met the lighter blue of the cloudless Persian sky. It seemed that it must be the end of the world, and yet my uncle Shimuel had written that all the water in Lake Urumiah was but a drop compared to the waters of the ocean he had crossed to reach the New World. It was very confusing. The old men in Nazie said that my uncle was a great liar. Everyone knew that the great salt lake, as we called the Lake of Urumiah, was the largest sea in the world.

I watched the beautiful white sea gulls flying over the lake, wheeling gracefully in the clear sunlight. We took off our clothes and ran shouting into the water. There was no danger of drowning. The water of the lake was so intensely salt that we could float easily upon it. We tried to duck each other as we did in the shallows of the Nazlie Chie, and discovered that the salt water burned our eyes and noses and throats. We were content then to float. Our bodies were white as snow with salt, and to wash the salt

away we bathed again in a fountain of fresh water on the slope of a hill.

Late in the afternoon we traveled home again the way that we had come. Along the road we saw sheep and goats grazing on the banks of the brooks and we passed some gypsies making butter by the roadside. We stopped to watch them. These gypsies were Kurds like the gypsies that came to Nazie sometimes in the summer and pitched their tents by our graveyard and told fortunes. We small boys were not permitted to go near them, for our mothers were afraid we might be stolen. These gypsies by the roadside may have been the very ones that came to Nazie. They were picturesque but very dirty creatures. They had put their cream into a bag made of goatskin and were shaking it back and forth. We had an earthen jar in which we made butter. My mother tied a thin skin tightly over the top and Sadig shook the jar until the butter came.

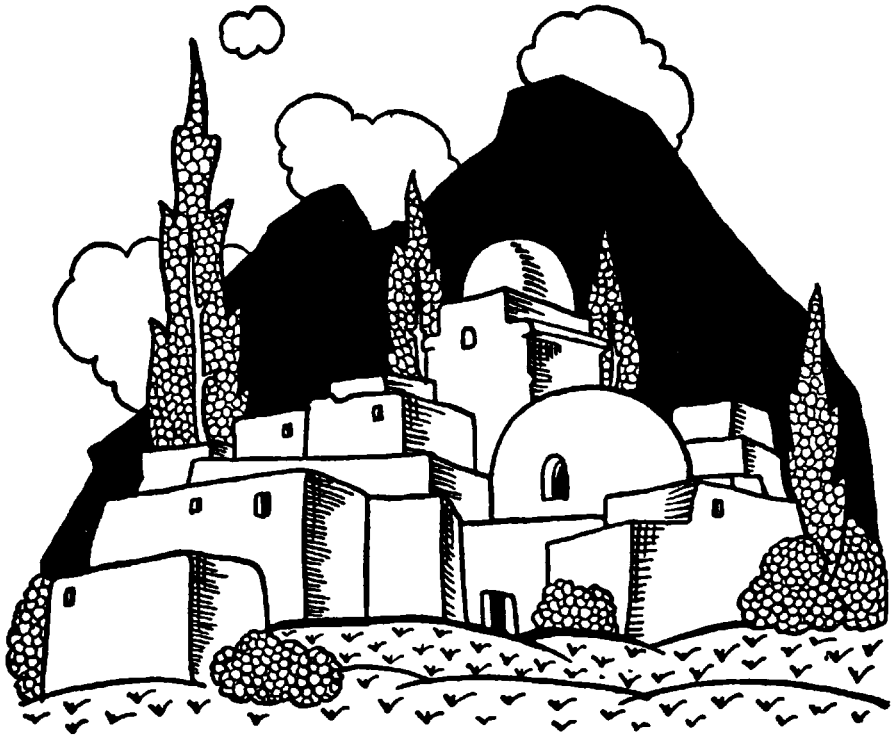
We reached home at dusk, hungry and weary after our great journey, of which we talked for days and weeks. The boys who had not gone to

summer school envied us now. They looked upon us as travelers of much experience.

IV

There was no more time for holidays. Harvest time approached. Our grapes were ripening and our vineyards were guarded day and night. Not only the men and boys of the surrounding villages but even some of our own townsmen would have robbed our vines if opportunity afforded. My father watched the vineyards all day long. They were at the other end of the village next to my uncle Benyamin's pasture. I carried my father's lunch to him when the summer sun stood overhead.

I played with Davod and Monat in the vineyards all the afternoon. Our favorite game was besieging a city, which we played in a tall tower that stood in the center of the vineyard. This tower was built of sun-dried brick. It was very old. Its narrow door led into a round dark little room big enough to hold ten or twelve men. There was a wooden ladder which we could climb, emerging through a trapdoor into a



second story. We would draw the ladder up after us, close the trapdoor with a heavy stone, then climb on through another trapdoor to the roof. From the roof of the tower we could look all over the surrounding countryside, over the tiny villages that dotted the plain and across to the snow-capped peaks of the Kurdish Mountains. Far off to the north we could even catch the glimmer of the sun on the towers of Urumiah.

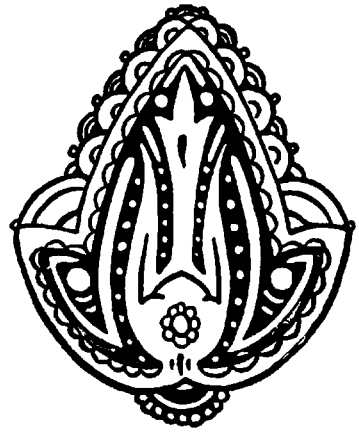
From the top of the tower Davod and I scanned the landscape for sign of an approach-

ing enemy, or again from within the tower we poked sticks through the holes that had been left in the brick walls through which to aim arrows or guns. We shot off our imaginary fire-arms at the assaulting army, which was Monat showering sticks and stones upon the tower. When Monat ran back now and then to look at my uncle Benyamin's cattle to see that they had not wandered away, Davod and I played the prodigal son, taking turns at playing the father and the son. If I were the father I stood on the top of the tower, shading my eyes with my hands as I looked out to discover my son "while he was yet afar off." At sight of Davod approaching among the vines I hastened down to the foot of the tower to meet him and embrace him. Pasha was the fatted calf, though he did not appreciate the significance of his rôle. He merely lay down at my signal and played dead as I had taught him.

The tower in our vineyard may have been used long ago as a refuge against enemies; my father used it as protection for his vines. On the nights of late summer when the grapes were

ripening and during the harvesting Sadig slept on the top of the tower, his gun ready beside him and his ear open to catch the sound of a robber's footstep. Pasha slept at the foot of the tower also on guard. His savage bark would frighten away all but the most desperate intruders.

Often I slept with Sadig and sometimes Davod came to join us. We liked to sleep on the tower, higher than the village housetops. We lay on our backs looking up at the stars that shone in a glittering splendor. I looked for the Great Bear and the North Star as for old friends, and for all the constellations that my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had taught me. All around us was the night, and the fragrance of the ripening grapes filled the warm still air.



CHAPTER VII

The Harvest

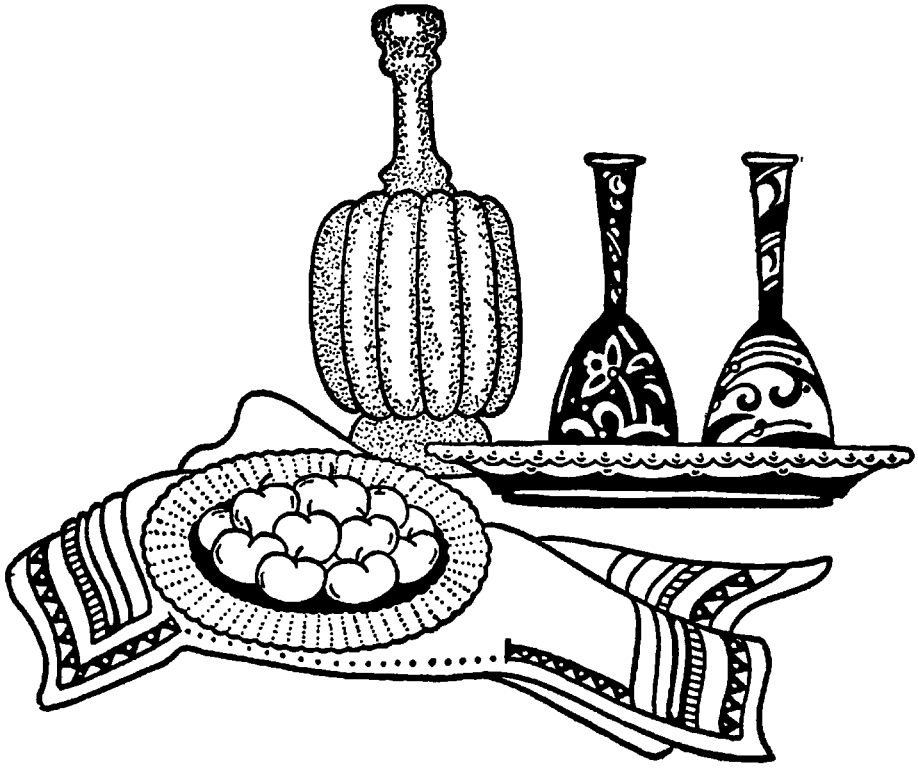
IT WAS the month of Ilul, the month of purple and gold—the purple of the fragrant grapes and the gold of mellow sunshine—month of golden sunsets tinged with amethyst haze, month of the harvest moon, rising round and red through the veil of mists that lay thickly along the Nazlie Chie in the chilly twilight.

From the fields and orchards and vineyards we gathered in the harvest. The ripe and rosy peaches hung thickly on the trees in the orchard

behind our house. My uncle Namatoe's gardens yielded melons, red and golden-hearted; large fine potatoes, the *yeralamisie* we called them (ground apples); carrots, long and dark red and sweet flavored; turnips round and smooth and delicately tinted in white and lavender; huge cabbages, perfectly formed like great green roses just bursting into bloom.

My father hired workers to gather our grapes. The vines were burdened with the great purple clusters. Some we spread in baskets on our house-top to dry in the sun into plump, sweet raisins, and of the others we made wine.

I was allowed to help in making the wine. I scrubbed my feet clean and trod up and down in the wine press, mashing the grapes to a pulp. My father put the juice of the grapes into big earthen jars, and after the fermentation had turned the juice into wine he sealed the jars tightly and they would be kept sealed for years to give the wine the delicious flavor of age. The wine which my father had opened for our use was made before I was born. I was not allowed to have wine, and my father drank very little,



but my grandfather the *Katkhoda* could drink two or three bowls of wine each day.

Our Mohammedan neighbors believed that it was a very great sin to drink wine. Their holy book, the Koran, forbade it. That was one reason why the Mohammedans avoided us. They thought that associating with Christians would put them in the way of temptation. Monat told me about the hair bridge that each Mohammedan must cross to reach paradise. If he had drunk wine he would not be able to keep

his balance on the bridge that was made of a single hair, and should he lose his footing, he would fall into a bottomless pit.

But there was one Mohammedan in our village who did not worry about the hair bridge. He was a great friend of my grandfather the *Katkhoda*, though hardly anyone knew that he came to our house. Ahmad Riza Khan was the only wealthy Mohammedan in Nazie. He was a landowner and had traveled widely. He was also well educated. He was a kind, genial man like Mullah Shoker. Often after dusk he would come to visit my grandfather, and the two of them would drink bowl after bowl of my father's wine, which Riza Khan always said was sweeter than the wine of Shiraz of which the poet Hafiz sang.

Riza Khan bore the title of *Hadji*, since he had made the great pilgrimage to Mecca for which the reward was a place in paradise. Perhaps that was why he was not afraid to drink wine. No other Mohammedan of Nazie had ever been able to make the pilgrimage. All looked upon the *Hadji* Riza Khan as a holy man. When

he came home from the sacred city they went to meet him on the way and kissed his garments and his horse, and begged him, since his own sins were forgiven, to ask Allah to pardon their transgressions.

I would listen to the *Hadji* tell of his great travels and the wonderful city of Mecca. He told me of the *Kabah*, the house of Allah, built in the shape of a cube and inclosed within the mosque at Mecca. Adam had first built it from a model in heaven, and when it was destroyed by the great flood the *Kabah* was rebuilt by Abraham. *Hadji* Riza Khan told me also of the wonderful white stone that was built into the wall of the *Kabah*. The angel Gabriel had brought it from heaven to the son of Abraham. It was white and perfect, but now it had become black because of the sins of the repentant pilgrims who had kissed it.

It was rather puzzling to me. I asked *Hadji* Riza Khan if he spoke of the same Abraham of which our Bible told, and he only laughed and answered that I should not puzzle my young head with questions of theology. I knew that

the Mohammedans in Nazie despised us and called us *gourchie* (unclean). I knew that we Christians were taught to regard the Mohammedans as sinners and wicked unbelievers, for ours was the true religion. It was not safe for Christians and Mohammedans to mingle, for they would soon begin fighting and killing one another. Yet *Hadji* Riza Khan and my grandfather would drink their wine together and talk as old and close friends. No other man in Nazie but the *Katkhoda* would have dared have a Mohammedan for a friend. But my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had always done just as he pleased nor cared for anyone's opinion, and *Hadji* Riza Khan was like him.

II

My uncle Benyamin and the other farmers were busy day after day in the threshing fields threshing out the golden wheat, beating it by hand to separate the grain from the chaff. Before they were finished the Sayeds came.

We were helpless before these men who came to every threshing field, Christian and Moham-

medan alike, and took what they wished without even thanks. They rode horseback and we knew them by their green turbans. Green was the holy color of the Mohammedans and only the Sayeds could wear it. They were called holy men because they were believed to be the true descendants of Mohammed. They were not subject to the law, even the king had no power over them because they were responsible to none but Allah. No man dared touch them or object to anything that they did. My uncle Benyamin could only stand aside and watch them fill their bags with the wheat which he had planted and tended and harvested with the labor of his hands. When they had taken what they pleased they dashed off to the next field.

The Dervishes came too, but we did not mind giving them a share of our grain and fruits. They were good men and worked for the poor, giving away nine tenths of all they collected, and keeping only one tenth for themselves. They had no fine horses. They carried their bags upon their backs and walked from place to place. They were very humble and thanked us for what

they took. Their chief, who lived as simply as they, was called *Orafa*, "the one who knows Allah."

The trees were taking on their autumn tints and the countryside roundabout became the home of the goldenrod and the marigold. The poplar trees were brilliant yellow and the mulberries and *chinnar* trees blazed in scarlet. Already the mornings were frosty, warning of the cold white winter that would soon descend from the mountains, but the afternoons were warm and golden.

My father gave the roof of our house a new coating of mud before the autumn rains should come. Sadig mixed the mud with straw and it was trampled by the buffaloes until it was like a thick paste. My father and Sadig spread this on the roof and pressed it down tightly with a roller.

Sadig had carefully dried manure in the summer and now he beat it into bits to use in bedding our buffaloes. My uncle Benyamin's sheep and goats were brought back from their summer pasture. Our buffaloes were rubbed with an oily substance that would protect their skins

from the bites of insects and vermin in the dark stables.

It was not only the men who were busy. The women had been spinning and weaving through the long summer days and now they were fashioning garments and knitting warm woolen stockings. Our housewives of Nazie were celebrated for their industry. The winter might come but it would find them prepared as the matron of Proverbs who "feared not the snow for her household for all her household were clothed in scarlet."

My aunt Almas had brought out her loom again to resume knotting upon the rug that would be two or three winters in the making. Dangling from the top of her loom were her balls of yarn, spun from the wool of my uncle Benyamin's sheep and dyed in the magic kettles of old Iskender, from which they had come glowing with rich and lustrous colors.

III

When all the harvest was gathered in came a week of merry-making and rejoicing. The vil-

lage fair was held each autumn under the walnut trees before our house. All the farmers brought the finest of their vegetables and fruits to be displayed. All the young men tried their strength in the wrestling matches and their skill in feats of horsemanship. All day long we paraded up and down, wearing our finest clothes, watching the games and listening to the tales of the old men.

We gambled with the melons, betting that there would be more red than yellow melons in a certain pile. We crowded round to watch the melons split open.

"Ten red melons against five yellow," bet Sulieman the merchant.

But there were eight red and seven yellow and Sulieman must pay the price of two melons to Rustom the blacksmith who had taken the bet, and we all feasted on the melons that had been opened.

Target practice was the most exciting part of the fair to me, though I was not yet allowed to handle a gun. The marksmen rested their rifles on a big stone and shot at a target on the mud

wall of our orchard a hundred yards away. The deadly zone was marked off and guards stood at each end to prevent anyone walking within range of the rifles. Zip—spang! sang the bullets through the air, and most of them found the target, for our men were sharpshooters. When the shooting was over Davod and I and the other small boys ran to the wall and dug out the flattened bullets, which we used to load marbles.

At the time of our fair Armiya, the wandering singer, always visited Nazie. He traveled about the country composing and singing his songs, which he sang to the accompaniment of the *torr*, a stringed instrument smaller than the *kamanja*, and in shape and tone much like a guitar.

I never in all my life saw any person so ugly and dirty as Armiya. His eyes were always sore and sticky and his face was *gotur*, or pricked all over with smallpox marks. Yet he was the vainest man I ever knew. He strutted about with a long ivory-handled dagger in a silver sheath fastened to his girdle. But in spite of this we admired him, for he could compose wonderful songs, and

we were half afraid of him, too, for he would make songs about people whom he did not like. He also made songs about the celebrated families whom he met as he traveled about the country. After being entertained by a family in which there was a young son or daughter he would compose poems about the beauty and accomplishments of the youth or maiden. This was a very effective way for parents to announce throughout the countryside that they had attractive sons and daughters of an age for marriage.

On his trips to Nazie Armiya would call at the houses in the village and make arrangements to compose *shirs* or poems about the family for certain sums of money. If the order were given and he received the price he wished he said wonderful things, no matter what the reputation of the family might be. But if he were refused or not offered enough money he went out of that house, shaking the dust of his feet upon its inhabitants and going elsewhere to tell mean and unpleasant things about them.

Armiya, the singer, was a great friend of

my young cousin Yocob, who followed him about like a faithful slave. As a result of this friendship Yocob gained a wonderful reputation throughout the surrounding country; besides being a grandson of Mirza Pachow the *Katkhoda*, he was advertised as the handsomest and strongest boy in the world.

IV

While Armiya was with us and on the last night of the fair we had a village concert. The concert was at our house, and all the friends of my father and grandfather came. Each man as he entered greeted my grandfather the *Katkhoda*.

"*As-Salaam-alai-kum!*" (Peace be to you.)

And he answered "*Alekma Salaam!*" (I take your peace.)

The persons of greater rank and age sat along the wall. The younger and humbler guests sat facing them, and in the midst were the musicians, Armiya with his *torr*, Agha Hady with his *kamanja*, and young Rustom with the *douhal* (drum), which he wore hung from his neck and which he struck alternately with the *chomakhta*

(cane) and a long slim stick like an orchestra leader's baton. My cousin Gvergis, Yocob's older brother, played the *zurna*, a kind of horn blown in accompaniment to the *douhal*. I sat close beside him, admiring his skill and wishing I could blow the *zurna* as he did. There were two *saz* players. The *saz* was much like a mandolin. Agha Hady led the musicians. They began with fast music, then little by little they slowed to the minor tunes and melancholy airs that were our favorite music. They had no written music. They learned and played their tunes by ear. If they forgot there was no help for it, but this rarely happened.

When the music began the dancers appeared, two young men who clashed cymbals in their hands as they danced, the little bells on their fingers and toes jingling as they snapped their fingers and heels together.

My grandfather and the village elders tossed copper coins to the musicians and to the dancers, who caught the money. They placed the large coins on their foreheads shouting, "*Shah-bash! shah-bash!*" (King's head, king's head.)

When no more money was being thrown Agha Hady decided that it was time to end. He rose and bowed low to my grandfather the *Katkhoda.* Young Rustom gave a loud tap on his *douhal* and the concert was over.

CHAPTER VIII

The Autumn

SCHOOL had opened and we were again at the tender mercies of Rabi Machiel. "The blows of the teacher are like a rose leaf," the wise Sadi said a long time ago, but none of us believed it.

With the opening of school this year something happened that stirred the whole village into excitement for several days. There lived in Nazie a woman named Elishwa, whose husband had died a few years before. She had not married

again as was our custom, for the man or woman deprived by death of a companion within a short time sought another. This was because we believed that it was right for everyone to marry, and because a woman needed a man to protect her. But Elishwa seemed able to take care of herself. With the help of servants she managed her fields and flocks. She had become a Presbyterian and, since she was well-to-do, was one of the chief supporters of my grandfather's church.

Elishwa had an only child, a daughter Sophia, now about ten years old, and she decided to send the little girl to school. When Elishwa made up her mind nothing could stop her. It made no difference to her that no girl in Nazie had ever gone to school, and that women had no need of learning. Had not the American missionary said that in his country the girls went to school? Her daughter was the one pride and joy of Elishwa's life and she was determined to give her every advantage that was possible.

Thus on the first day of school Elishwa appeared in our schoolroom with little Sophia,

and announced that she wished to enter her daughter in the class. We were thunderstruck. Rabi Machiel was embarrassed and did not know what to say. He attempted to reason with Elishwa, saying that the school was no place for Sophia, girls should be trained at home in the household arts and brought up in virtue and modesty.

"I shall attend to all that," said Elishwa, "but I also wish Sophia to learn to read and write as the girls do in the land of the *Sahib* missionary. I am a good member of thy church, Rabi Machiel, and I give money to it. If thou dost refuse to instruct my daughter perhaps we shall find another schoolmaster to take thy place."

Rabi Machiel was frightened. He was not a brave man. He could make a great show of authority before his pupils, but he did not know what to do with this determined woman who dared to argue with a man. He sent in haste for my grandfather the minister.

My grandfather thought it proper for girls to be educated. He had had his daughters taught,

but by private tutors. Certainly he could not say that Sophia could not go to school, and since there was no school for girls in Nazie she would have to attend our school.

Elishwa was triumphant. She praised my grandfather and went home, leaving her little daughter with the embarrassed schoolmaster and twenty angry boys. What! To go to school with a girl! We felt terribly humiliated. We moved far back in the room, for none of us would sit beside her. We never thought that little Sophia might be frightened. She sat timidly where the teacher had placed her, never raising her eyes the whole morning.

At noontime we rushed home to tell our parents. We vowed that we would never go back to the school while Sophia was there. Our pride was terribly wounded. How could we look the boys of the other schools in the face when they should taunt us with having to go to school with a girl? Our parents were astonished. The whole village was in an uproar. Men came to complain to my grandfather the *Katkhoda*. I crept in to listen. He would put a stop to all this nonsense.

But what was my disappointment to hear the *Katkhoda* say, when he had pondered the difficult question, that Elishwa was perfectly within her rights and that there was no law that could prohibit Sophia from going to school.

"The whole trouble," pronounced the *Katkhoda*, "lies with these missionaries who come here with these foolish ideas. The best way to avoid trouble now is to forget about it. Strife will lead to no good.'"

And he was right. Sophia continued to come to school, but she was very shy and kept always to herself. She troubled no one but studied her lessons quietly. In time we became used to it. The village found other things to talk about, and the excitement subsided. No other girl had the courage or desire to follow Sophia's example, and she herself, after finishing her fifth year in our school, ceased her studies and was married to the son of *Austa* Zia the barber.

But during the period she attended our school Sophia was the most brilliant pupil we had, and this humiliated us more than ever. We were jealous of her, though we could never have been

made to admit it. She quickly and easily memorized the verses of the Bible and when Brother Shomen made his next visit Sophia carried off the prize.

Brother Shomen was a missionary book agent. He visited our school three or four times a year and we were always delighted to see him come, for he was a kind man and very fond of boys. He had made a deep study of the Bible, and his knowledge of it was remarkable.

"Ask me what you will about the Bible," he said, "and if you find me wrong I will make you a present of a testament."

And this was not boasting. None of us were ever able to trip him. If we recited a verse he could instantly tell us just where it was to be found in the Bible.

Sophia won the prize of a New Testament from Brother Shomen for repeating the most verses and correctly answering the most questions about the Bible. Brother Shomen praised her and we felt ashamed, for we knew that we might have won his praise if we had studied more.

The first book I ever owned I bought from Brother Shomen. It was a leather-bound and gilt-edged Bible which I treasured highly, for books were very rare in our village.

II

In the autumn after the last of the harvest was gathered and before the rains and snows had blocked the roads, the *aboona* (bishop) of our Nestorian church came to collect his tribute of rugs, shawls, and grain. This was a great event and was made a holiday. The house of Kasheasha the priest, where the bishop stayed, was thrown open to everyone. I stood on Kasheasha's house-top and watched the crowd that gathered in the yard. Peeping through the skylight, I could see the people enter one by one to receive the bishop's blessing. No one dared take a seat in his presence. We stood humbly before him and knelt to kiss his hands and his garments, for the bishop was the representative of Mar Shimun (St. Peter) the Patriarch, who lived at Quodshanis in the Kurdish Mountains. The patriarch was very

holy and was to us what the Pope is to the Roman church. He lived a very secluded and holy life and had never tasted any animal food save milk, eggs, and fish. A mother who wished to dedicate her son to be one of the holy men from whom the Patriarch was chosen would not touch meat herself so long as she nursed her baby, for to have done so would have made her child ineligible for the holy office.

Our bishop was named Mar Illia (Elijah). He was a handsome and impressive-looking man, his black beard was long, and his long black hair fell around his shoulders. He was dressed all in black and on his breast gleamed a large silver cross. My cousin Yocob told me, and he had

heard it from Kasheasha the priest, that the silver cross was a present to Mar Illia from the Czar of Russia. In many ways our Nestorian church was very like the Greek Catholic church, which was then the state church of Russia, and our bishops and our Patriarch were under the protection of Russia, which meant security for them in a Mohammedan country.

Yocob rushed around looking very important on the occasion of Mar Illia's visit. As the assistant to the priest Yocob must entertain the bishop's servants in his house and attend to all the business of collecting the tribute. Kasheasha himself became very solemn and dignified, and was not familiar with us as he was usually. The presence of the bishop made him great and removed from us, as did the priestly garments and the mysteries of the altar on Sundays.

The people brought their gifts to Kasheasha's house. The farmers brought grain; the other men brought rich embroidered shawls and beautiful rugs, the patient work of months and years. My grandfather the *Katkhoda's* gift was always pieces of gold. When all the tribute had been

gathered in, the bishop bestowed upon us the blessing of Mar Shimun and prepared to depart.

The servants of Mar Illia, who took charge of the tribute, rode well armed, each being equipped with three cartridge belts. They looked wild and fierce like the Kurds, and I felt sure as I watched the cavalcade leave our village with heavily laden donkeys that the offerings the *aboona* had received would be well guarded against robbers on the road.

III

The nightingale "that in the branches sang" had flown. The twitterings of the swallows in our rafters had ceased, and the *hadji legleg* and his mate had departed again toward Mecca. The autumn rains descended and the Nazlie Chie that had flowed so smooth and shallow in the hot dry summer was again the roaring Giant, lashing its muddy waters against its banks. The trees were bare and the fields were desolate. In our vineyards the vines were shriveled and dead-looking.

The rains ceased and the mud froze into deep ruts in the roads. The northwest wind blew cold

from the mountains with a hint of snow in its chill passing. The work of the year was ended. There was nothing to do but care for the goats and buffaloes and sheep that were penned snugly in their stables. The old men gathered again at our house to tell their stories. My father and the younger men went hunting for foxes, quail, and rabbits and returned with much game.

We always had snow before Christmas. Our snowfall was heavy and usually stayed on the ground two or three months, glittering like diamonds under a sky of purest blue. We could walk for miles on top of the frozen snow without breaking the crust under our feet. We did not venture far from the village alone for there were hungry wolves about, hungrier and more desperate than in the summer. They would approach the village stealthily even in the daylight, and at dusk we heard their wild and blood-curdling howls as they circled the village.

Nearly every day we had beggars, poor ragged Kurds who asked for food to take home to their starving families in Kurdistan. My mother and the other village women were extremely kind

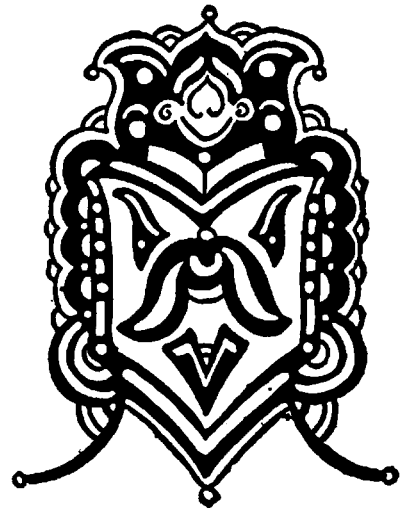
to these unfortunate people, and no doubt their gifts of food kept many a Kurdish child from hunger and even starvation. But no matter how much my mother gave away the great carved chest in our house always seemed to hold enough for us and for all who asked for food.

In our schoolroom the great Russian stove held a roaring fire, eating up like a monster the fuel we brought for it. We were warm and comfortable while we recited our lessons, but we were impatient until Rabi Machiel dismissed us. The afternoons were all too short; there was but an hour to play.

We reared embankments of snow behind the schoolhouse and fought desperate snow battles. We made slides on the ice that was thickly frozen over the village brooks. We frolicked in the snow until the cold chilled even our active young bodies, and with fingers and toes tingling we stumbled home, hungry and tired.

The heat from our oven made a pleasant security from the sharp wind and snow outside. The aroma of savory odors from the big kettle in which our supper was cooking filled the house.

The last ray of the winter sunlight shone through the skylight, glinting on glazed pots, shimmering on the glossy rugs hung all about, gleaming on the knitting needles that clicked in my mother's busy fingers. My grandfather the *Katkhoda* puffed slowly at his pipe. Near him lay Shahzadah, contentedly purring in the soft warmth of the cushions. As I stumbled half frozen through the door I felt the quiet contentment that filled our house. It was to me the most beautiful place in all the world.



CHAPTER IX

The Story of the Rug

FOR many years my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had followed the active and adventurous life of the rug trader, traveling about the country buying rugs from the weavers and selling the rugs again in the city market places. Much of his business was with the Kurds, who were famous weavers, but they sold far more rugs than they made, for nearly all the Kurds were robbers. It was dangerous to trade in stolen goods and dangerous to trade with the Kurds.

It was a business that demanded a valiant heart, a strong arm, a keen eye for marksmanship, and a ready tongue. The profits were great, as were the risks, but the risks were but wine to the adventurous thirst of the *Katkhoda*, who would have made a humdrum business out of the safe and pleasant occupation of tilling the soil, which his three sons chose to follow.

No one for miles about, not even the merchants in the bazaars of Urumiah, knew as much as the *Katkhoda* knew of Persian rugs, which have made my country's name famous throughout the world. Many a story my grandfather the *Katkhoda* used to tell me in the winter afternoons when the snow fell thickly or the wind raged so fiercely that we could not play outdoors and I was content to remain beside our warm oven. My grandfather told me tales of his adventures on the road. He told me also the tales of Persian heroes. Handed down through centuries were some of the stories he told, stories that had never been written, but repeated by tongue from one generation to another. As I think of it now I can almost say that we had

small need of books in Nazie, where there were men like *Austa* Zia and my grandfather the *Katkhoda* who could tell us the stories of the past. They could have told tales every night of the year and not once repeated themselves, so rich was the storehouse of their memory.

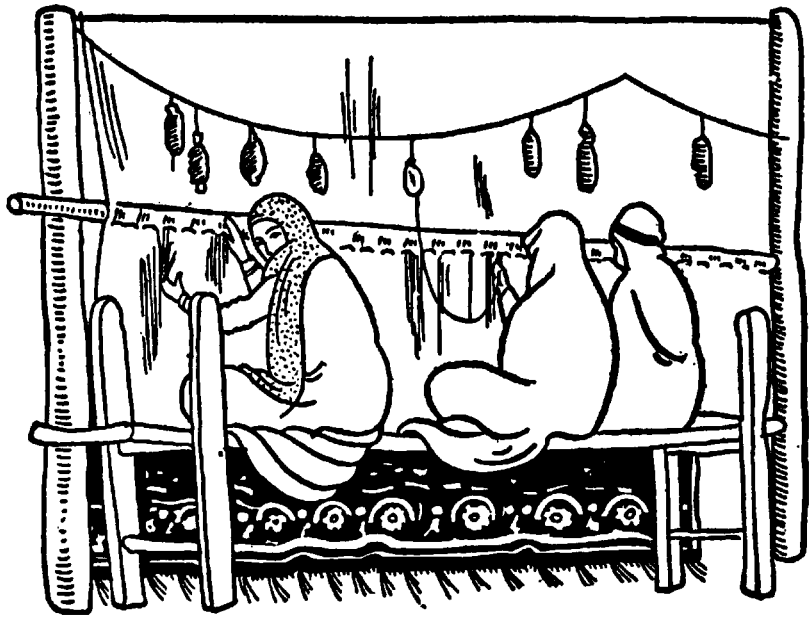
One day my grandfather told me the story of the rug. How much of it had been told to him, and how much of it was his own imagining, I do not know, but it is as near the truth as anything I have ever read of Persian rugs.

"Once upon a time," my grandfather began, "long and long ago when the world was young, there dwelt in the plain about Nazie a fierce, rude folk who spoke a strange tongue that is long forgotten. These folk came from the mountains, the high and windy plateaus that lie beyond the Blue Caspian Sea toward the North Star. They lived not in houses as we live, but in tents. They did not till the soil, but wandered to and fro, eating the flesh of their cattle and the wild fruits and herbs of the land, and pasturing their herds and flocks upon the grassy plains.

"Farther toward the south they had wandered

year by year until at last they reached the plain of our Lake Urumiah. It seemed a goodly land with fertile valleys and the clear river to promise abundance of water. Certain restless ones of the tribe pushed ever onward and returned in time with tales of great cities in a land of plenty between two mighty rivers where the people clothed themselves in fine garments spun of the white cotton plant and the blue flowered flax, instead of skins of animals.

"These people of the cities built high towers and vast palaces, and they feasted upon marvelous dainties. They made queer marks upon tablets of clay and called it writing. It was all very strange and wondrous to the simple people from the mountains. They desired to have the lofty palaces and they coveted the fine wares in the markets of the cities. But they were a poor folk and they had neither gold nor silver nor goods to exchange with the city dwellers. So they bided their time many years and increased their numbers of young men, whom they taught to shoot straight and to ride fast and fearlessly. Then they fell upon the cities and their archers



shot the defenders from the high walls, and they broke in the gates and entered and made great slaughter with their swords and took the palaces and temples.

"They learned of the city dwellers many things. They learned how to write down their speech that all might read of their battles and their heroes. They learned how to build houses of clay and mud and bricks dried in the sun, and they learned how to weave fabrics to adorn their houses. They sowed grain and reaped it in the summer, and in winter made looms and wove carpets to cover their bare floors and spun wool

and flax to make cloth to clothe themselves more finely.

"They wove plain fabrics first and slowly learned the use of colors and how to copy what they saw about them to make patterns for their weaving. The first rugs were not knotted as are our rugs. They were woven only of a warp and woof like our *kelims*, alike on both sides, whence comes the name, for *kelim* means 'double-faced.' It was a long, long time afterward that the secret of the knot was discovered, how to tie knots into the warp and woof and make the beautiful pile for which our rugs are famous. They say it was the Turkomans who first made knotted carpets, those fierce people from the northeastward who long ago made invasions into our land spreading destruction before their swords.

"The patterns of the first weaver were but crude pictures of the manifold forms of nature. The early weavers made strange signs to portray their thoughts about the world. This was very, very long ago. These early folk followed strange gods and worshiped fire and water and the sun and stars. To all things which they saw they gave

strange meanings. They had mysterious signs and symbols for their worship, and these symbols they wove into their carpets.

"Thou hast seen the hills of ashes in the meadow beside the Nazlie Chie, built by the long-ago people who erected great towers where their priests tended the Sacred Fire diligently that it might never go out. But it is long ago extinguished and the towers are crumbled into dust. Only the hills of ashes remain to be a sign of an ancient worship. Thus the patterns of the first rug weavers are to be found still in the rugs thy aunt Almas weaves, but the meaning they once had has been forgotten."

"And no one knows the meaning now?" I interrupted.

"Nay, we can only guess, but sometimes a guess hits close upon the truth. Look at yonder rug upon the wall. In the borders and the corners thou wilt find the old designs. What dost thou see?"

"Here is an arrow," I cried.

"Aye, they were a fighting race, those folk of long ago, and their deadly arrows sang a terrible

battle song in the ears of the peaceful plainsmen. They wove arrows into their carpets that the glory of their conquests might not be forgotten. Likewise they wove the tools of other occupations. In some rugs thou canst see the shepherd's crook, the farmer's sickle, the merchant's scales, the ax and saw of the carpenter. But what findest thou now? A circle and a smaller circle? What might they be?"

"The big one is the sun," I ventured a guess, "and the small one is the moon."

"Well may it be so," replied the *Katkhoda*, "but we know not certainly. Dost thou mark the many queer figures of straight lines? Here is a square, a triangle, a diamond shape, a triangle within a square, and other stranger forms. These are older than the circles."

"Why?" I wondered.

"'Tis simple. Which canst thou draw more easily, a straight line or a circle? The first weavers made patterns of straight lines before they could weave curves and circles. Can we guess what these ancient patterns mean? We know but little of the past. It is a book written in a

strange tongue and many leaves are missing. Yet we know that all these old patterns were made from the forms of nature and the symbols of ancient nature worships.

"See this triangle. Could it be a lofty mountain peak? And this broken line the zigzag flash of lightning? This waving line which I have seen in many rugs might first have been made to picture a gently curving river by which some tribe had pastured its flocks. But what of these queer figures which seem so strange to us?

"Thou hast watched the stars, Youël, from thy bed on the housetop on midsummer nights. Thou hast marked the curious shapes of the constellations, the figures of man and bird and beast that are formed of groups of stars. The heavens were the only book of the ancient peoples. There they read the signs that foretold the seasons and the weather and when to plow and plant their fields. In the stars they found their gods, the powers of good and evil that ruled the affairs of men. Perchance these strange figures in our rug once bore likeness to the constellations or were symbols of the mysterious worship of the stars,

which was older, even, than the worship of fire. Through many hundred years the ancient designs have come down to us. Thy aunt Almas is heir to all the weavers of the past, and with their long-forgotten symbols she weaves new patterns as her fancy pleases."

My grandfather pointed out to me the small figure that repeated itself in regular rows over the field of the rug on which he sat.

"This pattern is seen in many rugs, in Senna rugs such as this is and also in the rugs of Serabend, and often in the same arrangement. It is sometimes called the pear pattern."

"But it looks not like a pear," I objected.

"Yet there is likeness enough to give it the name," answered my grandfather, "though it hath also other names, the palm, the cone, or the river loop design. Some say the figure is a clenched fist with the thumb curled round the forefinger. But it may never have been drawn from any of the objects that give it names, but have had some mysterious meaning that we know not."

"Have other patterns names?" I asked.

"Aye, there are many names of patterns. But oft the name hath little meaning. 'Tis but the trader's way to tell one pattern from another. Sometimes a pattern is named from the place where it was first woven. Here is such a one. What wouldst thou call it?"

The *Katkhoda's* finger traced the design that ran along the border of the rug.

"A flower," I said. "A flower between two leaves."

"Aye, a flower between two leaves. Wherever thou findest it, it is the same pattern. Some call it the fish pattern because their fancy sees in the leaves the shape of a fish."

"Ho, ho!" I laughed. "The fish in the Nazlie Chie never look like that."

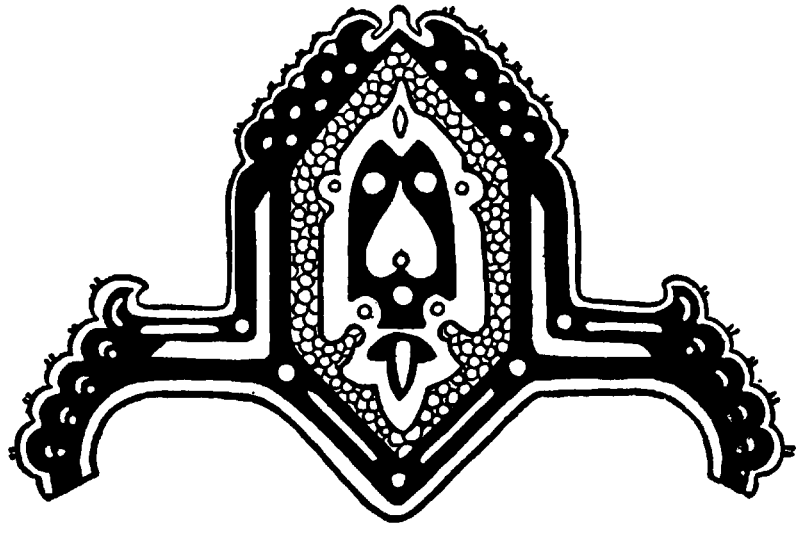
"Nay," said my grandfather, smiling. "Another name for it is the Herati pattern, from the city of Herat, which lies far away toward the rising of the sun in the mountains of Afghanistan. Here they say the pattern was first woven and thence spread to other weavers. It is but one of the beautiful flower patterns that our gardens have furnished to our weavers. Could I but take

thee to the city, I might show thee many carpets from all Iran[1] and teach thee many patterns, how some are like and some are very different from the patterns of our rugs of Azerbajin."

"And are our rugs most beautiful of all?" I asked.

"Thou hast never seen the rugs of Kashan, nor the carpets of Kerman," was my grandfather's answer. "Exceeding fine of weave they are and with a silky luster. Their colors are deep and rich, glowing like jewels. Their flowers are silken petaled, and the rose of Iran blooms in them soft as the rosy clouds of sunset. Yet to my eyes our Kurdish carpets with their bolder patterns and their brighter colors are more handsome. There is no stronger rug than our Kurdish Bijar with its heavy knotting, and the finest Sennas, with their glistening flowers like frosted velvet, can rival even the gems of Kerman. Aye, I like the Kurd rugs best," said my grandfather the *Katkhoda*, who was ever a Kurd at heart.

[1]We called our country Iran and ourselves Iranians. Persia is the Greek form of the ancient Parsa or Fars. The race that ruled in ancient Fars is now nearly extinct in Persia. The Parsees of India are their descendants.



CHAPTER X

The Feast of Christmas

THE Nestorians called Christmas "Little Feast." Easter was "Great Feast," because the fast preceding Easter was twice as long as the Christmas fast. For twenty-five days before Christmas a strict fast was observed. Only the very small children, the very aged, and those who were ill were excused. For the twenty-five days of the fast the eating of meat, eggs, milk, or cheese was forbidden. Bread and beans was the frugal fare of the poor man and his more prosper-

ous neighbor alike. Worldly affairs were forgotten, much time was spent in prayer, and each morning the great bell of Mat Mariam called us through the cold white dawn.

Those who had but lately forsaken the Nestorian church to become Presbyterians still observed the fast, for the old habits were yet strong. But my grandfather the Presbyterian minister and his staunchest followers, who had made their break from the older faith complete, did not fast. Their attitude was looked upon by the faithful Nestorians with astonishment. Not to fast during the holy season, they thought, was a terrible sin and showed lack of reverence to God.

My mother, having been brought up in the new customs, had never observed the fast, and she felt that it was not necessary for me to do so. Untroubled by any religious significance, my young mind was willing at this time and at the fifty-day fast of Easter to accept entirely the Presbyterian side of the question. My grandfather the *Katkhoda*, who was growing more and more feeble, was not able to fast. Only my father fasted in our house. He ate his simple meal

in silence before the rest of us were served. For his sake we fasted one day in each week.

The roads were drifted deep with snow. Nazie lay in a vast white silence, cut off from the rest of the world. A great peace descended upon us. No one spoke unkindly to his neighbor; there was no fighting; we all went humbly about our daily duties and our prayers, our thoughts upon the little Christ Child whose birthday we were to celebrate. At night the bright stars looked down from the clear heavens as they had shone long ago upon the shepherds who had watched their flocks by night. On such a clear, still night, and in just such a warm, snug stable as any in Nazie, had been born the baby for whom the angels sang and to whose manger cradle the brilliant star guided the Wise Men. It was all very real to us. As I lay on my little bed near our warm oven I would look up at the radiant stars that glittered in the patch of sky framed by our skylight and wonder if one of them might have been the Star of Bethlehem.

Even Mullah Shoker knew of the Christ Child. He called Him Isa-il-Massee, Jesus the

Anointed One. It was Mullah Shoker who told me that the wise men came from Persia. They were Magians, priests of the fire-worshipers, who studied the movements of the stars from their lofty towers, and thus it was they saw the new and bright star and followed it to Bethlehem.

On the last night of the fast Kasheasha the priest and my cousin Yocob went at midnight to the church. They consecrated bread and blessed wine and chanted psalms and prayers until the dawn of Christmas morning.

The bell of Mat Mariam rang through the still darkness of the hour before dawn. I woke from a deep sleep, thinking that the clear notes of the bell were the echo of the angels' Hallelujah. I rose and dressed and washed my face. Silently, speaking no word, I walked behind my father through the snow to Mat Mariam to receive the Christmas communion. My mother permitted me to take the sacraments of the Nestorian church, because to forbid me would have been an insult to my grandfather the *Katkhoda*, who always insisted that I was a Nestorian.

I approached the altar in my turn, with my hands clasped beneath my chin. I knelt before Kasheasha, who gave me the consecrated bread and held the silver chalice of wine to my lips. Then I returned to my place, where I knelt until everyone had gone forward to partake of the communion.

Kasheasha stood before us like a bright angel in the candlelight. He raised his hands high in blessing while my cousin Yocob's boyish voice chanted gladly, "The Saviour is born this day. Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men!"

II

We chanted it after him. We went from the church in joy and gladness to make the day one of happiness and feasting as we did when a son was born to any family in our village.

My mother had made the *harasa*, which was our traditional holiday feast. Into a great pot she placed the disjointed pieces of several young chickens and a measure of wheat, filling the pot with water. All night long it boiled in the oven. When my father and I returned from the communion at Mat Mariam the fragrance of the steaming *harasa* greeted us. Sadig had lifted the heavy pot from the coals and was stirring it with a flat wooden rod. But we could not yet sit down to our feast. First Kasheasha the priest must come, which he did when he had changed from his robes of the mass into his everyday black garments, to bring the Christmas communion to my grandfather the *Katkhoda*, who could not go to the church.

Kasheasha joined us at our Christmas feast. Sadig brought the ewer and basin of water and

poured water over the hands of the guest. Sadig served us, and my mother did not eat with us. She had put on her *yashmog* because no woman should go unveiled in the presence of the priest.

I stuffed upon *harasa* as American youngsters do upon the Christmas turkey, but still I managed to eat the dessert, which was our favorite delicacy, *matzam* and *pakhlava*, thick sour cream eaten with wooden spoons from small earthenware bowls, along with a rich dough baked with a filling of crushed nuts and honey. Afterward Sadig carried bowls of *harasa* and, baskets of nuts and raisins to the poor families, and still we had *harasa* all the rest of the week for the huge pot held enough to feed twenty families.

It was a time of great rejoicing. We celebrated the Christmas season as we did the holy time of Easter. Gifts were brought to the church; cattle were slaughtered and the poor were fed; old feuds were patched up and life was started anew. We visited our friends and neighbors and greeted each other by saying, "May your Christmas be a blessing."

We had never heard of Santa Claus and we gave no gifts at Christmas except to the priest, but I always had a new suit of clothes as I did at Easter time. All week we kept the holiday with games and feasting and cockfights and wrestling and story-telling, though my grandfather the minister frowned upon such sport. He was never to be seen among the groups of merry-makers. He kept aloof, reading his holy books and spending his time in meditation and prayer. When he walked down the street he looked neither to the right nor to the left, and the villagers would not have dared to call to him the jovial greetings they exchanged with Kasheasha. Yet my grandfather was a better man than Kasheasha and kind at heart, though he did not show that kindness in his stern face. Always wherever he went he carried with him his Bible. In the other hand he carried a staff. He might have been a prophet of old with his white beard and his staff.

III

The Nestorian New Year was celebrated with a mystic ceremony. On the last night of the

Christian year it was revealed to us whether we should expect a long cold winter or a mild one. Kasheasha, chanting his prayers in the dim, mysterious sanctuary, took the holy cross from the silken handkerchiefs which wrapped it and placed it in a bowl of water. If New Year's morning found the cross frozen in ice we should expect a severe winter, but if the water in the bowl were not frozen we might look forward to a mild winter and an early spring.

I slept restlessly that night. I was to be permitted to go with my cousin Yocob next morning to ring the bell that would call everyone to Mat Mariam to see the miracle of the cross. Yocob came to wake me. Sleepily I found my clothes and dressed and followed him through the night to Kasheasha's yard. There was an unearthly silence about us. All the village still slept. The crunch of our heels on the frozen snow was the only sound, until suddenly a soft pad, pad behind us startled me. A wolf was stealing on us in the darkness! I grasped Yocob, too terrified to utter a sound, but just then a warm furry head rubbed lovingly against my hand. Pasha had heard me

leave the house and had slipped out of the stable to follow.

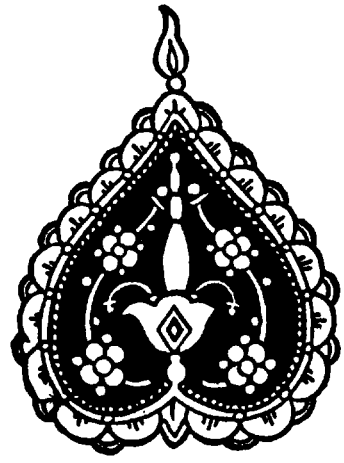
Yocob sent the peals of the bell echoing through the night. Kasheasha came from his house and we three entered the church. I waited, shivering upon the stone-cold floor, while Kasheasha and Yocob disappeared into the dark place behind the curtains to put on their priestly garments and light the candles. Silently the people began to come in and kneel to repeat their prayers. I said my Hail Mary over and over again under my breath, but I was thinking only of the revelation of the cross.

Kasheasha and Yocob came forth with the lighted candles and chanted the New Year's mass. At last they approached the green bowl that held the silver cross. Kasheasha lifted it and carried it among us. We all crowded to look, crossing ourselves in the presence of the sacred cross. There was no ice in the bowl.

I did not wait while Yocob disrobed. I ran home alone to give the good news to my grandfather the *Katkhoda*.

He was greatly pleased. He placed his hand upon my head to bless me.

"The Lord is merciful," he said. "We shall have an early spring and I shall hear the nightingale again."



CHAPTER XI

The Old Katkhoda

IN SPITE of the wisdom of my grandfather the *Katkhoda* and of Mullah Shoker, who strove to keep the peace between the Christians and Mohammedans in our village, once in a while there occurred a quarrel which brought serious consequences.

One morning my little playmate Davod appeared at school anxious and troubled. His father had been beaten almost into unconsciousness by a Mohammedan. Davod's mother was in terror and Davod himself was greatly frightened.

"How did it happen?" I asked excitedly.

"Hassan fell against my father in the street where the way is icy," Davod explained. "He lost his footing and became very angry. He cursed my father for being in the way, and called him dog of a Christian, and swore that he had put out his foot to trip him. My father denied that he had wished to injure Hassan, but Hassan was more angry than ever and bade him beg his forgiveness and salaam to him. But should my father salaam to a lying Mohammedan? So Hassan seized him and threw him in the ice and beat him until the blood streamed down his face and left him lying half dead. My mother implored him to attend to his wounds, but he has taken our donkey and gone to Urumiah in his bloody clothes to the judge. When the judge sees him thus persecuted and beaten he will give him redress for his wounds and send his officers to throw Hassan into prison."

We were all greatly incensed. I ran home at noontime to tell my grandfather the *Katkhoda.* But he had already had the news from two or three visitors that morning. He shook his head sadly.

"Mishu the miller was ever of a hasty temper, and anger destroyeth judgment."

"Why did he not come here?" I asked.

"He knew that I would counsel patience," answered my grandfather, "and he was hot for revenge. He is entitled to redress, but where will he find it in Urumiah where the judge is of the faith of Hassan? Better to have tended his wounds and left vengeance to the Lord."

"But could not you have punished Hassan? You are the *Katkhoda!*"

"Aye, but I have not the power to cast a son of the Prophet into prison. We are left in peace in this land only so long as we interfere not with the sons of Mohammed who rule it. We must be long-suffering and patient and offend not our masters nor those of their faith."

"But you have never submitted to anyone," I cried, proud of my grandfather's independent spirit.

"Nay, but I carry a wise head on my shoulders and a smooth tongue in my cheek," replied my grandfather, "and Mishu the miller has

neither. No good can come of his hasty attempt at vengeance, and mayhap much ill."

It was a wild and foolish journey that Mishu made. The snows had been melting, else he could scarcely have reached the city. Arrived at the court of the judge he was not even noticed. No one would listen to him. Disappointed, he turned toward home, shivering already from his long exposure. He reached his house scarcely able to dismount from the donkey. He was put to bed with a severe cold. His family were distracted. They bathed him with snow, which was thought the remedy for colds. But next day he was delirious with fever. The wise old women came. They gave instructions that he should have a sweat bath in the oven. They prepared a chicken for him to eat, for hen's flesh was considered heating. They rolled him in heavy blankets, fighting the fever with heat. But nothing availed, and Mishu the miller departed this life.

The village was a place of gloom. My grandfather the *Katkhoda* feared there might be an

outbreak against the Mohammedans. He called the village elders to him and counseled them to restrain any feeling of revenge, and though there were among them men of hot impulses, they knew the *Katkhoda's* wisdom and listened to him.

II

I wondered naïvely why Mishu could not have appealed to the King, who would certainly have punished the unjust judge. Just where we formed our impressions I cannot say, but we boys thought that our *Shah-in-Shah*, for we boastfully entitled our monarch the King of Kings, was the mightiest and the best man in all the world. He always did the will of God, who had put him on the throne. He had unlimited power, but that was because he knew everything and did only what was best for his people. The King could never be wrong; at least I came to learn that it would be a most unwise thing for anyone to say that the King was wrong. The wise Sadi said, "Should the Prince at noonday say, 'It is night, declare that you behold the moon and stars.'"

The King would have been even less concerned about the misfortunes of Mishu the miller than was the judge. The only interest the officials took in the people was to be sure they paid their taxes. There was no way that we could complain of unjust treatment. Not only were we Christians given no ear by the judges; poor Mohammedans were quite as likely to be dismissed from court unheard, or even punished if they had complained against a rich man. There was a law that a Persian *gazi* (judge) should not accept bribes, but they paid no heed to the law. They received no salary, and depended for a living upon the bakhsheesh (tips) of those who were brought to trial.

But the wicked judge could not forever escape punishment. There was a saying of Mohammed that was quoted to us by the good *Hadji* Riza Khan, who was truly sorry for the trouble that had come to the miller's fatherless family.

"There is no judge," said Mohammed, "who orders between men, whether just or unjust, but will come to Allah's court on the day of resurrection, held by the neck by an angel; and the angel

will raise up his head toward heaven and wait for Allah's orders, and if Allah orders him to be thrown into hell an angel will do it from the height of a forty days' journey."

In time even the miller's neighbors forgot about the great injustice, for such was the way of the world and nothing could be done about it. But I did not forget. For the first time I became conscious of a government of which I had known nothing, a government that gave me no protection. This was the first seed of that discontent that was to bring me to America.

III

Just before Easter that year there was a hard frost that blighted the budding fruit. It had been a long cold winter, and my father was discouraged over the condition of the vineyards and the orchards. I thought back to the New Year's morning when Kasheasha the priest had taken the silver cross from the water. The water had not been frozen, and we should have had a mild winter and an early spring. It was all very puzzling. How could we doubt the testimony of

the cross, and yet there were the blackened buds on our peach and apricot trees.

The *hadji legleg* did not return this year in time to greet the Persian New Year. The ground had still been white with snow. My grandfather the *Katkhoda* was weaker each day. Vainly he waited, longing for the nightingale. My father and mother were very sad. My grandfather's old friends came and went away sorrowfully, for they knew that the wisest and bravest heart in all our village soon would beat no longer. Even my grandfather the minister came now to sit beside the dying man who had been his friend long ago when they both were young. They had been estranged from each other all during the active years of their manhood; even old age had still harbored the ancient grudge, but now in the shadow of death the hard words were forgotten and they were friends once more.

It was the first time that my mother had seen her father in her house since she had left his roof against his wish to marry the *Katkhoda's* son. There had never been any lack of affection between these two, but my grandfather the minis-

ter would not come to see his daughter in the *Katkhoda's* house. My mother smiled now through her tears to see my two grandfathers at peace, for she had never seen them so and scarcely hoped for it.

Slowly and mournfully the bell of Mat Mariam tolled the *Katkhoda's* passing. One by one all our clan gathered. My mother and my aunts wept. My father and my uncles sat silent and gloomy faced, with folded arms. Neighbors crowded in and the mourners came. They were women who had recently lost a child or one of their near kin, and they wept for their own sorrows rather than ours. They waved the *Katkhoda's* clothes before the assembled villagers, his familiar long blue coat spangled with brass buttons, his red waistcoat, and they chanted:

"What is this life so short and full of pain?
A great man has gone from us;
He has left his noble sons bowed with sorrow;
Ah, Mirza Pachow, who will take your place,
Why have you left us, Mirza Pachow?"

Meanwhile the ox had been killed for the funeral feast, and in the house of my uncle

Benyamin next door the women of the village busied themselves with cooking the *shorba* and *yakhana*, a thick soup of potatoes and onions with balls of meat highly seasoned with garlic and saffron and mixed with wheat meal.

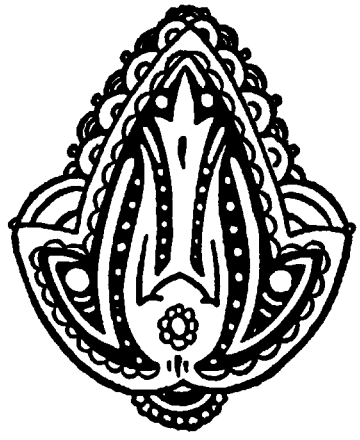
The carpenter had already come and measured my grandfather for his coffin. Soon the sounds of his saw and hammer were heard in the court-yard outside. Kasheasha the priest came. My mother brought him a great bowl of water which he blessed and gave to the body washers, who were pillars of our Nestorian church and old friends of my grandfather. They washed the right arm, then the left, the neck, and finally the rest of the body. When they had finished they were given my grandfather's clothes as a token of their friendship and love for him.

Then my grandfather, wrapped in his white shroud, with embroidered shawls about him as befitted his age and station, was laid in his coffin. The young men of the village contended for the honor of bearing his body to the grave. Finally four were chosen. They placed the coffin on a ladder, and led by Kasheasha and my cousin

Yocob, carried it to the graveyard. As they walked Kasheasha chanted the liturgy for the dead, and Yocob, swinging his censer, uttered the responses.

The bearers set the coffin on the ground, and each kinsman and neighbor looked for the last time upon the beloved face. Then Ouraham, a tottering old man, a friend of my grandfather from his youth, put the lid on the coffin and it was slowly lowered into the grave. Kasheasha took a handful of dust and sprinkled it over the coffin, saying, "From earth thou camest, to earth thou shalt return," and each of the mourners did likewise in turn. By and by there was only the scratching of the spades as they went into the ground and the flat sound of earth falling upon earth.

We returned home to eat in silence the food served by my mother and my aunts. When the mourners had finished they went away, saying, "Such is the end of man. May God give him rest, for he lived and died in the faith of his fathers."



CHAPTER XII

The Rug Trader

OUR clan was still the strongest in the village and so had power to name the new *Katkhoda*. The choice fell upon my father's cousin Sirkhush, the same who had the great strength and fighting spirit of my grandfather. Whether Sirkhush lived fully up to the meaning of his name as well, for it meant "Goodhead," was not so easily discerned. But wisdom comes with years and Sirkhush might well grow into it.

Sirkhush had chosen to follow, too, the trade of my grandfather and had become a rug and

cattle dealer, buying from the Kurds, who received him with welcome because he was the nephew of Mirza Pachow. To go into Kurdistan had been an ambition of mine as long as I could remember, certainly as long as I had listened to the tales of my grandfather's adventures. I knew I should not need to coax Sirkhush to take me, for he was fond of me. The difficulty was gaining permission of my mother and father, and that finally was given.

In the early dawn of a summer morning we made ready to ride forth from Nazie. Sirkhush had overseen with care each detail of the preparation, the harnessing of the donkeys, the placing of the saddlebags in which were stowed the leather pouches filled with silver coins, the only medium of exchange which the weavers would accept. Sadig was to go with us. My mother felt that the faithful boy might be an added protection for us among his outlaw folk.

I awoke before dawn to dress in my fine new traveling clothes. First I put on the long loose trousers and boots of Russian leather. Over my long vest of homespun cloth I wore a gay red

jacket. I had a fine new hat of lambskin, but the most important feature of the costume to me was the cartridge belt which I wore around my waist in place of a girdle. I took up my new rifle and thus fiercely equipped I marched up and down the courtyard like a young chieftain.

My father smiled in amusement and perhaps in pride, but my mother's mind dwelt anxiously upon the dangers of the road. She knew, however, that the arms and ammunition with which Sirkhush and Sadig were similarly equipped were carried more for display than for use. For many years my grandfather the *Katkhoda*, and now my cousin Sirkhush, had had an agreement with the emir of the neighboring Kurd tribes. Never had they been molested. The Kurds knew that Sirkhush rode well armed and would not hesitate to shoot with deadly aim upon any rash band that might disregard the order of their chieftain.

My playmates were envious of my good fortune. They crowded around to watch our departure. I rode behind Sirkhush and behind us trailed the donkeys who would carry back the rugs

Sirkhush was to buy. Last of all rode the faithful Sadig. The donkeys filed slowly along to the jingling of the bells fastened to the fringes of the saddlebags. They also proudly wore bells around their necks and they tossed their heads now and then to set them merrily tinkling.

I lovingly felt the smooth barrel of my fine Russian rifle. Already I looked about to discover the presence of some wily robber. Was that a head peering over the clump of thorn bushes yonder? Many a tale had I heard from the old *Katkhoda* of these fearless thieves who waylaid the unlucky traveler.

"Shall I shoot at sight?" I called out to Sirkhush ahead.

The trader laughed. "The robbers do not attack us, for we are friends to the emir, Sheikh Ahmed. And look not for robbers here upon the open plain. They keep to the mountain passes."

The sun rode high in the clear heavens. The donkeys kept their steady pace. The road led through wheat fields and rice fields, almond orchards and vineyards, but ever we rode

steadily toward the purple mountains of Kurdistan.

We approached the straggling foothills where the road began to lead up through the passes of the mountains. We were in the land of the robbers. My cousin Sirkhush pointed out a hill in the distance.

"See yonder hill, Youël? 'Tis called the *Ghula-tapa*, Bullet Hill, for many a bullet has whizzed out from behind those rocks in years gone by to halt the poor merchant or traveler."

As we passed the *Ghula-tapa* I scanned the rocks closely, but never a head or rifle barrel did I see, nor was there any shot. I was half disappointed. I felt that I was born too late for adventure.

II

We came to a Kurdish camp. I marveled to see the handsome unveiled women mingle with the men in a freedom that would have scandalized Nazie. Here we were welcomed with the rough hospitality of camp life. The Kurds were poor and outlawed, but they shared with a friend whatever they had. Dinner was cooked over an

open fire by the women, whose gypsy dark eyes held a witchery in their smile. The ragged, half-naked children played happily about the camp and curiously inspected our clothing as their fathers enviously eyed our Russian rifles. The Kurds had a passion for fine firearms.

The weavers brought out their rugs and unrolled them, and the fascinating business of bargaining began. My cousin Sirkhush offered a price for the three rugs of the first weaver, and the man howled that the price insulted him.

"By the Beard of the Prophet, it would not pay for the wool in the rugs!"

Warily the bargaining continued, the trader offering a bit more and the weaver demanding a bit less until the two figures nearly met. All the time the other weavers crowded round, begging Sirkhush to look at their rugs. The camp had been turned into a market place. The shrill bargaining and the magnificent epithets hurled from ready tongues that each proclaimed the merit of his rug to the great discredit of all the others made the proceeding as interesting as a cockfight.

I watched Sirkhush as he examined the rugs, running a practiced finger across the weave, while his keen eye discovered any flaw of workmanship or any harsh contrast of colors that might make the rug of less value to the city dealers.

Finally the bargain was struck, though Sirkhush protested that it had ruined him and the weaver whined that the labor of his family had been sold for a song. Sirkhush opened the pouch of silver and drew forth the purchase price piece by piece. The weaver suspiciously examined each

piece and rang it against a stone. Angrily he threw back two coins.

"Must I be cheated for my rugs and then be paid in false coin?"

"Thy ears are deaf that thou canst not hear it ring true," cried Sirkhush, but he took back the coins and replaced them with others, which he was perfectly willing to do, for the coins were good and the weaver knew it. It was all but a part of the fascinating game of bargaining.

We ate again beside the camp fire and slept on the ground, rolled up in our gay striped blankets, under the summer stars.

"How likest thou the trader's life?" asked Sirkhush next morning as we set forth for other camps. "Why dost thou not go with me on all my journeys and learn to be thyself a trader?"

But I shook my head again as I had at old Ishaq the merchant, for I knew it was not for me, though I liked it well.

CHAPTER XIII

The Rug Bazaar

WE TRAVELED several days through the mountains, living the outdoor gypsy life of the Kurds. My cousin Sirkhush purchased other rugs until at last the pouches of silver were nearly empty and each donkey carried a load of rugs upon his patient back. We turned our faces toward the east again, taking a road that sloped gradually downward. Before us in the distance the ancient walls of Zoroaster s city rose out of the plain.

We sought the house of a distant kinsman of our family who dwelt in Urumiah. Here we were hospitably welcomed. My grandfather the *Katkhoda* had often been entertained in this house when he visited the city. No Persian traveler seeks an inn unless he has no kinsman or acquaintance in the town where he stops for the night.

Next morning we heard the rumbling of the drums that announced the hour to open the shops. We set out for the market place, leaving the faithful Sadig to follow, driving the rug-laden donkeys, a slow progress through the narrow crooked streets where there was only one path for both man and beast. We came to the market place and entered under its arched roof that kept out the winter rains and snows and the heat of the summer sun. I lagged behind to look at the fascinating wares of the shrill-voiced merchants who strove to entice the passersby into their stalls. Each kind of merchandise had its own section of the market place.

We approached the rug bazaars, a row of little booths hung with handsome rugs. Sirkhush the

trader made his way to the stall of Ali ben Hassan, with whom my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had used to deal. Ali ben Hassan sat cross-legged in the door of his stall, smoking his water pipe, apparently occupied with his own meditations and uninterested in what went on about him. He was an old man who had himself been a trader and had now settled down in comfort to deal in rugs brought to him by younger men. His face bore the marks of his long following of the open road. It was bronzed and roughened by burning suns and desert winds. From beneath

his white brows his eyes looked out, keen and shrewd.

"*As-Salaam-alai-kum*, Ali ben Hassan, prince of merchants!" my cousin Sirkhush greeted him.

"*Alekma Salaam!*" replied the old merchant courteously, and yet with an imperiousness that had marked the words on the lips of my grandfather the *Katkhoda* when he returned the salutations of the villagers.

"Welcome, Sirkhush," said Ali ben Hassan. "What news of the road?" And then seeing me, for I was standing shyly behind my cousin, "Is this thy son?"

"Not mine, but my cousin's son," answered Sirkhush. "This lad is the youngest grandson of Mirza Pachow, peace to his name."

"Come hither," beckoned the old merchant to me. "I knew thy grandfather well. Mirza Pachow was a great man, fearless and wise, and the friend of the oppressed. Pattern thyself after him. This is thy first visit to the rug bazaars?"

"*Balee Agha!*" (Yes, sir.) I answered shyly. "But it has long been my desire to come here. My grandfather the *Katkhoda* used to tell me of

the great bazaars and how one might see there rugs from every part of Iran."

"Thou hast come to the right man," declared Ali ben Hassan.

He noticed my inquiring glance about his small booth, which contained not more than half a dozen rugs, and he laughed.

"Yonder is my *ambur*," (storeroom) and he pointed to the rear of the little stall. "Come with me."

He held aside the tapestry that made a curtain between the two rooms and I followed him into a place piled high with rugs. Save for the space directly beneath the square skylight the room was in shadow.

"Abdul!" called Ali ben Hassan, "bring me the rose Kerman."

A boy a few years older than I came out of the shadows carrying a small rug which he spread down before his master. The light from the opening in the roof shone down upon exquisite shadings of rose and gold that seemed the work of fairy weavers. I had never imagined anything so beautiful.

Ali ben Hassan stroked the rug lovingly, smoothing the fine, short nap.

"A royal gem of Kerman," he said. "See the closeness of the weave, the sheen of the fine wool, the delicate colors—rose pink against white and gold. The old dyers of Kerman knew the secret of pale and delicate colors. Observe the pattern, a true design of Kerman. The tree of life, we call it," and he pointed out the graceful, flowering tree that grew in the field of the rug.

"Is it the tree of life that grew in the garden of Eden?" I asked, "from which Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit?"

"It might be," said Ali ben Hassan, "or it might be the *Sidrah* tree of the blessed Koran. The *Sidrah* tree grows in the highest heaven beside the throne of Allah. It bears a leaf for every man with his name thereon written and in the time his leaf falls then a man dies. Only Allah the Compassionate knows when each leaf shall fall. But," and Ali ben Hassan's eyes twinkled merrily, "it may be neither of these trees, but only the rose tree that grew in the garden of the weaver. Tree of life is but the name

we give the pattern. This rug comes from Kerman, where long ago dwelt the family of heroes from which sprang the greatest of all our Persian heroes, the mighty Rustom. Thou knowest his story?"

"Oh, yes!" I cried. "And how he fought with Sohrab his own son."

"It is the most moving tale that ever poet sang," said Ali ben Hassan. "The matchless words of Firdousi make strong men to weep that hear them. The day of the heroes is long past and the glory of Kerman is found now in its weavers."

Abdul brought other rugs at his master's direction. Ali ben Hassan showed me a handsome carpet from Khorassan, the Land of the Sun, which is the easternmost province of Iran. The carpet was woven in gorgeous colors, but it was more loosely knotted than the fine Kerman. The pattern showed fanciful figures of flowers and stars and animals against a field of light, bright red.

"The designs in the field of this carpet," said the merchant, "resemble the designs to be found in the rugs of Samarkand?"

I knew of Samarkand, for the wandering singer Armiya sang a song of that golden city that lay far off toward the rising of the sun. He had learned the song from gypsies, whose ancestors had long ago left their home in Turkestan, but in whose legends still lived the memory of the distant mountain country bordering the vast empire of the almond-eyed Mongolians. I looked at the rug with interest.

Ali ben Hassan pointed out the triangular spaces that marked the corners of the field. "Here," he said, "we find the true Khorassan design," and I recognized the Herati pattern that my grandfather had taught me. Round the border of the carpet ran the familiar pear or palm design that figured one of our Senna rugs at home and was embroidered upon my mother's beautiful shawls. I wondered how the merchant could tell the names of all the rugs when the same designs were found in rugs from places far apart.

"There are many ways to tell," explained Ali ben Hassan, "not alone by the design, but by the knotting, the colors, the feel of the wool, even

sometimes the size and shape of the rug. When thou hast seen as many rugs as I have seen thou wilt find no difficulty in distinguishing one rug from another. See, here is a rug we call Belouchistan. It was made by a weaver of a Belouchi tribe that wanders along the eastern borders of Iran, seeking pasture for its flocks. The broad, striped selvage is ever a mark of a Belouchi rug. The dull brownish red and dark blue of the colors tell me it is a Belouchi rug, likewise the short nap and the coarse weave and the wool warp."

'It is a prayer rug," I said. I knew how to tell a prayer rug by the *mihrab*, the outline of the niche that is found in every Mohammedan mosque. The niche is always carved in the wall that faces Mecca so that the worshipers, facing it, are turned in the direction of the holy city of their prophet. Even in our Christian home we had a prayer rug, a fine piece of Kurdish weaving. We used it only as a decoration hung upon the wall, but my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had told me how devout Mohammedans knelt upon such rugs, touching their foreheads to the *mihrab* as

they performed the ritual of the Mohammedan prayers five times a day.

Ali ben Hassan unrolled another rug.

"Here is the work of Turkoman weavers that are like the Belouchi, wandering tribes along our borders. We call this rug Bokhara and know it by the *gül* design."

"But I see no rose," I cried, for *gül* in the Turkish language means "rose."

Ali ben Hassan smiled and put his finger upon one of the rounded eight-sided figures of white and brown that were placed in regular rows upon a field of deep, rich red.

"Here is the rose. This is an example of how flower designs have lost their natural form in stiff and conventionalized symbols. Such designs are frequent in the Turkoman rugs, which are therefore less beautiful than our Persian rugs. Compare!" and he threw down beside the Bokhara rug another.

On a field of pale rose color bloomed flowers of every hue, graceful shapes, so tiny and perfect that I wondered how human hands could have fashioned them. The crimson of the tulip was

there, and the rich blue of the iris, the paler blue of the bluebell and the gold of the buttercup and marigold, the white of the daisy and the pink of the wild rose. It was a carpet of flowers like the meadows along the Nazlie Chie in the springtime. The soft, fine wool had a beautiful sheen that made the little blossoms glisten as with dewdrops in the morning sun.

"What is the name of this rug?" I cried in delight.

"Feraghan," said Ali ben Hassan. "This is the true Persian design and weave. The rugs we now call Feraghan are woven in the manner of the royal Ispahan carpets of the days of the great Shah Abbas, such carpets as the world had never seen and doubtless will never see again. That was weaving indeed which the master weavers wrought when Ispahan was the capital of Iran. Even now a Feraghan rug such as this is more precious than the rarest weaves of Kerman and Kashan."

"My grandfather the *Katkhoda* once told me that the Kashan rugs have the luster of jewels," I said to Ali ben Hassan.

"Thou shalt see," he said, and presently the sunshine which came through the skylight overhead gleamed upon a rich and glistering fabric that shot sparkles of light into my eyes. I reached out to touch the rug, wondering what breed of sheep might grow wool of such shininess, and I knew then that it was not wool but silk.

"The wool rugs of Kashan have a softer sheen," said Ali ben Hassan. "Their warp is cotton as in the fine Feraghan rugs, for cotton makes a finer, tighter web into which more knots can be tied."

"Our Senna rugs have a cotton warp," I said, "but our heavy Bijars are all wool."

"That is true," said Ali ben Hassan. "Now tell me what sheep grew this wool," and he unrolled a little rug.

The background of the rug was a soft light brown in color. The nap was fine and fluffy to my touch. I looked up at Ali ben Hassan, whose eyes seemed to be laughing at me, and I ventured a guess.

"No sheep grew this wool," I said, "but a camel."

"By the Prophet's beard," cried Ali ben Hassan, "that was a clever guess. Or hast thou seen a rug of camel's hair before?"

"*Kir Agha!* (No, sir!), but I have seen a camel."

"This is a Hamadan rug," said Ali ben Hassan. "The weavers of Hamadan are famous for their rugs of camel's hair, but many Hamadan rugs are made of wool."

I looked with much interest at the little rug, for my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had told me tales of Hamadan, the ancient city that was older than the Persian nation and very long ago had been the capital of the Medes.

"Here is a rug that is a neighbor to the Hamadan," said Ali ben Hassan as Abdul spread down a long narrow runner. The ground was a rich dark blue, but it was so thickly covered with the familiar palm design woven of tiny reddish colored knots that from a little distance the blue color was almost lost to sight.

"The palm design and the reddish color are two marks of the Serabend rug," said Ali ben Hassan. "There is something about each rug that speaks its name to the experienced eye. Now, Abdul, bring hither one of the Shiraz rugs."

I watched eagerly while the rug was unrolled. It was light and loosely knotted. The wool was soft and the colors were warm and bright, blue and white and yellow and red. The pattern was made of stripes and palm leaves and gay-plumaged birds. But I was disappointed. I had looked for the most beautiful rug of all to come from Shiraz, of which the poets Hafiz and Sadi sang as the most beautiful land upon earth, where "the sweetest roses bloom and the brightest rivers glide," and where the "nightingale nourishes the rose, dyeing her petals red with the blood from his torn and jealous breast."

"But the Shiraz rugs are not made in the city of the roses," explained Ali ben Hassan. "They are made by nomad weavers who wander through the plains along the Persian Gulf. The rugs are brought to the markets of Shiraz and that is why

we call them Shiraz rugs. Shiraz has no weavers. Her fame is in Sadi and Hafiz, the weavers of song."

Abdul brought still another rug. "Let us see," said the rug merchant, "whether thou hast learned thy rug lesson well. What rug that I have shown thee does this most resemble?"

I looked at the rug carefully, thinking back over the different rugs that I had seen until I recalled the shining, flower-sprinkled rug which Ali ben Hassan had called Feraghan.

The old merchant nodded approvingly at my answer.

"This rug, though not a Feraghan, is related to the Feraghan rugs in both weave and pattern. It is in truth a newer arrangement of Feraghan designs and therefore only a more indirect descendant of the old Ispahan carpets. We call it Sarouk. Remember the name. Kerman and Kashan, Feraghan and Sarouk, these are the finest of the Persian rugs, and worthy to be named with them are the fine Kurdish Sennas and Bijars such as thy cousin Sirkhush hath brought me now."

For Sadig had arrived with the donkeys and Abdul was helping him to carry in the rugs which Sirkhush the trader had purchased from the Kurdish weavers and would sell to Ali ben Hassan.

My cousin and the merchant counted over the rugs and again the leather pouches were filled with coins. We were ready to start homeward. I thanked Ali ben Hassan for what he called my rug lesson, and the old merchant smiled kindly upon me.

"Bring the lad again with thee," he said to my cousin the trader. "We shall make a rug trader of him also."

But again I shook my head regretfully, not knowing what the future had in store.

CHAPTER XIV

The Hand of the Law

I HAD gone out to the hayfield to my father. Before I reached it I heard the sound of angry voices. I quickened my steps into a run as I saw that my father was fighting with Shillu the Kurd.

Shillu was a lazy, sullen fellow. When he had come seeking work that morning Sadig had warned my father that he knew Shillu of old and that he was always causing trouble. But my father had hired him, for there was no one

else to be had and the hay must be gathered in. The brightness of the morning was dimmed with haze. Clouds lay low upon the horizon and there was a smell of rain in the warm, sweet air. We should likely have one of our brief but violent thunderstorms before the day was done.

My father was a man of calm temper. He was not easily provoked to fighting. I could tell now by the desperate way in which he struggled that he was fighting in self-defense, attempting to ward off the murderous blows of the Kurd's powerful fists. I rushed to help him, but even as I caught hold of Shillu, my father freed one hand. It was the hand in which he chanced to carry a heavy rope. He swung the rope with what strength he could and it hit Shillu squarely upon the head. The Kurd fell like a log and lay still upon the ground.

"He is dead!" I cried in horror. I had never seen a man killed.

"Nay," said my father, breathing hard from his exertion. "A Kurd is not so easily killed. He is but stunned. I did not think I had force enough left in my arm to have done it."

"It was the rope," I said. My father had forgotten that he carried the rope, which still dangled in his hand.

Shillu stirred and groaned. My father wet his handkerchief in the near-by brook and wiped his face. The Kurd opened his eyes and sat up. He was far from dead, but he had had enough fighting for that day. He rose and walked away.

My father looked after him and then at the piles of hay.

"An hour is wasted and nothing done," he said, "and besides, I have lost my laborer. I had been wiser to have listened to Sadig."

"I will help," I said, for I was growing a big boy now. "But what caused the fight?"

"The lazy fellow would not work. He moved as slowly as a rheumatic old woman. I but remonstrated with him and he answered with his fists. Look thou, say naught of this to thy mother. It would but cause her needless anxiety."

II

Shillu the Kurd was forgotten in the busy days of summer. It was in the harvest season

more than a month later that the officers of the Mayor of Urumiah rode into Nazie and sought our house.

My father came to meet them in the court-yard and received them courteously as it behooved one to do. They asked for Mousa, son of Mirza Pachow.

My father bowed, saying, "I am he, and my lords' servant."

"We are come to fetch thee to court," they said. "The charge of murder hath been made against thee. Shillu the Kurd is dead."

I was overcome with terror. My father started, and then composed himself to inquire who had lodged the charge against him.

"We know not," answered the officers. "It doth not concern us. We are instructed to bring thee to judgment, and verily that we shall do."

We were helpless. There was nothing to be done but that my father should accompany them, else they would have beaten him into insensibility and dragged him thither. There was no time to call my uncles from their fields.

My father kissed my mother and tried to re-

assure her. It was but some mistake that soon would be made right. He bade me take care of my mother in his absence and rode away with the officers. We did not know when we should see him again, if ever. Prison or perhaps even execution awaited him. I thought of the terrible sight I had seen in the city when I was but a little boy and my mother had taken me with her on a visit to her sister. My city cousins, proud to exhibit the sights of Urumiah, had dragged me to the walled yard of the arsenal, and eagerly pointed out to me, high in a tree, the dangling, mutilated body of a criminal who had been shot through by a ball from a cannon. The ghastly sight had haunted my dreams for nights. It rose now before my vision to freeze my blood.

My mother sought what comfort she could find in the house of her father. *Hadji* Riza Khan was away on one of his travels again. We all longed for the wise advice and influence of the old *Katkhoda*, my grandfather, whose place was empty.

Sadig departed at once into Kurdistan, return-

ing that same evening with the news that Shillu indeed was dead, but that none of the tribe believed he had died because of any injury my father had inflicted. He had died from the bite of a deadly snake that is found in the rocks of the mountains, and of which all men were in terror. One of my father's uncles had been bitten by this snake and had died a fearful death.

The Kurds had not known that the mayor had been informed of Shillu's death, and they had no intention of appearing against my father at his trial. They still remembered the name of Mirza Pachow, and were friendly to his son. But they could not help us. They dared not go to the city to attest my father's innocence and state the true cause of Shillu's death, for to have appeared before the mayor would have put them into his power and they were guilty of murder and robbery and that greatest of all crimes, nonpayment of taxes. They were safe from the law only in the inaccessible rocks of the mountains where their small numbers could hold at bay all the armies of the Shah, as the

three hundred held the pass of Thermopylæ against the hordes of Xerxes.

III

The news came to us that the informer against my father was Hassan, the same bigoted Mohammedan who had beat Mishu the miller. He had learned of Shillu's death and of his previous fight with my father and saw an opportunity to make trouble for a Christian. In time we understood it all. The mayor, being informed of the affair by Hassan, saw an opportunity to extort money. My father was known to be the owner of land. Moreover, he was the son of Mirza Pachow, who was known to have been wealthy as wealth was counted in Nazie. Consequently my father was thrown into prison to suffer mistreatment until he should be willing to buy his release with gold. The mayor did not trouble himself to inquire further into the case. It was no matter to him that my father might be innocent, and for the death of Shillu the Kurd he cared not a whit.

The officers of the mayor, being shrewd fel-

lows, decided to profit by their master's example, and gain a little money for themselves. On the way to Urumiah they clubbed my father, beating him almost into unconsciousness, until he promised them the money they asked.

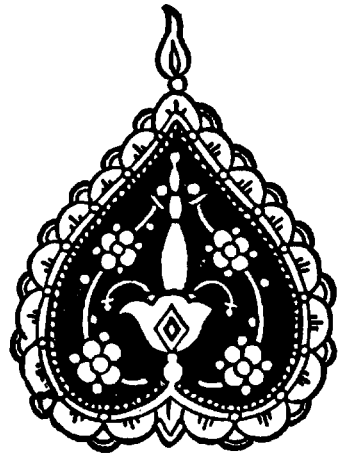
My father was thrown into prison, a dungeon dark and filthy and without ventilation, crowded with unfortunate men, many of whom like himself were innocent of any crime, except that of possessing money. The jailer, like the mayor, knew the value of a good beating now and then, and to prevent being beaten to death, my father had also to promise him money.

The messengers arrived at our house with the news that for a certain sum of money my father could be freed. My mother wept for joy that it was only money they wished and not my father's life. My uncle Benyamin dug out the stones from the wall where my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had kept his bags of gold and silver. The only safekeeping for money in our village was burying it in the foundations or walls of our houses.

My uncles went to Urumiah with the money to

release my father. To the jailer and his servants, to the officers of the mayor, and to the mayor himself, my father paid over the amount that each demanded. It was a total of several hundred dollars which he could ill afford to spare. But we cared not for the money for my father was at home again. Ten days he had spent in the prison. He was pale and weak from lack of food and air, and his shoulders were striped with the whips of the jailers and the officers of the law. A great anger burned in my heart against the law that could so cruelly trap the innocent and let the guilty go. The law had killed Mishu the miller and had robbed my own father.

We lived always in fear of the law. We knew through bitter experience the meaning of the words in the Bible, "agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing of my



CHAPTER XV

My Apprentice Days

I WAS growing up. At nearly fourteen I was as tall as my father. My playmates were leaving school to follow the trades of their fathers. They would have small use for their knowledge of reading and writing. Davod helped his elder brother at the mill. Other boys worked in the fields, driving their fathers' cattle to pasture. They would soon marry and themselves become heads of families. My aunts began hinting to my mother and father that it was high time they look about for a suitable bride for me.

I laughed when I heard their plans. I had no interest in a bride. I was not anxious to assume the responsibilities of a man. I did not know what I wished to do. Thus it was that my father had a long talk with me.

"We must think of thy future, Youël," he said.

It was the custom among our people for the sons, particularly the eldest, to pursue the occupation of the father and sustain the reputation and good name of the family. My father's family had followed the one or the other of the two livelihoods of tilling the soil or dealing in cattle and rugs. The latter hazardous business my mother would never approve, I knew. It seemed that I should follow my father and become a husbandman of the vine and orchard.

My mother would have been pleased to think that I might choose the example of her family, whose men were teachers and preachers. But our custom dictated that I should follow the vocation of my father's family and not that of my mother's.

"Am I not to aid thee in tending our vineyards and orchards?" I asked my father.

"I fear," said he, "that our plots of land are too small to yield a comfortable living for us all when thou art wed and hast children. The land left by my grandfather has been divided and redivided among many heirs until my share is small indeed."

This was true. I knew, too, that my father's loss in the money required to buy his freedom from the law had been a heavy blow. The future seemed not so secure as I had thought it.

"I have given grave deliberation to the matter," continued my father. "To augment the income from our land it seemeth wise for thee to learn a trade."

The particular trade, too, my father had decided, that of carpenter. "A trade that carries with it," he said, "respect and honor as in the days of Joseph."

I was not enthusiastic. I had been fond of fashioning small plows, wagons, and yokes[1] with

[1] The wooden yoke used to harness a pair of oxen to the plow.

my big Persian jackknife when I was a little boy, but this was something different.

"I wish to be a teacher," I ventured, making a definite statement of the desire that had been hitherto very vague. The great obstacle to that course was that it meant continued instruction at the hands of Rabi Machiel, and he had grown no less cruel with the years I had studied in his class.

"But think of the miserable wages of the teacher as compared to the earnings of a master carpenter," my father pointed out. "The work of the teacher is not so necessary, but he must work all the year. The carpenter labors in summer beneath the shade. In the winter he enjoys his well-earned leisure. Our clan numbers many heads. All would come to thee rather than go to a stranger for their wagons, plows, and doors."

II

My father's persuasions overcame my objections. It was settled that I should become a carpenter. I left the schoolroom for the shop. I accompanied my father to Balove, a town about

four miles distant from Nazie, and there I was presented to *Austa* Bajin, or Master Bajin, a famous carpenter and wood carver. He was the best known carpenter in the province and his apprentices were assured of attaining great success in the end. *Austa* Bajin's reputation was so well established that he could demand what he wished in compensation for teaching his trade.

"Take my son into thy care," my father begged of the *Austa*. "Make him thy servant if it be thy desire, but so thou instructest him in the use of the ax and the saw."

After a careful consideration *Austa* Bajin consented to take me as his *shakard* or apprentice. A gentleman's agreement was finally concluded between him and my father, by which the *Austa* was to instruct me how to become a carpenter, in the meantime boarding me in his home. For his services he was to receive fifty dollars the first year, twenty-five dollars for the second year, and ten dollars for the third year; after that if I wished to stay with him he would pay me ten dollars a year and give me my board until I was qualified to go out to work for myself. After the contract was made, and the water pipe smoked to seal it, my father and I happily returned home, making plans for the future when I should have entered upon the worthy trade of a master carpenter.

Two weeks after our first visit to my *Austa* I returned to enter his household. To be sure that I should not suffer hunger or lack of wearing apparel, I was provided with plenty of nuts and raisins and some Persian pastry of the doughnut variety, three suits of clothes and three pairs of shoes. Equipped with these I was escorted by

my father to the carpenter's home. When we arrived we were hospitably received. My father was given tea and the water pipe, while my master endeavored to make me feel at home by giving me a playful tap on the shoulder. Having done his duty, my father, with tears in his eyes, left me. No sooner had he departed than I became sadly disappointed with my lot. The first day in my master's house was full of disillusionment. I became homesick, discontented, and very anxious to return to Nazie.

III

The carpenters among whom I found myself did nothing but high-grade work and that for the upper classes only. They made by hand, and varnished also, chairs, doors, and tables, and did all kinds of wood carving. These articles no one could buy except government officials with European tastes. The master workman had learned to do this kind of work in Russia, where he had lived for several years. His aptness for business was quite remarkable, for he was well acquainted with the Persian way of meeting

obligations. When one asked the patron for his compensation the reply was merely, "*Inshallah* (in the name of God), to-morrow," and to-morrow never came. Knowing this, the master carpenter never made a contract until he had received some money as part payment for the work.

Besides being a shrewd business man, *Austa* Bajin was a man of exemplary habits and serious manner. He never smoked, drank, or cursed. He was a man of few words and seldom smiled. On Sundays he took his family, including his wife, his daughter, and his fellow craftsmen, to Sunday school and church.

Austa Bajin was a Presbyterian like my mother's family, and the most influential member of his church. He compelled me to give a solo in church every Sunday morning, for when I was recommended to him as a *shakard*, my ability to sing had not been overlooked by my proud father. If I acquitted myself well I was almost sure of a good Sunday dinner and a pleasant day generally. On the other hand, if my singing did not please my master, I hardly knew

how to conduct myself in his presence afterward.

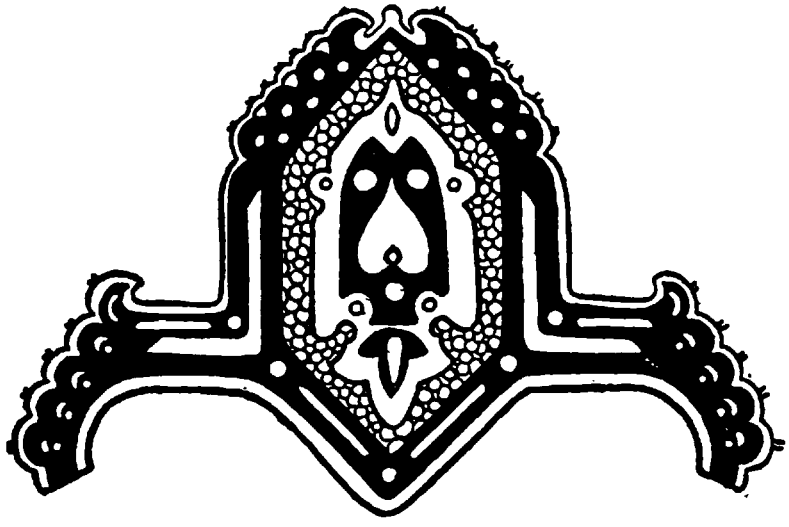
Austa Bajin had a brother carpenter of vain disposition and two other *shakards* besides myself. The older was Isriel, who had almost finished his contract of three years and was doing some excellent carpentry. The other was a boy near my own age by the name of Aveshalem, or Absalom, the son of a widow who was nearly blind. With him I formed almost such a friendship as existed between David and Jonathan, or as Sadi the poet expresses it, "like two kernels in one almond."

In the sad and lonely days of my life as a carpenter's apprentice, the widow and her son became as mother and brother. In return I shared with them the provisions which were supplied me from home. The kindness of my new friends was the one brightness of my disappointing lot, and I never forgot Absalom and his mother.

Several years later, when I was studying at a great American university, I learned by chance that a Persian was being detained in quarantine at the port of the city, and that he was about to

be deported. I went to see him, and what was my joy at finding my old friend Absalom. We knew each other instantly. Absalom was in a sad plight. He had decided to seek his fortune in the New World and embarked with all his small savings. On the voyage he developed a serious eye disease. At New York he was refused admission into the country because of his eye trouble. He was put upon another ship and for several months he was carried from one port to another, just why he never learned. But now he was at the port of Baltimore, where I found him.

I sought the aid of my professors at the university. A great surgeon from the Johns Hopkins hospital examined Absalom and performed an operation that removed his disease, which other doctors had pronounced incurable. Now, restored to health and with his eyesight saved, Absalom was permitted to enter the United States. We spent a happy time together, talking over the days when we were *shakards* in the carpenter shop of *Austa* Bajin of Balove.



CHAPTER XVI

The End of My Apprentice Days

OUR days in the carpenter shop were busy ones. Besides our work in the shop, our duties in our master's house were manifold, and the work hours were from sunrise to sunset. We reported early in the morning, doing the housework under the direction of the master's wife. Absalom swept the yard and sprinkled it. As the new worker and the younger, I was delegated to fill the big earthen jars with fresh water every morning from the village brook, half a

mile away. Each jar held several gallons of water, making it by no means easy to mount it upon one's back or head as is done in Oriental countries. Only expert water carriers do it gracefully. It was a most humiliating task to me, for in my village this was the work of girls and women. I felt this keenly, and often I rested myself against a wall and cried to my heart's content.

Our morning tasks finished, we were called to our meager breakfast of cheese, weak tea, and bread. None of us really had enough, but we were too bashful or too fearful of our master to ask for more. During the meal all except the master knelt in silence. When it was over we followed the master into the carpenter shop, situated on the first floor of the house. As a beginner I was allowed only to learn the names of the tools and hand them over when wanted to my master and his more experienced apprentices. The *Austa* kept everybody busy. I swept the floor and carried out the trash, storing it away for the winter's fuel.

There was no regular time for our meals. When

the master was ready I was sent to inform his wife that the carpenters desired to turn from labor to refreshment. Then the *Austa* threw off his apron and rolled up his sleeves to wash his hands. At this time it was one of my duties to see that the chief carpenter was well served. When the meal order had been given, I immediately filled a copper pitcher with water, and poured the water over my master's hands into a bowl which I held in my left hand. To let me know that my task was finished, he often playfully splashed a little water in my face, bestowing a kindly look upon me. I was thankful that

he had no toothbrush, otherwise I might have had to brush his teeth for him.

Soon after we had had our lunch the afternoon work began, to continue till about dusk. During the heat of the summer a great part of the rough work was done in the churchyard near by and close to a delightful little stream of water with branches extending into the small orchards and vineyards, making them fertile and promoting the lively growth of the apple, peach, and plum trees. In the churchyard the shade trees gave us comfort, protecting us from the heat of the sun.

We carried our movable tools and timber there to cut the wood into boards, which were finally made into doors and *pangeras*, or window frames. Since there were no sawmills in Persia the wood must be sawed by the workmen. We placed the log in an upright position in a frame, one of us stood on the frame and another on the ground, and holding the long saw between us by its two handles sawed the wood. To be sure to saw in a straight line, we wet a cord in a solution of charcoal, held it on each end of the stump and gave it a gentle tap. By this method

we also regulated the thickness of the boards. When the saw became dull we placed it in our laps, and each sharpened his end with a file.

Chopping and sawing wood required no special training. Very soon, therefore, I began to perform such tasks. Sawing was not easy, for at times one's back seemed almost broken from bending low. Chopping wood in the Persian fashion was attended with difficulties also. Our axes were almost as sharp as razors. The log to be cut was first placed on the floor and held at one end with the left foot. We chopped the surface little by little until it became smooth. When we were unfortunate enough to have the ax hit our foot, it not only cut the sole of the shoe but the sole of the foot as well. When such accidents happened we were our own doctors, bandaging our wounds with our handkerchiefs, and allowing them to heal without putting anything on them except ashes from burned cigarettes and pipes.

II

Austa Bajin was not the only master I had. His wife Gozal, whose name meant "beautiful,"

called me her "boy," and ordered me to do things for her, not only by word of mouth, but by mysterious nods and gestures. The *Austa* had a daughter, Onnah, who also commanded me at pleasure. Whenever she was so disposed I had to stop my work in the carpenter shop to fetch her fresh water or do other errands. As this placed me in the position of doing a maiden's work, I complied grudgingly.

Onnah was two years my senior, a Persian beauty of sixteen, slender of figure and charming of feature. I often saw her face, for she felt no hesitancy about leaving off her veil in the presence of her father's apprentices, though she never spoke to me save to give me orders, and always looked bashfully down at her feet as a Persian maiden of good breeding always does in the presence of boys and men.

Onnah gave much time to making herself beautiful, as the Persian maiden is taught to do. She used collyrium to enhance the brightness of her large, dark eyes, and she dyed the heavy ropes of her hair with the same henna with which she stained the soles of her feet and the

tips of her pretty fingers. She was her father's darling and could wheedle anything from him, but she was very timid and dutiful toward her mother.

I began to observe that Onnah's manner toward me was more friendly than toward Isriel and Absalom, whom she scarcely deigned to notice. But I was all unprepared for the surprising knowledge that eventually dawned upon me that I was accepted in the household as Onnah's probable betrothed. I came to learn that my father looked upon the master carpenter's daughter as a suitable bride for me, and that it had been a part of the agreement between him and *Austa* Bajin that after I had served my three years as apprentice, if I showed promise of becoming a master in the trade, I was to have his daughter Onnah.

But I was not interested in that part of the contract. I was too young to appreciate the ornament which my father had chosen for me, and I resented Onnah's proprietary interest in me and her command of my services. Despite her beauty and her accomplishments, for she was

skilled in the household arts, the thought of Onnah could not overcome my growing dislike of the trade that my father had selected for me.

III

Every day I became more and more dissatisfied with my life as a carpenter's apprentice. I could not think of remaining with my *Austa* for three long years. When the summer months were over and the time for school approached I began thinking seriously of running away. I began planning my flight. At night I would lie awake wondering what my father would do were he in my place, and whether he would approve the course I had determined to take. To run away from one's master in Persia was considered quite disgraceful. Happily in my case it was prevented.

One Saturday morning my father made his appearance at my *Austa's* house and asked the master to allow me to go home with him as my mother was anxious to see me. When I became aware of this fact I almost danced for joy. I knew that after I had had a chance to talk the

matter over with my mother there would be no more carpenter days for me.

At first my *Austa* was unwilling for me to go. He contended that the agreement between my father and himself was that before I paid a visit home I must have remained with him six months, working continuously at my trade.

"An agreement is an agreement," my father replied, "and you shall have him back on Monday morning."

After much begging and many promises I was given permission by the *Austa* to visit my mother, and I trailed happily after my father back to Nazie. On the way I told him everything, how they made a servant of me, and treated me as dust under their feet, how I was ordered about by my master's wife and daughter.

But to all my story my father gave me his deaf ear, saying, "My son, if thou suffer now while thou art young, thou wilt be paid for it in manifold in the days of thy manhood and old age."

Although I had absolutely made up my mind not to go back to that carpenter shop, I did not

wish to disobey my father. I said nothing more about the matter until we reached home.

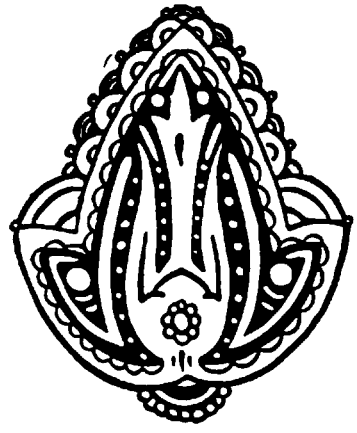
At the entrance to my father's yard my mother came to meet me with open arms, exclaiming, "My son, my son, what has happened to thee? How doth it come that thou art so changed?"

"Truly, truly, Mother," I replied, "my food has been bad and meager. I have never had enough to eat, and besides they have made a slave of me and made me to do work that only a girl should do."

This was enough to cause my mother to condemn the whole trade of carpentry. She turned to my father and then to me.

"Both of you," she exclaimed, "have learned your good lessons. Youël will stay at home and go to school and follow in the footsteps of my family, who are teachers and preachers."

I was perfectly willing to go back to my studies with Rabi Machiel. I never again saw my master carpenter. My days with him had made me more appreciative of my mother's love and of the education she was so anxious for me to have.



CHAPTER XVII

The Call of the New World

A YEAR had passed since the spring day when I had journeyed to Balove to become an apprentice to *Austa* Bajin, and I faced a journey that was to take me to a new world. Twelve months had made many changes and had given my whole life a new turn.

I had returned from the carpenter shop none too soon. To my young eyes there appeared no change in my mother, no wasting of beauty in her beloved face. My father and I could not realize that she was slipping away from us. But

with the late autumn, when the birds were flying south and the chill winds were stripping the yellowed leaves from the poplar trees in our courtyard, our house was left in gloom and mourning. The house that had sheltered my childhood, the house that had been to me the loveliest and happiest place in all the world, was like the house of a stranger, for all the joy and sweetness was gone with the passing of my mother.

Through that dark winter I buried my thoughts in my schoolbooks. I was the only boy of my age still under Rabi Machiel's instruction. The places of my old playmates had been taken by their younger brothers. Rabi Machiel was kind to me. I was too big now to be thrashed, and besides, there was no need for him to correct me. I studied quietly and seriously, reciting alone my lessons, which were far advanced beyond the lessons of the younger boys. I made the progress that winter that I had previously made in two or three when I had not been seriously interested in school. I found that I had learned all that Rabi Machiel could teach me. If I

were to continue in the studies my mother had wished me to follow I must leave Nazie.

Then it was that I turned my thoughts upon *Yeni Dunya*, the New World. It seems to me that I had always heard of its wonders. My uncle Shimuel and my aunt Sara had written to us about the electric lights that lighted the streets on dark nights. We did not understand it very well, but we talked about the "new night sun" in *Yeni Dunya*. We read in their letters about the railway trains, and we were mystified when we learned of their incredible speed. With our customary exaggeration the tales told in Nazie about my uncle Shimuel's letters grew to great proportions as they were told from one neighbor to another. Indeed I once heard one of my own uncles explain to marveling listeners that if a gun were fired at the rear end of a train in motion the bullet would never reach it because the train was running so fast. But what caused the trains to move at all was the great mystery. We were awe-stricken when we were told that the trains moved of themselves without horses or camels to pull them. We finally accepted it as a miracle.

My uncle Shimuel still lived in *Yeni Dunya*, where there were opportunities of study beyond any dream of my grandfather the minister or Mullah Shoker, who had been the scholars of Nazie. The desire formed in my mind to go to *Yeni Dunya*. My country had a great and glorious past, but there seemed no bright promise for its future. The desire to see the New World grew stronger and stronger within me until at last I spoke it to my father.

But his surprise was not so great as I had looked for. He knew my discontent and my great loneliness since my mother was no longer with us. He knew, too, that there was little hope of my attaining anything higher in my own village and country.

"I shall grieve to see thee go," he said, "but thou hast my consent and my blessing."

I would not be leaving him alone, else I should have hesitated to go. But lately he had brought a new wife to be mistress of his desolate house. We had lived alone together through the long dreary winter. It was pleasant to have a smiling, kind woman in the house. I could find no censure

in my heart that my father had brought another to take my mother's place in the house. It was our custom, and moreover I knew that the new wife, good and kind as she was, would never take my mother's place in his heart, for my mother had been the love of his boyhood. My father was still a young man in years. There would be other children, without doubt, to take my place who was the son of his youth.

II

All Nazie was in excitement over the news that I was going to *Yeni Dunya*. There were not lacking those who pronounced it a foolish venture. Even my aunt Sara, my mother's only sister, who had returned from the New World within the year with her husband and children, counseled my father to delay the journey a few years. I was very young, too young to be cast upon a strange world with no father and mother to guide me. But it was my very youth that gave me confidence, and I was impatient at the thought of delay.

Davod, who had always followed me in every

childhood game and adventure, wished to follow me now. He could see no hope of anything for him in Nazie save grinding wheat day after day at the mill. A kinsman of his had gone to *Yeni Dunya* some years before, and the report was that he had prospered.

We heard of a group of five young men of near-by villages who were planning to leave together in the late spring to travel to the New World to study or to seek their fortunes. My father made arrangements for Davod and me to accompany them.

My father did not have in cash quite enough money to carry me to the end of my long journey. He therefore went to the money changers of the city and borrowed on one of his vineyards two thousand *karans*[1] at twelve and one-half per cent. interest, which was the ruinous rate we were compelled to pay for borrowed money.

The time for departure approached. My father took me to a tailor in the city to have me fitted with European attire, and to call for my passport. The passport could be obtained from no less

[1]At that time ten *karans* had the value of one American dollar.

a personage than the Crown Prince of Persia, who was the Governor of Azerbajin. The officials at Urumiah had to write to headquarters for it and it took nearly two months to secure that precious *tasgara.* The official at the passport bureau in Urumiah was a boy of not more than twenty. He was white as a sheet from smoking opium. His office hours were from eleven in the morning to one in the afternoon. He would not see persons desiring passports before or after those hours. We called two or three times at the office of that boy official, but each time the guards informed us that "his soul was busy." At last we tried bakhsheesh. The door was immediately opened to us and we were courteously received by the young lord whose soul had been wrapped in meditation but a moment before. The passport was waiting for us and we carried it away.

I wished to take along with me the pair of Kurdish swords which the emir had sent as a New Year's present to my grandfather the *Katkhoda* when I was a little boy. My father would have given them to me, but he knew what

I did not, that I should never be permitted to carry them past the Russian border. What has become of the swords and the handsome Kurdish rugs that were also presents from the Kurds I shall never know.

Were I to visit Nazie now I should not know the village of my childhood. A few years after I had left my native country the Great War broke upon Europe. The Mohammedans at last found their prayers answered. The holy war had come. My people were driven from their fields and vineyards in beautiful Azerbajin and transported into Arabia.

My father had not lived to witness this. He died while his orchards and vineyards were his own, and was buried as he wished beside my mother. His children, the half brothers whom I never saw, did not survive the hardships of the war. There is no longer anything of Nazie left to me but memory, but that memory is strong and beautiful.

I left Nazie in the springtime when its fields and orchards and meadows wore their most beautiful garb. I can remember the fields of

Nazie in the rich beauty of the harvest and in their winter shroud of white, but I think oftenest of them as they looked in their springtime radiance of bloom beneath the deep blue Persian sky. The nightingale sang a golden melody from our poplar tree the last night I slept in Nazie. The sun rose goldenly upon the morning of my departure.

All the village accompanied us to the banks of the Nazlie Chie. Here our weeping kinsmen kissed us in farewell. Then Davod and I and my father, who was to go as far as the city with us, took off our shoes, rolled our trousers above our knees, and waded the river after the donkey that carried our bags of clothing and provisions.

We lingered with tears in our eyes to wave again and again to the friends and kinsmen on the other side of the river. High in the top of the tall *chinnar* tree by the mill stood the stately *hadji legleg*, as if to watch our departure. We could stay no longer. We set out on the dusty road toward Urumiah where we were to join the party with which we were to travel. My father saw us ready to start under the care

of our guide. He kissed me and gave me his last blessing and his last farewell, "*Khoda fest*" (God be with you), and returned with the donkey to Nazie.

III

We traveled northward toward the Russian boundary. Our road lay in the shadow of the Kurdish Mountains that rose upon the left hand. We met other travelers upon the road, now a party of women on a pilgrimage to a Mohammedan shrine. To shield themselves from the gaze of the sons of the road, they traveled in little cages fastened on either side of their horses.

Now and then a caravan appeared on the horizon, drawing nearer until we had passed it. Camels, donkeys, and mules marched in these caravans, weighed down with huge boxes and heavy saddlebags upon their patient backs, transporting freight that would be unloaded in the market places of the Persian cities. A caravan often comprised a hundred camels and ten camel drivers, all under the direction of the caravan leader. The camels were tied to one another with a rope that linked their bridles. Each

driver looked after his camels to keep them from fighting and biting each other. The camel drivers were ferocious-looking men. They wore Russian clothes and were armed like the Kurds with rifles, daggers, and murderous-looking knives.

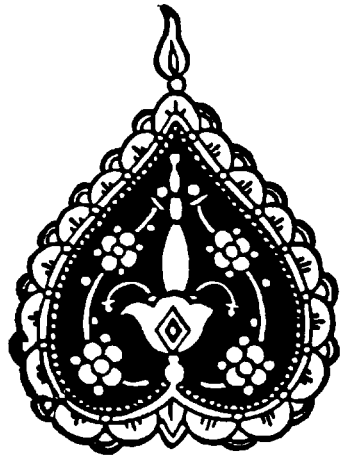
We reached the caravanserai where we were to pass the night. For hundreds of years its great iron-barred door had swung open to the weary traveler, both man and beast. I looked about with interest while our guide unloaded our baggage and led his horses to drink at the pool in the center of the court, round which were the small, rudely partitioned rooms for the use of the guests.

Other travelers arrived, some afoot, some with donkeys and horses. Two or three tall camels joined the group of animals that formed a circle round the open court. The keeper of the caravanserai was busy with his servants preparing refreshment for his guests, cooking a *shishkhbab* over a charcoal fire in the courtyard. The strips of meat, strung between bits of onion, tomatoes, and green peppers, gave forth a delectable odor as they broiled on the spit. Near by in a great pot was a mound of rice, the traditional ac-

companiment for the *shishkhbab*. The great brass samovar bubbled merrily. We were all very hungry.

The caravanserai was filled with the sound of eating and drinking and laughter. The sons of the road were friendly and engaged with one another in pleasant conversation and recital of their travels. As the night deepened rude lamps were lit, and by their wavering light one group began a game of *tachta*, which is like the Hindu *parchesi*. Someone had a *kamanja* and strummed softly a monotonous, melancholy air.

The animals stirred and jostled one another, grunted, squealed, and finally settled down in quiet. An aged pilgrim on his way to Meshed already slept and snored loudly. The air was heavy with the odors of cooking and tobacco and the warm smell of the animals. My eyelids dropped lower and lower, though I winked strenuously to keep awake to listen to the tale of a traveler from distant golden Kandahar. The tale was ended and one by one we withdrew into the little stalls, making our beds of blankets spread upon the earthen floor.



CHAPTER XVIII

Across the World to Yeni Dunya

AT THE Russian border we left our guide. Henceforth we must travel alone. The eldest member of our little party of seven was one Pollus, an accomplished young rascal of about twenty-one. He spoke the Russian language fluently, and we depended upon him to conduct us safely through the empire of the Czar. But we soon discovered that he was a weak reed on whom to lean.

At the border we were subjected to a rigid examination and search. One or two of the boys

had brought their Persian daggers, and these were taken away. I saw that my father had been right. Had I brought the Kurdish swords I should only have had to give them up to the customs officers, for the law allowed no weapons to be carried into the country by foreigners.

It was here that Pollus, whether to exhibit his knowledge of Russian or whether to assert his independence, objected to part of the routine of the customs examination, and was soundly thrashed for his impertinence. Pollus was the first of our little party to be examined, and the rest of us became somewhat excited, thinking that a beating was in store for each of us. But the officer, observing our agitation, reassured us with a kindly smile, and we were admitted at last into the land of the Czar.

We continued our journey in a carriage to Baku over the wide, smooth Russian roads so different from the rough and narrow caravan routes of Persia. We neared Baku on the evening of the second day in Russia, approaching it by a road that ran along the shore of the Caspian Sea,

whose smooth and glassy surface was set ablaze by the light of the sunset.

We immediately sought out the railway station, for from here we were to journey across Europe by train, that mysterious means of transportation of which we had heard and which had aroused our wonder.

We did not know where to go to spend the night, and we remained in the railway station, curiously watching the puffing engines come and go, too excited to think of sleep. The night was dark around us, but the station was bright as day with the light of great lamps that swung overhead. This was the "new night sun." We played marbles under its light.

Early next morning we purchased our tickets for Tiflis. We were told that our train would not leave for an hour and more. We became suspicious. The thought occurred to us that they had not enough men to start the train.

"How can they start the train," asked Davod, "when they have nothing to pull it?"

At last we were told that our train was ready and were directed into a coach. We sat down and

waited expectantly. There was a great ringing of bells, a blowing of steam, and we felt ourselves moving, gliding smoothly out from under the railway sheds. We looked around at one another in excitement. We had witnessed the performance of a miracle. Our excitement became slightly tinged with alarm as the train gathered speed. We clung to our seats breathless. Through fields and forests we raced. We roared over bridges. Another problem rose to our minds. How should we ever stop? But that problem, too, was solved in time as the train slowed to a standstill in a town. We settled down in perfect faith then to enjoy the journey.

II

We reached Tiflis, now the capital of the new Soviet republic of Georgia, but then the metropolis of Caucasian Russia. Here we were delayed for several days waiting to have our passports viséed. We explored the picturesque city which is built partly on a hillside and partly in a valley. At night we looked up at the city that extended up the hill. Its beautiful lights shone

like stars. We could easily have believed that some of the bright stars had fallen from the sky and come to rest upon the towers of the city.

The streets of Tiflis were thronged with Armenians, Turks, Persians, Jews, Assyrians, Arabians, Russians, and Europeans of almost every nationality, for the city, like Constantinople, was a meeting place of Europe and Asia. One day we met a countryman of ours who was very kind to us. He had known my grandfather, Mirza Pachow. He took me to the bazaars one day and bought me a white derby hat which became the envy of all the party.

We had found a *menzil* (lodging house) where we stayed while waiting for our passports. We called each day at the passport office, but our passports were not ready. I thought of the young Persian official whose "soul was busy," and we tried bakhsheesh to find that it opened doors as readily in Russia as in Persia.

We were ready to leave Tiflis and purchased our tickets for the express train that was to carry us across Russia to Germany. Pollus did not buy a ticket. We became alarmed.

"Certainly I am going with you," he replied to our excited questions. "But I have kept my eyes and ears open and I have discovered that it is easy to fool these stupid Russians. I do not need a ticket. I shall save my money."

Pollus boarded the train with the rest of us. The inspectors came through the coach announcing the coming of the official for whom we should have our tickets ready. Pollus had disappeared. We knew something had happened to him. Someone must have discovered that he had no ticket. The conductor came, a military-looking person who dispatched his business with the manner of inspecting a regiment. He went on to the next coach and presently, to our great surprise, Pollus reappeared, grinning broadly. He had bribed the inspectors, who had hidden him while the conductor was examining the tickets.

We slept in our seats, clutching our money tightly all night long, for fear of pickpockets. We bought our food at the stations at which the train stopped, taking turns getting off to buy

bread, sausages, and hot water with which we made our own tea.

We came to the German frontier and entered a world as different from Russia as Russia had been from Persia. Here the customs officials were brisk and thorough, though not unkind. They gave us each a hot bath, fumigated our clothing, changed our money into German marks, viséed our passports, and put us on a train for Hamburg within the space of two hours.

The train was clean like the well-scrubbed streets of the German towns. We rode through carefully thinned woodlands, smiling towns, and past fields so tiny that they looked like a patchwork as we flashed past them.

III

We were ten days in Hamburg awaiting passage across the ocean. Here it was that a terrible thing happened. Yousoph, the only one of us who could speak English well enough to be understood, deserted us and sailed alone. We were distressed beyond measure, for we had looked to him to help us find our friends and

kinsmen when we had arrived in *Yeni Dunya.*

None of us knew any German, but the German officers seemingly understood from our passports what we tried to tell them in sign language. They put us aboard our boat and at last we were directly started for the New World.

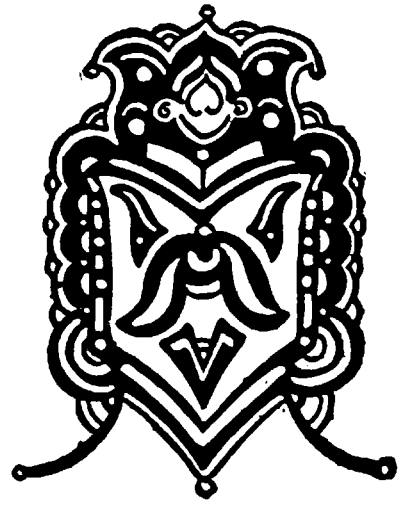
The courage of youth had carried us safely through strange lands and the bewildering experiences of our journey across a continent. We had been lost in the babel of strange tongues and the swiftly moving life of European cities, anxious often over the delays which we could not understand. The sea voyage promised to restore our courage and comfort our bewildered hearts. There was a vastness and silence about the ocean akin to the everlasting majesty of the purple Kurdish Mountains in whose shadow we had grown up. From the deck that first night I gazed upward into the velvet-black curtain of the night and found it spangled with the same stars that shone over Nazie. Happily I traced the familiar constellations as I had done many a summer night from our housetop or from the old tower in our vineyard.

But the voyage proved miserable. We had been put aboard a slow freight boat that carried no passengers except on its westward voyage when as many immigrants as could be crowded into its scant and unhealthful quarters were conveyed to the shores of America. We found ourselves huddled together like cattle. The food was bad. Nearly all of us were seasick. For twenty-two days we traveled thus; our only thought was of the New World which we finally must reach.

I saw the towers of the New World rise through the mists of a summer dawn. With the patience of our race we waited the long delay of going ashore, the examination of our passports, the satisfying the officials that we should be allowed to enter the country. To our joy we found interpreters, men who could understand our tongue, and we poured an excited tale into their ears. We took stock of our money and divided it so that each of us should have the amount required by the immigration law.

Each of us had a kinsman or friend to whom to go. All but myself were bound for Chicago, where the greater number of my countrymen

then in America had settled. My uncle Shimuel lived in another Middle Western city. But at the last I feared I should not be able to find him, and I boarded the train with my companions, also tagged "Chicago."



CHAPTER XIX

The Wonder Land

POLLUS knew no English, which was fortunate, else he might have caused trouble for us all by attempting to bribe the American railway officials. He was as careful as the rest of us to have a ticket as our train pulled out of New York.

A man came down the train, his arms full of bright boxes. To each passenger he held out one. We took ours wonderingly and curiously opened them. They were filled with candy. We believed

now the extravagant tales we had heard of the kindness and hospitality of the Americans. Did they not greet the stranger with a gift of sweetmeats as we served our guests in Nazie on feast days and great occasions?

But the man came back. We saw him take up a box here and there. We were bewildered. When he reached us we held out the boxes, which were now half empty. He frowned. We shook our heads to show that we did not understand what he said. He showed us money and made signs. We understood. We must pay for what we had happily accepted as a gift. We opened our purses and gave him the money. We had the sweetmeats, indeed, but we took no more pleasure in them. The disillusionment had been too bitter.

The midday heat of the next day found us in Chicago. Here lived the brother of Ishu, next to Pollus the eldest of our group. We conferred the leadership upon him and were ready to follow. Two cab drivers beckoned to us and Ishu proudly led the way. We piled into the two cabs with our nondescript baggage. Ishu showed the drivers the address of his brother. They mounted

their seats, whipped up their horses, and away we rode in style.

We halted before a great building of brick and stone. We looked at one another in amazement, and Ishu was fairly bursting with pride to behold that his brother had so prospered that he dwelt in a palace. We descended from the cabs and piled our bundles on the sidewalk. We took out our money to pay the cab drivers. They each took five dollars from Ishu and me, who were the wealthier ones of the group. We did not know the value of the money.

Ishu approached the entrance of the building. We waited outside until he should find his brother. Soon Ishu returned, but he came crestfallen, even frightened.

"He is not here," he said. "A man looked at my paper and shook his head. He does not know my brother."

We could not know that the great building was a school which was closed for the summer. It was the janitor whom Ishu had seen, and the janitor did not know the names of the pupils.

We were badly frightened. We sat on the side-

walk in the midst of our baggage, unable to think of anything to do. We were unnerved by the confusion about us, by the excitement of rushing traffic, and the bewildering maze of tall buildings that shut out the sky.

A tall man approached us. He wore a blue uniform and carried a club, but his broad, ruddy face was kind and sympathetic. He needed no speech to tell him that we were lost. We showed him the address of Ishu's brother. He motioned to us to follow him.

We gathered up our baggage and trooped after him. He took us to a shop whose proprieter was a big, ruddy, jolly man like our rescuer. He led us up a dark narrow stairway to a room above his shop. Here we were made to understand that we might stay until Ishu's brother was found. The policeman took the name of Ishu's brother and went away.

We were hungry. We ventured down the stairs into the clean, pleasant shop. We remembered that it had been filled with odors of food. We pointed inquiring fingers at articles under glass cases and the jolly grocer handed over to us

bread and cheese. I pointed to a shelf behind him and to a small glass filled with a thick brown substance. It looked like a fine grade of syrup which we had in Nazie.

We climbed the stairs and spread our feast out on the floor. We opened with difficulty the jar I had bought and spread the syrup on pieces of bread. We tasted it. It was not syrup. We had burned our tongues on mustard, which we had never tasted before.

II

I was very restless and sad. Perhaps I should not find my uncle. I was suddenly homesick for Nazie, for the familiar fields and orchards and for my father's house. I left the other boys and went out into the street before the shop. I did not wish to talk with them. But Davod noticed that I had gone and came after me. I was glad to have him. I was not ashamed to have him know that I was homesick.

We walked together up the street, looking curiously about us. We were amazed at the wonders of the New World. My uncle Shimuel

had not begun to tell them all in his letters that had read like tales of magic. We came to a bridge over a river. We crossed the bridge and walked a little way beyond. We turned to go back and stopped astonished. The bridge had disappeared. There was only water in front of us.

"We shall have to swim," said Davod breathlessly, his eyes big with wonder.

But just then a steamer passed up the river. Immediately the bridge came into view as if from nowhere and placed itself directly before us. We crossed it and hastened back to the other boys, who at once set out with us to see the miracle of the bridge.

On the third day Ishu's brother came, and with him the kinsmen and friends of the other boys. They showed us the newspaper in which the policeman had put a notice about the lost Persians. We were filled with joy to be safe among our countrymen. Each boy went away with his own kinsman or friend, and I went with Ishu and his brother.

We parted regretfully, for we had traveled half across the world together. Davod wept at parting

from me, for I was to go to another city. Of the group with whom I journeyed to the New World, I have since seen only Ishu. Davod returned after a few years to Nazie, but has since come again to the New World. Ishu is still in Chicago, and has prospered to a commendable degree, if not to the estate of living in a palace.

III

It was Ishu's brother who found my uncle. He sent a telegram, another marvel, to the address. The answer came next day but from another place. It was midsummer and my uncle was having his vacation at a lake. It was Saturday afternoon. I was impatient and wished to take the next train. Ishu and his brother saw me safely aboard the train, instructed the conductor where to put me off, and I was started upon the final stage of my long journey, this time all alone.

It was very early on Sunday morning when I left the train. The sun had not yet risen. The station agent eyed me curiously. I showed him the address in my hand and he motioned me to go ahead. I walked and walked, at last finding

myself deep in a wood along the edge of the lake. I was too weary to walk farther. I sat down on a big stone and cried, a homesick boy in a strange land where no one knew me or could even speak to me.

The sun rose over the tall pines across the lake and touched the water with golden fingers. Birds sang merrily in the tree tops. My courage returned. I picked up my heavy suitcase and started on again.

I came upon a sidewalk sweeper in front of a large building. I showed him the slip of paper in my hand and he motioned me up the steps. Inside I found a man behind a desk, and to him also I showed the precious paper. He shook his head to say that it was early and that my uncle would be still asleep. But I understood only that he was not there. The man saw the dismay in my face. He came from behind the desk and conducted me to my uncle's room, where indeed I found him fast asleep.

IV

"You must have a name, Youël," said my uncle, "a name such as American boys have."

I had had no need of a last name in Nazie. Everyone knew me as Youël, the son of Mousa and the grandson of Mirza Pachow the *Katkhoda*. But my uncle explained to me the American custom.

"Your grandfather the *Katkhoda* was known as Mirza," my uncle said. "That shall be your name."

Mirza was not my grandfather's name. It is in Persia a title of honor and my grandfather was called Mirza because he was the great man in our village. I was pleased to take his title for my name.

"Then if you desire you may have a middle name," said my uncle, and I chose Benyamin or Benjamin for my father's eldest brother.

"And you must have a birthday," continued my uncle, "for that is also the custom."

But I did not know when I was born. I knew the year, for it was the year in which my mother's sister had been married, but not the day or month. No one thought of age or birthdays in Nazie. I did not know what to do.

"Choose any month and any day," said my uncle.

"But suppose I should forget?"

"Choose a day near to some holiday so that you shall always remember," he said.

Thus December twenty-third came to be my birthday.

I had come to the New World to study. My uncle announced that he would send me to an American friend of his who was the head of a school in an adjoining state. Letters went back and forth between my uncle and his friend. All was arranged. My uncle was to send me on a certain day and my new guardian would meet me at the train.

From the day my uncle started me off to my first American school I have lived entirely among Americans, speaking only their language, adopting their customs, even in time their ways of thinking.

CHAPTER XX

Across Twenty Centuries

THE house of my American guardian stood in a spacious lawn. Among the fine old forest trees surrounding it was a great sycamore lifting its graceful silvered branches high into the sky as did the tall *chinnar* tree by the mill where the *hadji legleg* made his nest. Beyond the house was a meadow and at the meadow's edge rippled a little brook along whose banks grew willow trees, drooping their branches over the water as the waving willows drooped beside the Nazlie

Chie. In a world so new, so bewildering, and so strange, I looked upon these trees as familiar, like the sun and moon and the stars of the night. They had not changed. The same sun warmed me, though its radiance was often dimmed by clouds and mists of an atmosphere less clear than our blue Persian air. The same moon gleamed in the sky, changing in its familiar phases from graceful, glittering crescent, to round, full orb. The same stars shone overhead. High above the great sycamore tree stood the North Star at which we gazed in Nazie, thinking it stood over the towers of the city of Urumiah.

I was in the same world with Nazie, and yet it was not the same world. It was as if I had been born again, or like Enoch of old, translated to another sphere. When I traveled to the New World, *Yeni Dunya*, I crossed eight thousand miles of land and sea, but I crossed besides the bridge of twenty centuries.

The life of my people when I was a child in Nazie had scarcely changed from the life of simple Judean farmers and shepherds in the days when the ruddy boy who was to be a king in

Israel watched his father Jesse's sheep in the meadows of Bethlehem. There were for us no obscure passages in the Bible such as have puzzled Western readers. We, unlearned though we were, understood its every word. We lived the life of its people, spoke their language, thought their thoughts.

The first fifteen years of my life were spent in a world that was small and circumscribed. The purple Kurdish Mountains hemmed us in, a little community of farmers. The simple routine of our days changed only with the different duties of the different seasons. We lived close to Nature, obeying her laws, learning her ways.

I found myself plunged into a world that sought not to learn the ways of Nature but rather to conquer her. It was a world that chained the lightning, harnessed the power of mighty rivers, built monsters of iron to do the work of beasts of burden and machines to do the work of men. It brought the fruits of the tropics to the tables of northern climes; it turned night into day with a thousand lights.

Set down in this strange world in a household of strangers who knew not my language nor the customs of my people, I was compelled to learn the customs and speech of the New World, and I learned more quickly than did my fellow travelers who went to live among their kin, withdrawn into a little world of their own in the midst of the life about them. I learned naturally and easily as an infant learns the ways of the family into which it has been born. My way was smoothed with kindness. I was made to feel that I was a welcome member of my guardian's family. I have never been made conscious of a great difference between myself and the people among whom I have lived more than half my life, never made to feel that I was a "foreigner." How then could I help falling into the ways of the new land, wishing to make them mine?

I learned to sleep on a bed that was raised from the ground. I learned to sit in chairs, to eat at a table and use a knife and fork. There were three small children in the house, a boy of seven, a little girl of five, and a baby just beginning to talk. I learned from these children more quickly

than from older persons. I watched them as they sat at table, observed their movements with the unfamiliar knife and fork and the gentle correction of their parents. I listened to the wee child's hesitating imitation of the speech of her older brother and sister, and I copied her in her attempts at a language as new to her as it was to me. Gradually my ear became accustomed to the alien sounds, and my tongue acquired the twist of the difficult syllables, so that now I speak the language of the New World as readily as if I had been born to it. With the practice of day after day, the New World customs at last became natural and I should now find it awkward to sit on the floor and eat with my fingers.

But the spirit of the New World was entering more deeply, becoming more a part of me than any outward conformance. It was not long until I thought in the new language, ceasing to translate in my mind from my native tongue. My mind began to leap the chasm that separated Nazie from a world complicated with the achievements of two thousand years. When I had bridged that chasm I was an American, long

before I was legally a citizen of the United States.

II

I was at school again, a strange school. The teachers were kind and there were no switches. Girls came to the school. I, who had been indignant because little Sophia wished to come to school in Nazie, now felt myself surrounded by girls. I was very bashful and even afraid of them.

My lessons were strange, too. I was tutored in English to help me keep up with my classes. The only study that was not totally new was mathematics. The form of the numbers themselves was the same, for they came from Asia, and in any language figures still combine to make the same results. Though at first I scarcely knew what I was trying to study and could make no sense of my textbooks, I did learn a little, and my knowledge of English was increasing rapidly.

I made friends easily with the boys among my classmates. They accepted me as one of them and proceeded to give me a nickname. But I was not pleased at being called "Major." I did

not know the meaning of the word. I knew only that it was the name of a dog that belonged to playmates of my guardian's children. It was an indignity that I could not endure.

"Major is a dog's name," I said with scorn. "My name is Youël."

The boys laughed and explained to me that Major was the title of a high rank in the army. It was an honor to be called Major. But still I was not satisfied.

"Perhaps not everyone knows that," I replied seriously. "If you call me Youël there can be no misunderstanding."

They respected my feeling and dropped the nickname, though doubtless wondering why I took the matter so seriously.

There were other things which seemed serious to me which American boys treat lightly. I became involved thus in my first fight.

As I sat on the steps of the school one afternoon with a merry group of boys one of them playfully knocked my hat off upon the ground. He could not have known that in Persia a hat is regarded as the most sacred part of one's apparel.

To knock off a hat was to convey the most deadly insult.

"Pick up my hat!" I commanded threateningly, whereat the boy only laughed.

I leaped upon him. He was so surprised that he could not defend himself from my first furious blows, but suddenly he hit back and we fought in grim earnest. We tore each other's clothes, our noses bled, each had a black eye, and each hung on determined to make the other cry enough. We were forcibly separated finally by one of the teachers and commanded to shake hands and apologize. I was surprised at that, but when I saw my opponent hold out his hand and grin a friendly grin across his bruised and dirt-streaked face I was ashamed not to meet him halfway and put out my hand, too.

That fight, which was almost my last, was an illuminating experience and taught me more about the social customs of the New World than many a classroom lecture could have done.

I learned that the American boy fights his battle himself, never asking nor even expecting the assistance of his friends, and that the

spectators never take sides as our whole village used to be drawn into a fight. I learned, too, that the American boy fights only with his fists, scorning to use clubs and stones, and that when the fight is over he is often ready to be friends again. In Nazie a boyhood fight might easily grow into a family feud.

I was taken snipe hunting. I accepted the invitation eagerly, for I was fond of hunting, but I was mystified to find that we were to go at night and carry no guns. I felt that the American snipe must be a peculiar bird. We set out on a moonlight night of winter and tracked through the snow until we reached a woods at the edge of the town.

The boys gave me a bag.

"Now," said they, "you are to hold the bag open. We shall go off to scare up the snipes, and they will be so dazed that they will walk straight into the bag."

They scattered into different directions and I squatted patiently, holding the bag. The footfalls of the other boys died away in the distance. I heard no sound. The night was cold and white

and silent. There was even no wind to rustle the dead leaves that lingered on bare branches. My suspicions became aroused. No one in Nazie ever hunted quail as I was attempting to bag a snipe. I realized that I was the victim of a joke, but I was not angry. I had learned enough of the ways of American boys to know that one should not take jokes seriously. I dropped the bag and ran quickly through the woods and across lots, reaching town a few minutes before the other boys, who had not hastened. I awaited them eagerly, and they were good sports enough to admit that the joke was on them.

I did not enjoy American sports at first. I saw no fun in watching a football game and could imagine no fun in playing it. I thought it quite enough to handle one boy if one wished a fight. To have ten boys fall on one was too much. I could not make out which boy had won the game when it was over.

It was explained to me that no single boy had won, that it was the "team." I could not understand the idea of a team. We had no such games in Nazie. Our sports were individual. One en-

tered to win glory for himself. We banded together only in times of necessity, as to fight against robbers.

Of my favorite sport, wrestling, I found that my young American friends knew little. They depended only upon their strength, for they knew scarcely anything of the science of wrestling. They were astonished to see me easily throw boys older and much larger than I. My skill in wrestling was as much a mystery to them as their strange games of football and basket-ball were to me.

III

Gradually I was finding myself in the schoolroom as I began to fit into the life outside. When I had learned to read English there was opened to me a vast store of knowledge of which I had never dreamed and before which the instruction of Rabi Machiel shrank to nothing. Our principal textbook in Rabi Machiel's school had been the Bible. I was versed in that far beyond any of my American classmates, but aside from the Bible I had learned in Nazie only a bit of

arithmetic, a little geography somewhat incorrect, and how to read and write the Syriac and Turkish languages. I knew no history save the legendary history of Persian heroes which I had heard told by my grandfather the *Katkhoda* and *Austa* Zia the barber. I knew no literature save the Bible and the Persian poets whose verses Mullah Shoker had taught me. I knew nothing of science except what I had observed of nature in the fields of Nazie. My knowledge of astronomy was only legend, obscured by superstitions.

In my first years in the New World I learned what the Western peoples had learned in the two thousand years in which the life of my people had stood still. I learned that the earth was round rather than flat, as I had firmly believed it. I learned that it was the earth that revolved around the sun rather than the sun around the earth. I learned that the earth was unbelievable ages old. I learned that the stars, the little suns of the night, were indeed suns, many of them, and often larger than our earth.

I learned that there were no genii and no fairies, but that there were more remarkable

things. To have a light in my room I had only to press a button. It was long before my wonder at the miracle ceased and I performed the action with the casual force of habit. As wonderful as the light was the fire that burned in a room of my guardian's house, logs that burned with a beautiful, clear blue flame, burned and yet were not consumed. I thought of the burning bush that Moses beheld, and the miracle of the strange gas flame held me awed and fascinated. On every hand I saw miracles and I began to learn the laws that governed and explained them.

My head swam with the new ideas that crowded into it. I was immensely curious. I had caught the American spirit of inquiry and progress that had never stirred in Nazie. I now asked why when I was told something instead of merely accepting it. That did more to make me an American than the formality of answering certain questions about the government of the United States. Indeed, no such questions were asked me when I appeared before the Baltimore judge who was to examine me for my final citizenship papers. By that time I was a graduate student in

Johns Hopkins University, studying in the department of political science and government, and the judge, knowing that, smilingly waived the customary examination.

I learned that in the United States I was safe from the law so long as I obeyed it, and that the law was made to protect me, not a small and privileged class. I was free to come and go as I chose, free to study what I wished, free to think my own thoughts, free to become what I chose if my ability were equal to it. No great discoverer ever looked upon his first sight of a new land or sea with more of a thrill than I experienced when I discovered the spirit of American freedom. Indeed, no Columbus ever discovered all that I discovered in the New World. Coming from quiet little Nazie that was far more primitive than the medieval port from which Columbus sailed, I had discovered not only America, but the Twentieth Century.

CHAPTER XXI

The New Freedom

IF I had remained in Nazie I would always have been a part of my family group and clan, which was regarded as more important than its individual members. Our boys and young men followed the occupations of their fathers. They remained living in the father's house even after they married. Often a group of fifteen or twenty people, parents, sons, and daughters-in-law and grandchildren lived happily under one large roof. The mother-in-law was head of the household. She apportioned the tasks to her

daughters-in-law. Likewise the father commanded the service and obedience of his grown sons. The group earned the living and the members of the household shared equally with no thought of mine or thine.

At first I looked upon it as very strange that my young American friends talked of leaving home as soon as their schooldays were over, talked of going out into the world alone to seek their fortunes. Why should they wish to leave their parents, to live perhaps hundreds of miles away, to enter strange occupations that their families had never followed?

I observed that this individual freedom brought upon the young man a financial responsibility. He made his own living, dependent no longer upon his parents. He must wait to marry until he could support a wife as well as himself. In Nazie a young man married at the age of twenty or less, often at sixteen or eighteen. He brought his bride to his father's house. She helped his mother in the house; he helped his father in the fields. There was no burden of financial responsibility upon the young husband

and wife. They were a part of the father's family and in his care. As the years passed and the father grew old and feeble, the son and daughter-in-law, grown to maturity and wisdom, assumed the active leadership of the family, and the history of the family repeated itself over again in the next generation.

Our way withheld responsibility from the young man and placed it upon the man of middle age. In the New World youth reached out to grasp responsibility and with it freedom. The individual seemed more important than the family. I did not stop to think which might be the better way, nor that at least our way in Nazie had the test of age behind it. Youth does not think; it only feels. I drifted naturally into the new ways.

II

I rejoiced in the feeling of independence. I was happy to have money in my pockets which I had earned myself. I was happier still when my bank account had grown large enough so that I could send a draft to my father in Nazie repaying

him the money he had spent to send me to *Yeni Dunya*. He was surprised to have it repaid. He was my father. It was right that he should care for me in my youth, and I when grown to manhood would become head of the family.

I had not definitely put the thought into words, had perhaps not even consciously thought it, but I was not to return to Nazie. The spirit of the New World had won. I was to take care of myself, glad to give up my rights of inheritance to the half-brothers who would stay with my father. It is strange, after all, that they did not live to claim their inheritance and I am the heir to the orchards and vineyards in which I played as a child.

I discovered a means that had brought money to many a poor student and had started the career of more than one future capitalist. I sold books. I looked upon each house as a prospect for a sale. If disappointed I sought the next house. The calm patience and philosophy of my people who lived the moments as they came, untroubled for the future, was still strong in me. I was not easily discouraged. When I had money in my

pockets I spent it as I needed it. When my pockets were empty I sold a book.

I continued to go to school. It was the only thing I knew to do and there seemed no end to the path of learning. I was eighteen. I had been three years in the New World, three years in the house of my American guardian. The spirit of American independence had become mine. I wished to spread my wings for wider flight. I went away to a larger school.

I was to find another means of earning money, a way to work in the summer and continue my studies uninterruptedly during the winter. I smile now to think that I combined so naturally the callings of my two grandfathers. They had fought over me and each had longed to see me follow in his footsteps. Would they have been satisfied if they might have seen me? Throughout the winter I sat at the feet of the greatest scholars of the New World, but at the closing of school I quickly put off the manner of the scholar and became the rug trader. The one came to me as easily as the other. The half-forgotten lore my grandfather the *Katkhoda* had told me came

back to my mind as I displayed the carpets of my country to American purchasers. Even since I have left the university the double life has held me. Pursuit of wisdom gives me pleasure; the business of Persian rugs gives me financial independence. I am unescapably the grandson both of Kasha the scholar and Mirza Pachow the trader.

III

I did not foresee all this that was to come when I left the house of my American guardian. I was my own guardian now, my own support. I was confident as any American boy who starts happily away to college or career, eager to seek new fields to conquer, eager to cut the tie of family dependence.

Yet I looked back at the pleasant house that had been the home of my American boyhood with a part of the same sadness that had filled my heart when I left my father's house in Nazie. Those two houses were symbols of the boyhood I was leaving behind.

The little blue-eyed girl of five who had looked upon me as a jolly older brother was eight years

old now. She had been the little sister I had never had. We had had many a romp together. She used to ask me prettily to dress in my Persian costume, then trailing in long shawls she played Queen Esther to my royal Xerxes. Her blue eyes were filled with tears as she kissed me farewell. She was too little to imagine, nor did I know it then, that she was to grow up to wear in her turn the treasured necklace of carnelians that had been worn by the brides of my family and which had been my mother's bridal gift from my grandfather the *Katkhoda*.