



Some books survive as works of art, read for their own sake; others for some extraneous reason. The Mountain of God turns out to be a significant historical document. E. S. Stevens, whoever he or she was, had spent considerable time in Haifa and 'Akka before 1911, met the small group of dedicated Bahá'ís resident there, among them the great calligrapher Mishkin Qalam, and attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This unforgettable experience is recorded in the pages of The Mountain of God.

The title refers to Mt. Carmel, and the story unfolds on its dry, stony slopes. Robert Underwood, the partially paralyzed young Englishman who comes to Haifa to spend a few months; Mrs. Greville, a slightly eccentric Englishwoman in love with a Turkish officer Schmidt Pasha; Schmidt himself; Gerald Whitby, an Orientalist from Oxford—they all become involved with the Bahá'í exiles on Mt. Carmel. The exiles seem to possess a secret knowledge which gives them peace, happiness, and a radiance that is visible to any but the most superficial observer, or one whose mind is so totally out of tune with things of the spirit that it cannot see the brightest light even while looking at it directly. Whitby is a Bahá'í; Schmidt Pasha becomes one; Underwood, in spite of all his fine sensitivity, makes no commitment, though he is deeply affected by his Persian friends. Only Mrs. Greville is unmoved.

The Persian Bahá'ís as drawn by E. S. Stevens are true to life. Mishkin Qalam, of course, is no fictional character. Others may also be recognized as real persons. Their conversations ring true. The atmosphere in which they move is real. Every one of them is guided, motivated, and inspired by the Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He appears in the novel but once, yet dominates it from beginning to end. The encounter between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the fictional Underwood is brief and inconsequential. What fascinates a Bahá'í reader today is the accurate description of the Master, and the report of the effect He made on all those who came within the orbit of His personality.

The editors of WORLD ORDER do not know whether E. S. Stevens ever became a

Bahá'í.

Internal evidence drawn from the novel itself appears inconclusive. However, the author had seen 'Abdu'l-Bahá and reported the experience as accurately as the pen would allow. The report is precious to the Bahá'ís who read it today. It will become even more precious in the future when the last survivors of the Heroic Age of the Faith will have left this world. Here lies the value of The Mountain of God and here lies the guarantee of its survival through the centuries.

The text of the novel is reproduced exactly as it appears in the 1911 edition. We have not changed the spelling or added diacritical marks to transliterated Arabic and Persian words.

- editors, World Order, 1970.

To Abdul Baha  
In Gratitude, respect and affection  
All that is God in an imperfect book  
Is dedicated

"This mountain is a holy mountain: it has always been sanctified. The prophets have always loved it. Christ has trodden on its paths; Elijah lived upon it. The wind is sweet on it, the flowers are many, the view is wonderful. When you come up the mountain many fragrances reach you; the pure air gladdens you; the beauty refreshes you. So the mind is made single, the thoughts are purified; the spirit turns to God."  
(In a conversation with Abdul Baha.)

"Where are you going?" she inquired, after a moment, with cheerful naturalness.

"To Haifa."

"So am I! For long?"

"For a week or two – to pick up."

She considered him gravely.

"And you?" asked Underwood, feeling that he might exchange the role of catechised for that of catechist.

"I? I don't know how long I shall stay. Perhaps a long while." Her eyes were serious. "I have business in Haifa."

"Really," he said, awkwardly, to fill in the pause which ensued.

"Yes," she continued. "It's about some property there, on Mount Carmel – you know, where

Elijah sacrificed the prophets."

He masked a smile, for it was said unconsciously.

"It's still thought a holy mountain," she went on, "by every one – the

Mohammedans and

Jews as well as the Christians. There is something in the air, they say, which

makes one able

to understand hidden things – something which awakes the spiritual nature. My

mother used to

tell me that. But from what I know of the people who live there, I should think

that that was a

piece of sentimentalism, and that it really is a hotbed for cranks. However,

they call it The

Mountain of God."

As Mrs. Greville had prophesied, it was to the German hotel that Underwood had

been

consigned by the omnipotent Cook. There was, in fact, little choice. As he was

bumped over the

uneven main road of Haifa, through the unclean Syrian town, with its crowds of

semi-

Europeanised natives, he saw no other caravanserai, except an uninviting native

locanda near

the quay. A few dogs lay about the streets on rubbish heaps, where such were

available, with

the air of pashas, to cringe away with a yelp if a passer-by touched one

inadvertently with his

foot. In the public square, near the entrance to the native bazaar, though it

was not more than

eight o'clock, the fishmarket was busily in progress, and close by outside a

native café, men

whose yellow-embroidered kerchief bound around the fez proclaimed them Moslems

in spite of

their slovenly European dress, sat idly smoking argilehs. As they drew the

smoke through the

bubbling water they talked little, and regarded the world with indifference and

dignity, the

traveller included.

Underwood was tired. He had scarcely slept; he had endured one of those nights

of physical

and mental torture that left him exhausted afterwards, as a demoniac from whom

the evil spirit

has departed. He was glad when he was alone in the room which had been engaged

for him,

and glad that the necessity for effort was for the moment over. At Magner's

insistence, he

allowed himself to rest on the high white German bed, with its mosquito

curtains drawn canopy-

wise. The room had many windows, and though the careful Magner had pulled to

the  
persiennes to exclude the brilliant Syrian sun, he could hear the sea breaking  
rhythmically  
against the shore below the hotel, and the spring breeze in the pine trees just  
outside, pulsing  
and purring through the green needles, and bringing into the room the resinous  
smell and the  
perfume of other growing things in the garden – citron blossom perhaps.  
At half-past eleven Magner appeared with some hot water, and several letters.  
Underwood  
had almost fallen asleep, but he roused himself, washed, and opened his  
correspondence.  
'DEAR OLD MAN' – began the first – "I hear you're going to Haifa sooner  
or later, and so  
I've asked Gerald Whitby to call on you – he lives there, I believe, or makes  
Haifa his  
headquarters. He and I were at Magdalen together; he's a good Orientalist,  
rather a queer little  
chap, but a thoroughly good sort. Please drop him a line, care of the Ottoman  
Bank, when you  
arrive, and he'll do all he can for you, I know.

DEAR MR. UNDERWOOD, – I shall be in the Colony to-morrow and will call on you  
at nine  
o'clock, unless you are otherwise engaged. – Yours sincerely,"  
GERALD WHITBY.  
"P.S. – I mean 9 a.m."

This note had been brought to Underwood the night before at dinner. He was  
slightly  
astonished, as he had not yet written to announce his arrival; however, it was  
possible that  
Whitby had heard from Cook's agent. He had been in Haifa several days, and had  
got rid of the  
fatigues of his journey. His naturally fine constitution gave him wonderful  
recuperative power.  
He was able to practise walking a little daily with the aid of his crutches as  
the Viennese doctor  
had ordained, and felt an increase of strength as if the air of the place  
suited him. It was this  
very persistent strength of his which made him impatient and tortured him  
beyond knowledge. It  
was as if he were battering against an iron door, which could never be opened.  
With Magner beside him, he swung himself slowly up the main road which led  
through the  
German colony; the two sidewalks bordered on either side with olives, pines,  
carobs, pepper  
trees, cypresses, and fig trees; the last white and leafless as yet, though it

was as warm as an  
English May. In front of every house, whose wide cool porches were made to  
combat the heat  
of the summer, was a garden, trim and gay; divided, but not hidden, from the  
passer-by by a  
low wooden fence. In these little gardens vegetables and flowers grew together  
in harmony,  
and as he passed along the shady walks he could see the women of the colony  
sturdily at work  
with hoe and rake, kerchiefs tied around their heads, and their skirts tucked  
up above their thick  
ankles. These uncomely but good-tempered German matrons were the mothers of  
large  
families, from big-boned, undeveloped-looking elder daughters and their  
brothers, to the pretty  
flaxen-haired little children who played at giant's stride outside the sunny  
schoolhouse and  
dropped him shy curtseys if he spoke or smiled to them. They ran about barefoot  
for the most  
part, healthy as the Bedouin children who pattered along the Jaffa road at the  
foot of the colony  
beside their father's asses  
The Jaffa road, which Underwood could see from his window, was a constant  
source of  
amusement to him. Groups of Bedouins, their puce-colored keffiyehs fluttering  
behind them,  
paced past on the highway with their cattle, or rode magnificently mounted on  
horses of varying  
degrees of breed. Long strings of camels, led by an Arab on a donkey in front,  
and an Arab with  
a forked goad on another donkey behind, and laden with unknown merchandise,  
plodded  
dustily along it till they disappeared in the bend of the road between the  
sub-tropical gardens of  
the German colonists, towards the point where Mount Carmel sloped abruptly down  
to the  
sapphire sea.  
Mount Carmel was the presiding genius of the place. The town lay nursed in her  
mighty lap,  
her long flanks stretched away to the sea on the north and south and west, the  
sun  
disappeared behind her long ridge a full hour before the sunset rosied the sky  
and set the  
snows of Mount Hermon, her far white sister, on fire on the other side of the  
bay.  
The sides of the mountain were thinly clothed with green and shrubs – here  
and there rocky

and bare, here and there interspersed with olives and low pine trees. Houses occasionally dotted its surface, and, in patches, its sides were scarred with brown where the vines, still barren in their winter sleep, gave promise of the autumn vintage. In the wonderful clearness of the air and intensity of the light, every detail stood out with astonishing clearness. Underwood found that his eyes wandered constantly to the mountain.

Mrs. Greville had called it the Mountain of God, and the name had an odd fascination for him.

He had seen or heard nothing of her since his arrival, and it was with a lonely man's

gladness that he received Whitby's brief note. It was only due to his own negligence that he had not made the first advance.

At nine Whitby was shown into the upper balcony where Underwood was sitting. He proved

to be a slightly made, insignificant-looking man on first sight; he wore a beard, and his thin face

was very sunburnt. For the rest he had a courteous manner, a diffident, slightly detached and

apologetic air – not uncommon in scholars. Underwood noticed his extremely beautiful hands.

"I am disturbing you too early," Whitby said, looking at the breakfast-tray on the table beside

Underwood's chair.

"No, no; I have finished. I was expecting you."

"We are early risers here – I should have remembered that you are accustomed to European

hours."

"Mayn't I offer you some breakfast? – a whisky and soda?"

"Thanks, I have sworn off alcohol, and I had my coffee at five."

"How did you know I was here? I have been meaning to write, but – "

"I saw you. But as I was occupied at the time with some important business, I could not

come to you as I wished. Of course Prothero told me you were coming."

"You and he were at Magdalen together."

"Yes; and we have kept up a desultory correspondence ever since. He told me about you –

and your accident."

"It was kind of you to look me up."

"I hope I can be of some use to you. Unfortunately I am leaving Haifa in a few days."

"For long?"

"I don't know.... I am not my own master."

The phrase suddenly reminded Underwood of Mrs. Greville when she had said, "I

am not my  
own mistress." But Whitby spoke with a dreamy seriousness, his eyes filled with  
an expression  
that conveyed to Underwood the impression that something of immense importance  
to the little  
scholar lay behind the words.

"The most I can do," Whitby went on, "is to introduce you to a few people here.

Do you know  
any one yet?"

"I met a Mrs. Greville on the way out."

"Mrs. Greville?" Whitby repeated. "I seem to know the name."

"She has some property on Mount Carmel."

"Ah yes; I have heard of her. But she doesn't live here?"

"She has just come out. Then, at table d'hôte and so on, I have more or less  
picked up

acquaintance with some of the Germans here – and some Russian Jews who are  
apparently

staying at the hotel until their house is completed."

"There is a growing Zionist colony here."

"So I hear."

"And have you met Schmidt Pasha?"

"No – at least not to my knowledge."

"He usually stays here when he is in Haifa. But he comes and goes – no one  
knows his

movements. But he knows England well – has stayed there a long time. There  
was a good deal

about him in the papers at the time of the Counter- Revolution. He is a  
powerful member of the

Committee of Union and Progress."

"What nationality?"

"A hybrid. But he is not a Levantine and not a Jew. He is Turkish to all  
intents and

purposes."

"And the 'Pasha'?"

"It's an hereditary title, I believe; or, at any rate, his father was a pasha  
too. The father

received it for services rendered to Ismail Pasha in Egypt. He also has a  
considerable interest

in the Hedjaz railway, so he is a rich man. He is very able, and speaks English  
well. But you

talk German?"

"I understand it. But I prefer my mother speech. I have not the gift of  
tongues, like yourself.

Prothero tells me you are a great Orientalist."

Whitby's fine hands moved in a gesture of disavowal, almost discomposure.

"I have studied Arabic; but I have difficulty in speaking it. Persian I know  
fairly well."

"The language of Omar Khayyam. I should like to read that fine old cynic in the original. And Hafiz and Sa'adi, and the rest. What a pity one can't be inoculated with a language by mechanical means. I mean, if one could only insert a tiny portion of brain matter containing the complete knowledge of a language!"

Whitby smiled. "It is a pity. But a time will come when languages will become as obsolete as dialects. And the universal language will be so flexible, so expressive, that none of the classics of the Old World will lose in translation into it – perhaps they will even gain."

"You are an Esperantist?"

"In a sense. But in living Esperanto which will have vitality because it has developed naturally through a process of evolution. Think of the immense barrier which language offers now. It is the cause of half the hostility and misunderstanding between nations. A man who can speak the language of another nation really well, must necessarily get into sympathy with the soul of that nation."

"And conversely, to speak the language of another nation well, one must first get into sympathy with that nation."

"That first."

"And you really think that that would be desirable? To my mind it has something of the horror that the visions of Socialists call up before you. To replace defined characteristics and the picturesque mysteries and non-comprehensions, the mountains and valleys and mysterious caverns, by one flat, perfectly illuminated plane."

"You are counting without your host."

"Which is?"

"In this case Nature. Does Nature ever allow a dead level? Isn't she always the artist, careful of her lights and shades, her mixing of colours?"

"That is true," Underwood replied. "But artificiality may spoil her work. Isn't civilisation, as seen in our big towns, ugly enough?"

"It is civilisation in a state of evolution. The dirt, the sordidness, the ugliness, are what remain from barbarism. Civilisation is still in the workshop."

"But man is a bungling workman. How do we know that ugliness will not be the end as it was

the beginning?"

"Because God is the master workman, and the end must be perfection."

Underwood looked at him sharply. There was an abrupt change in the other's voice, as if he

were against his own will saying something intimate, something personal.

Underwood suddenly

realised that God to this man was in some way a reality, and not a form of speech, and a

curiosity to see into Whitby's mind arose in him.

Then Whitby said, as if to change the subject –

"I should like to introduce you to a Persian friend of mine here, by the way; he will do

anything for you that he can. I have asked him to be at your disposal."

"How is it that a Persian is here in Syria?"

"There are many." He spoke with a certain reserve.

"Many? But why?"

Whitby paused, and then replied: "The Bahai exiles were sent to Akka, just across the bay."

He pointed to the sea visible through the pine trees.

"The Bahais," Underwood repeated. "I seem to have heard of them. Ah, I remember! Didn't

some chap at Oxford write a book about them? I know they were talking about it one night at

dinner, when Digby, who'd been attaché at the British Legation at Teheran, was there. Some

Persian or other called himself the Gate or the Door, or something, and he was shot; and there

was a wholesale slaughter of his followers."

"That was the Bab," said Whitby. "Did you never read the history of him? It has been

translated into English, and was written by a poor Persian prisoner... ." His eyes strayed to the

mountain. "Do you see that big brown building on the hill?" he asked. "Straight before us. The

sun is on it. There are cypresses beside it."

"Yes," said Underwood, following his gaze.

[Anmerkung des Abschreibenden]: gemeint ist Prof. E.G. Browne

"He is buried in that place."

"Who? The Bab? But he was killed in Persia. How did they get the body here?"

"Don't you remember what Turner said when they asked him how he mixed his paints? He

answered, 'With brains.' So to your question, how did they get the body here, I reply, 'With

devotion.' "

"But they were a proscribed sect, weren't they? It must have been difficult."

"It was difficult," Whitby answered, with a smile.

Underwood was searching his memory.

"Yes," he went on; "and Digby said that one of them declared that he was another

Mohammed, or another Christ, or whatever it was. These are the people, then?

But he didn't

call them Bahais, but some name rather like it.

"Yes," Whitby answered. "These are the people. Before the declaration of Baha 'Ullah, they

were called Babis. But as they saw in Baha 'Ullah the manifestation of Divine Wisdom that the

Bab had foretold, they became known as Bahais."

"And is this Baha 'Ullah living now?"

"He died in prison in Akka."

"Then they are without a leader?"

"No; they have a leader."

"Where? "

"Here. The son of Baha 'Ullah."

"So there were really three generations of prophets – the Bab, and the manifestation person,

and the present leader?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean that he is here in Haifa?"

"Till last year he was a prisoner in Akka. Since the Constitution<sup>2</sup> he and his family have been

given freedom."

"Then why the deuce don't they go back to Persia?"

"He – they – do not wish to leave Mount Carmel."

"The Mountain of God," supplemented Underwood involuntarily.

Whitby's eyes became again alive with the strange look of intimacy which

Underwood had

noticed before.

"Yes," he repeated. "The Mountain of God."

His eyes, still on the mountain, were peopled with thoughts which he did not share with the

other man.

"I can't think why Carmel should be called the Mountain of God," said

Underwood, following

his gaze. "Hermon, across the bay, seems to me infinitely more beautiful, more mysterious. It

lies distant, it is veiled by clouds, there is something of the beauty of unapproachableness

about it, its eternal snows, its height, its power of appearing and disappearing according to the

weather, make it far better adapted to the name. Carmel is scarcely more than a hill; it is so

devoid of mystery that in this atmosphere you can see almost every blade of grass, and there

are no shadows or mists upon it.'

[Anmerkung des Abschreibenden]: seit der Jungtürkischen Revolution 1908  
"Why should God be expressed by a mist and indistinctness?" asked Whitby,  
smiling slightly.

"Don't you remember the Jewish conception of Him? – 'the Father of Lights,  
with whom is no  
variableness nor shadow of turning.' "

Underwood raised himself a little painfully to another position.

"You believe in God – the Jewish God?" he asked abruptly.

"Why give Him a nationality?" Whitby asked pertinently.

"Well, then, a conscious deity – not merely an indefinite and metaphysical  
First Cause?"

But Magner appeared at this moment.

"Mrs. Greville to see you, sir."

"Ask her up," said Underwood.

"I have asked myself up," said Mrs. Greville, behind him. "Wasn't that rude of  
me? But I saw

you on the balcony from below, and thought that you were alone."

Her eyes, always full of a friendliness that was almost flagrant, went from one  
man to the

other. Underwood introduced Whitby.

"Mr. Whitby?" she echoed. "Surely I've heard – ah yes, in connection with  
this Persian ..."

She paused, as if she were afraid to enter upon a subject, and then in the  
infantile, airy way

which women of the world adopt when they wish to appear ingenuous, she went on:

"They tell

me he is a delightful person. The French Consul yesterday talked a long time  
about him – and

this movement of his, or religion – which would you call it?" Underwood saw  
her eyes quickly

absorb Whitby, and guessed that she had an avidity for brushing, with butterfly  
lightness, the

intimate side of every human being with whom she came into contact. She had  
divined that in

this man's interest or connection with the Persians, then, lay an intensely  
vital part of his nature,

and she plucked at the strings of this knowledge like a child. Again, he  
disliked her for it.

"I should call it both," Whitby replied, unperturbed. "It couldn't very well be  
a religion if it  
weren't a movement."

"How about your contemplative mystics, then?" she asked, seating herself.

"They're the drones in the hive," he answered, reddening a little, as he  
arranged a cushion

behind her. "Personally, I think that religion was meant to be used, not locked

up in a cupboard  
and looked at."

"Admirably said," she remarked. "And unlike most men you've arranged the cushion just in the proper latitude for my back." She sank back against it.

"What a lovely day," she continued, under her breath, as if speaking more to herself than to

them. "How exquisitely clear the air is! I love Carmel on a day like this. Have you noticed yet,

Mr. Underwood, how different the sunlight is here? It does not dazzle you, as our July sunshine

does; on the contrary, it is something so transparent, so lucid, so intense, that you seem to be

in another element. Our sunshine seems so muddy, and, well, almost fat, beside this thin

magical light. It takes my breath away." She smiled lazily, at her own choice of words.

"We were just talking of Carmel, before you came," said Whitby.

"And of God," said Underwood mechanically.

"Of God? Then you are getting the infection. Every one in Haifa talks of God – as if He lived

in the next street. The missionaries talk about Him, stupidly for the most part, because

conventionally. Then the Templars, the Germans, talk about Him, rather impertinently, I think;

because they infer that they have the monopoly of Him, so to speak. Then there is your

delightful Persian prophet, Mr. Whitby; and the Carmelites on the mountain, and the nuns by

the sea; and the Mohammedans who are almost indecent with their immodest habit of praying

in public. And several small sects, on their wild lones."

Both men laughed, and she laughed too, an engaging natural laugh.

"Well," said Underwood, falling in with her tone, "why shouldn't one?"

"You know very well that in England you apologise if you happen to get on the subject of

religion with people who are at all conventional. God is a backstairs and attic subject. But here

they keep it in the dining-room – even at table d'hôte."

"And you?" asked Whitby, in the tone of one who speaks to an amusing child.

"I hate talking about anything which I don't understand."

"Then you understand everything you talk about?" asked Underwood maliciously.

"How unkind of you, Mr. Underwood! You've caught me out. But tell me what you were

saying – about God! I'm sure Mr. Whitby will know. He's hand and glove with the Persian

prophet here. What is his idea of the Deity? "

She looked at Whitby with a bright, intelligent curiosity, like that of a bird.

"It sounds like a debating society."

Whitby looked embarrassed. He was conscious of the loneliness in the one soul, the frivolity in the other.

"I don't know what to answer," he replied simply. "How can one have an idea of God? You can only be conscious of Him – as you are conscious of the sun, as you are conscious of fate."

"Is that what your Persian prophet says?" Mrs. Greville said. "That's very vague. Now, I should like to have an image to worship. Frankly. Think of the days when the temple of Baal stood up on the mountain. There he was – an awful image, grim, solid – a symbol of inexorable Fate. One didn't merely go into a church and murmur polite and fulsome prayers to him; one brought one's children, and placed them into his red-hot arms. That was something like a faith. I can imagine the abandonment of immolation, the ecstasy that a mother felt when she had burnt what she held dearest in his honour. You see, Carmel was a Mountain of God even in those days."

"But that was barbarous, horrible," Underwood said, his eyes on Carmel.

"Aren't most strong things barbarous?"

"Christianity wasn't barbarous," said Whitby; "and yet it has become one of the strongest forces in the world."

"Not until the healthy part of paganism had been engrafted on to it," she replied. "Do we turn the other cheek? Do Dreadnoughts look like that? Do we do unto others as we would that they should do unto us? Not a bit of it. Ours is the morality of common sense, not of Christianity. We walk so as not to tread on other people's toes, because we know they'll tread on ours if we don't."

Whitby looked at her with a kind of gentle horror. Mrs. Greville, vivid, talkative, specious, belonged to a world which he had scarcely known even in his studious Oxford days. She, always sensitive to criticism, turned to him with a frank smile, the instinct to please uppermost.

"You don't like to hear me talk like that, Mr. Whitby. I'm not sure that I mean it, either. And I

have shocked you."

"No, no," he replied shyly. "I think you are right – we have wandered very far from the teachings of Christ, of course." He hesitated, and then went on: "It was time that the law of love

should be proclaimed again – the world was never so ripe for it."

"And is that the message of your Persian prophet?" she asked pertinaciously.

"Of Baha 'Ullah?" he repeated. "Yes."

"The law of love! It sounds delightful, don't you think so, Mr. Underwood? To love your

neighbour as yourself! What could sound nicer, and what be more difficult – especially when

the neighbour's wife is there to be loved too, and complicate matters. No – Mr. Whitby, a

thousand prophets will never preach the law efficaciously. Nature forbids it.

She has built her

species on pitiless wars. Competition is the mainspring of progress."

"We are not animals," Whitby said. "If we were entirely governed by the law of self-

preservation – what of the men who have sacrificed their lives in fighting disease – this doctor

who died from his experiments with X-rays, for example? And the Frenchman who received

Mass before he started in his flying machine last week, for the last time?

Those men willingly

took their lives in their hands for the sake of progress. We are going to have a humanity who

will do no less."

"But they were working – your cases – for a very definite aim. A man will sacrifice a great

deal for a definite aim, whether it's the conquest of an invention, or the conquest of an element,

or the conquest of a woman. But your law of love is an indefinite idea. Why should I love my

neighbour? Is he lovable? Very rarely. I'll love him when he is, and not before."

"Yes, but you are counting without one thing," Whitby said, his eyes alight, as if in spite of

himself. "The motive force."

"And that is?"

"The love of God. The love of man is only possible through that."

"Ah," she said. "Now you're talking Algebra."

"Algebra? "

"God is the Unknown Quantity, isn't He. Why love Him? It seems to me, one might just as

well talk of loving electricity."

He smiled.

"Tell me, frankly, do you really love God?" she persisted, with mischievous naivete.

"And if I answered 'yes'?"

"Really, I shouldn't believe you."

"Then I won't answer," he said.

"Yes, you shall – but another day. I've got to go – I'm a quarter of an hour late for an

appointment as it is. But it is so novel to talk theology. Can't you both come to tea with me to-

morrow? It will be rather a picnic tea – the house is in great disorder as yet." She looked at

them both inquiringly.

"With pleasure," said Underwood.

"If I am here," said Whitby.

"You are going away?"

"Yes."

"Back to England?"

"No – to Teheran."

"Take me with you!"

"Why? "

"How ungracious you are! Never mind, I won't come. If you haven't gone, then – to-morrow.

My house is on the monastery road – any one will show you the way."

She gave each her hand in turn, and went away, smiling, self-content.

It was on Sunday afternoon that Underwood saw Whitby again, for the latter had sent a

message that he could not come to the appointed lunch. He was announced at about four

o'clock, and was brought up on to the upper terrace where Underwood was lying.

Behind him

came another slighter figure – a young man with a red tarbush<sup>3</sup> on his head.

Underwood

wondered who he was for a moment, until he remembered that this was probably the Persian

friend of whom they had spoken.

[Anmerkung des Abschreibenden]: Tarbusch, Fes

Whitby introduced his companion as Mirza Nouredin.

"You speak English?" Underwood asked.

"Yes, a little."

His voice was melodious and his pronunciation careful. Underwood looked at him as he sat

down on the chair which the waiter brought for him. Mirza Nouredin was clean shaven, and

this added to his look of extreme and graceful youth. His eyes were unlike anything that

Underwood had ever seen. They were the true Persian eyes, disproportionately large in his

face – dark as pools of marsh water, fringed with long lashes which were coal-black and silky.

Added to this, there was a velvety bloom over them like a curtain, which seemed to veil the

inward thought which lies hard as a stone in clear water at the bottom of a European eye. Yet

he lifted them ingenuously, with movements that were gentle, modest, and furtive as a young girl's.

Underwood's attention was caught by the youth's appearance, he knew not why.

"Where did you study it?" he asked. "You have a good accent."

"I studied it in Akka." His lashes swept upwards, and with a gesture he indicated the little

town across the bay, white as a seagull's breast where it lay against the long coast-line.

"One can see Akka well to-day," said Whitby. "We must take you there one day soon."

"I will take him to the Rizwan," said Nouredin, in his soft voice.

"What is the Rizwan?"

"That is our garden – it was made by the believers."

"By the believers?"

He explained himself without haste.

"For the Bahai. They made it for the Blessed Perfection."

Whitby was gazing across to Akka with his dreamy scholar's eyes.

"The Rizwan will be at its best in a month or two, when the lilies are out and the mulberry

trees by the river are in leaf," said he. "You should spend a whole day there."

"I shall certainly have to go," said Underwood, wondering what pleasant and secret madness

enwrapped these two people. He continued –

"There's a much better view from here than on the balcony, isn't there, Whitby?

One can see

all the sea. By Jove! what a glorious sweep of bay! I should like to have my little red-wing here

to do some yachting." He had ceased to remember for the moment that yachting was of the

past, and added, with a short laugh, "Confound it! I forgot that that's knocked off too. I shall

have to try to sell her."

Nouredin listened with a slightly mystified expression.

"I forget that I'm off the active list, sometimes," Underwood remarked to him, in explanation.

"Pardon," said Nouredin, with a diffident smile, "but what is a redwing? "

"It's a small yacht with scarlet sails," Underwood said.

"Ah, you see my English is bad," he returned, with sadness. "Also the English is different to

the American, though in books it is the same. But I am always learning. I

should like to be able  
to write in English as I write in Persian. And this list you spoke of?"  
Underwood explained. "I've lost the use of my muscles, more or less."  
Noureddin's eyes filled with pity like a woman's.  
"That is bad," he said, like a child.  
"I've been giving Mirza Noureddin lessons for the past year," said Whitby; "but  
I'm afraid the  
English I've taught him has not been very colloquial. We've been doing some  
translations  
together."  
"Translations of what?" asked Underwood.  
He hesitated slightly. "Of – some of the Bahai manuscripts."  
"I almost feel inclined to take Persian lessons," said Underwood? with a smile.  
"Only I'm  
such a frightful duffer at languages, and one ought to get at them young, at  
the same age that  
we stuff Latin and Greek."  
"That is true," remarked Noureddin gravely, in his musical voice. "When one is  
young the  
brain is like butter – a fly can leave a mark upon it. And when one is old it  
is as iron. But you are  
not old yet. You are quite young. I will teach you."  
"Yes, why don't you study a little Persian, Underwood?" said Whitby. "You'll  
find that time will  
hang heavily here in Haifa if you haven't anything to do."  
"I'll think about it," said Underwood. "At present I am enjoying a lazy peace.  
For instance, I  
came up here to write a letter this afternoon, and found myself staring at  
Carmel for a whole  
hour together, without writing a word. There's something fascinating about it,  
though it's  
scarcely more than an insignificant little hill."  
"I wish you could go upon it," said Whitby simply. "The wild flowers are  
wonderful now, and  
still more wonderful later. A botanist once told me that he had picked a  
hundred and thirty  
different species of wild flowers on Carmel in one day."  
Underwood looked at the mountain wistfully.  
"You've made the carriage drive up to the Carmelite monastery, I suppose?"  
Whitby asked.  
"Not yet. But I will."  
"You get a good view from the plateau of Notre-Dame de Carmel. If you like,  
I'll give you a  
card to one of the fathers – an Irishman – a friend of mine. You'll like  
him, and he will be glad to  
see you."  
He drew out a worn pocket-book, and extracting a card, wrote upon it: "Ask for

Father

Patrick."

"Thanks awfully, Whitby. You're acting sponsor for me all round."

"Not as much as I should like. But Mirza Nouredin and his people, and Father Patrick, are

my best friends here, and I'm handing them on to you, or rather you to them.

I'm sorry you didn't

come a month earlier."

"When do you leave?"

"I don't know yet," Whitby replied.

"But surely you have an idea?"

"It is not in my hands," he answered.

Again Underwood felt excluded from some secret which Whitby held like a jewel in his soul.

His friend had the look of a lover who guards in his heart a newly won

happiness. He glanced at

the young Persian. His face, too, was grave and serene, as with an inner knowledge.

"I see," said Underwood.

"And you must command me, if you want anything," Nouredin added, with sincerity in his

dark wide eyes. "The friends of Mr. Whitby are our friends. I will come to you often, if you wish

to see me. You will come to our house, like Mr. Whitby. If you wish to go to Akka, or to any

other place, I am ready."

Underwood answered with a smile. He felt attracted to the youth, as he would be attracted to

a graceful and beautiful wild animal with gentle manners.

"Come often, if you have time," he said. "I'm a lonely brute." He spoke almost as he would

have spoken to a woman.

"So Mr. Whitby has gone," said Underwood.

"I have just come from the steamer," Nouredin replied. "He sent his love – his regards – to

you, and told me to say many things. I shall be as your brother, he said."

It was naively uttered, and the liquid eyes of the young Persian were wells of childlike truth

and affection as he gazed at Underwood. How much of it was sincere?

"That was very kind of him," said Underwood, "and very kind of you," he added.

"And he gave me a little letter for you," continued Mirza Nouredin flutily, drawing it from his

pocket. His dark eyes fluttered up to Underwood's.

Underwood understood that he was to read it, and opened it.

It was written in pencil on steamship paper –

"MY DEAR UNDERWOOD, – Nouredin will bring you this. I find that I have ten minutes'

grace, and employ it in writing to you. I had hoped to come in and say good-bye, but I was sent for at the last moment, and stayed so long that I was unable to get as far as your hotel. I made a thorough search for a room in the German colony, but could not find one. If it seems advisable, Nouredin will put another proposition before you, which you can accept or not, just as you like. Do not tell him that I have mentioned it in this letter; he will probably speak to you of it himself. With regard to the Persians, don't hesitate to accept any kindness they may offer you.

I would like you to experience the disinterestedness and devotion of the Bahais here, as I have done. Their ideals of love and fraternity do not merely exist on paper; they are carried out in the most literal sense of the word. Don't be put off by the surface differences between Oriental and Occidental life that will strike you at first, as you see with fresh eyes, or that miserable aphorism that 'East is East, and West is West,' and so on. It was invented by the stupid and masculine West. The feminine East has more intuition. It is true she hates the West with the repulsion of a woman for a brutal conqueror, but in her heart there is the knowledge that there is the miracle of love to be accomplished, so that what is begun in lust and struggle may end in a union which shall be happiness for both. Sympathy and intuition are the keys. While we are busy reiterating that stupid 'East is East' refrain, we shall never put our hand to the keys. Just as love provides understanding between a man and a woman, love will provide understanding between the races. At present we are like the annoying pedagogues of a generation ago, who wished to prevent the education of women by reiterating that their brains weighed lighter.

"Nouredin is waiting, so I must finish this quickly. I want to say something personal to you, and I am so cursedly English still that it is almost impossible to say it as I wished. Nouredin would say it to you as easily as a child who asks for jam on the top shelf; but I'm not Nouredin, and we've both got our English hatred of ever talking to others on vital facts. But I am going to write it, all the same. I envy you. Your Kismet has brought you up to a blank

wall. You said as  
much to me the other day. It has taken the world away from you – you have not  
had to leave it.

I was brought up against the blank wall too, but in a different way, along the  
road of a good  
many useless mental struggles.

"I have said I envy you; because, if you only knew it, the wall isn't solid at  
all – and there's all  
the universe on the other side! God grant that you will know what I mean –  
you must know what

I mean sooner or later – because for you there is no escape. You will  
probably wonder what I  
am blithering about.

"Well, good-bye, and good luck. Forgive me for what will seem maniacal and  
presumptuous  
ravings, and believe me, yours sincerely,"

GERALD WHITBY.

Underwood looked up to find Nouredin's grave eyes fixed on him.

"I think Mr. Whitby wrote very much?" he said.

"Yes, it is a long letter, not a little letter," said Underwood.

"I came to ask," said Nouredin, "if you would come to our house to-day to  
drink tea. My

father will like to see you. I have a carriage outside, if you will come."

"Thanks," Underwood replied, "I'd like to. I'm looking forward to meeting your  
people."

But he was still thinking of the odd tone of the letter, of its air of  
sincerity – the interest it  
displayed in himself. How had Whitby guessed at the psychical Sahara through  
which he was

passing, at the Gehenna of burning dreariness which scorched his soul? He was  
against a

blank wall, it was true. But Whitby's air of optimism, of "God's in His heaven,  
all's right with the

world," roused in him a spirit of bitter laughter. If he thought of existence  
dispassionately,

nakedly, as he knew it, now that the rose-coloured spectacles of health and  
youth had been

removed from his vision, it seemed to him terrible, and God, a relentless  
being, more callous

than any blinded Destiny ever conceived by man's imagining. What could Whitby,  
wrapped up

in his mystical dreams, know of the bare and ugly view of facts which comes to  
one robbed of

his illusions and the comfortable fictions of physical security?

Meanwhile, he allowed Nouredin to help him to adjust his crutches, and to  
assist him into

the carriage. The young Persian's hands were as gentle as a woman's. They drove up the straight road of the German colony, discoursing of various subjects – the tourist season, the new hotel in building, the German colonists. Then they turned a little to the left and drew up before a small, new-looking house, set a little back from the road. A path led up from the iron gate upon which a bell jangled as Nouredin jumped down and opened it. On either side of the path flowers were planted – rose bushes, geraniums, and frisias; while pebbled paths divided the beds. Wild flowers and vegetables grew together farther back, as if a generous Nature could afford nourishment to all her children in this rich soil. An old man was bending over a freshly planted shrub, which he was securing with a string to a stick. Its limp leaves and flaccid stems needed support. He had evidently been watering it, for a rusty petroleum can, half filled with water, stood beside him. He wore a loose and voluminous djebbah of brown cloth which reached almost to his feet; a snowy turban was coiled about his fez. A simple white garment, buttoning close to the throat, and a sash wound about his body were apparent when he turned and straightened himself at their approach. "This is my father," said Nouredin – "Mirza Amin 'Ullah." The old man smiled, touched his forehead, uttered a Persian greeting, and held out his hand with a slight awkwardness that spoke of lack of habit. His hair was grey, and a short grizzled beard grew on his chin, but there was something indomitably young about his eyes, and a kindly gaiety, as it were, that contradicted his wrinkles. "He says that he is very glad to see you," translated Nouredin, "and that he loves all the friends of Mr. Whitby." Underwood replied that the pleasure was mutual, and a translated conversation ensued. "He says he hopes you are well." "I am well – as well as I can be." The old man spoke again. The Persian sounded soft, the inflection seductive. "He says: 'If the heart is well, then all is well.' " Underwood smiled. "The heart cannot be well when the body is sick." Unconsciously he was adopting the simple phraseology of Nouredin to express his own sardonic

thought.

"He says: 'No, no,' Noureddin said, with emphasis. "That if that were so, the king would serve his slave."

"If the slaves revolt, the king is no longer a king."

"But the king is stronger than the slave, because he is immortal," translated Noureddin. "And the soul is always strong because its strength is God's."

Mirza Amin continued to speak –

"He says that my grandfather was tortured to death in Teheran," said Noureddin – "that they

fastened lighted sticks to his body – do you say torches? – and that all the time he said, 'God

be praised, this is my happiest day. Never have I known a delight like this.'

My father was with

him and saw his words and witnessed his joy. So that if the heart is well, the body is a small thing."

Underwood experienced a slight shock. The old man's eyes were as untroubled and gay as

ever. His tone was the simple, matter-of-fact tone of reasoning. Yet he had witnessed the dying

agonies of his father by slow degrees, the tragedy of death by torture. Such a remembrance

could be spoken of with a smile! Was it Eastern disregard of death, or something else?

Mirza Amin led the way to the house up the sunny gravel path, and then, mounting a few

steps and opening the door a little, called out in Persian. Underwood realised that he was giving

the women of the house time to make their disappearance. He had seen the flutter of a black

garment disappearing behind the house as they opened the gate.

Then Mirza Amin threw wide the door, and Underwood, aided by Noureddin, ascended the

steps with some difficulty and entered.

He found himself in an airy room. The walls were white, and there were four large windows,

so that it seemed full of lightness and whiteness to Underwood after the confined and dark

rooms of the German hotel. Three doors, besides the entrance door, communicated apparently

with other rooms or parts of the house. The floor, tiled with black and white stones, was partly

covered with fine Persian rugs. Two large divans ran down each side of the room; they were

covered with white linen with a fringe of crochet. The cushions, too, were

plain white. On the table stood a vase, full of wild flowers, marigolds, anemones, and campions. On a second and smaller table stood some Persian books, an English dictionary, and a japanned and painted case of Persian design. There was no ornament of any description, and through the windows came a fresh breeze from the sea.

"Sit by the window," said Nouredin, arranging the cushions deftly, so as to make a support

for Underwood's big helpless body. "Mr. Whitby always sat at this end of the divan, because

one can see the sea and Akka."

He himself sat carefully, in the European style, on the edge of the divan.

Mirza Amin, on the

contrary, who had slipped his shoes off at the door, sat on the divan opposite to them, cross-

legged, in the Oriental fashion. He looked at them tranquilly, happily.

"Tell me something about your father's history, Nouredin," said Underwood.

"Your

grandfather was one of the Babi martyrs, then?"

"Yes. My father was little at the time, and he cried very much when he saw my grandfather

killed, but he was very proud. And as soon as he was fourteen, he ran away from his aunt, who

lived in Isfahan and took him into her house after my grandfather and granduncle had been

killed by the Government; and he went to join Baha 'Ullah in Adrianople. Some day I will tell you

of his adventures – because he had no money, and it was a difficult journey.

When the Blessed

Perfection came to Akka, he came too.

"Then you were born in Akka?"

"Yes. We lived there until lately. We have only inhabited this house a little while. We

received permission to change a year ago."

"From the Turkish Government?"

"Their permission was already given. No, from the Master."

"The Master?" repeated Underwood vaguely.

"Yes, the Effendi – Abdul Baha (the Servant of the Radiance), the son of the Blessed

Perfection. We call him the Master – did not Mr. Whitby tell you?" He spoke with simple

reverence, as if of something unearthly and sacred, yet which had passed with him into the

realm of ordinary and accepted fact.

Underwood remembered his conversation with Whitby. He had not paid much

attention to it  
at the time, but it came back to him. This "Master" to whom Nouredin alluded  
must be the  
"delightful Persian prophet" of whom Mrs. Greville had spoken – the present  
head of the  
"movement." The astounding fact remained that Whitby, a young man, not by  
nature a crank,  
who was considered one of the most promising men of his year at Magdalen,  
should go to the  
other end of the earth at the bidding of an obscure political and religious  
refugee. Was this  
merely the call of the East that drew men as inevitably as a magnet? Or, again,  
was it  
something else? Was it the personality of this man mysteriously designated as  
the "Master"? or  
was it the impulsion of some secret doctrine such as that imparted by learned  
lamas in their  
fastnesses in Tibet? Such theories as the last were purely fantastic. He was  
inclined to regard  
the lamas as mythical, and the Westerners who professed to have received from  
them  
elaborate theories about the Universe as charlatans, or, at most, self-  
deceived neuropaths.  
In the American phrase, he was "up against something" which he could not  
understand. It  
pervaded this place, there was a subtle indication of it, the air seemed full  
of secrets, and  
among these Persians, especially, he was conscious of an enchantment, like a  
mortal who has  
strayed into a garden inhabited by fairy people, who knows that he is seen by  
eyes which are  
invisible, and listens to music which his straining ears cannot hear.  
"Where is he – the Master?" he asked, involuntarily expressing his curiosity.  
"He has come to Carmel. He lives in the new house on the hill, just to the  
left, above ours,"  
answered Nouredin.  
The answer was so matter of fact and prosaic that Underwood almost smiled. But  
Nouredin  
was adding something in Persian to himself, which sounded like a blessing or a  
prayer.  
"Where is Abdul Baha's house?" asked Underwood suddenly, as he settled his big  
limbs in  
the carriage. Nouredin pointed to the left.  
"There. You can see the roof. And you see those Persians? They are going to see  
him –  
they are pilgrims from Teheran and Isfahan."  
A dozen men, in Persian dress, with the black sheepskin cap on their heads

which contrasted funereally with the gay scarlet tarbush of the Syrian driver, were moving up the hillside road. They walked slowly, and Underwood saw that the reason was that a very old man, bent almost double with age, was in the midst of them. Two younger men supported him on either side. Presently he paused, as if his breath failed him, and they paused too. The old man lifted his face, and Underwood saw it, though he was looking not at him, but towards the house which Nouredin had indicated. And the old man's tired face smiled. It was the same smile of eternal youth that Underwood had seen on the face of Mirza Amin. It was a very heavenly smile.

"To the hotel," said Nouredin to the driver.

"The charm of Carmel is growing on me," said Underwood politely. "I confess that at first it looked merely an insignificant hill."

"He says," translated Nouredin, over a mouthful of pilau, "that you are English, that you are a Christian. The Christians think the mountain sacred as well as the Mohammedans and the Jews, because Christ walked on this mountain."

"Did He?" said Underwood, whose Bible history was shaky.

"He says, 'Because of that, the paths should shine,' " said Nouredin, his dark eyes gleaming in the flicker of the candlelight.

"I'm afraid I'm a bad Christian," admitted Underwood, with a rueful smile.

This seemed to arouse the old man's sense of humour when Nouredin conveyed it to him.

He gave a deep chuckle within his beard. In the East to confess a difference of creed is a delicate matter enough, but to blandly confess disloyalty to one's own is a piece of honesty in which an Oriental would rarely indulge.

"Then we must convert you to be a good Christian," translated Nouredin, when Hosseyn had spoken, joining in the merriment.

"Or a Bahai," smiled Underwood.

Hosseyn's eyes grew deeper and more serious.

"He says, 'To be a Bahai you need not leave your religion.' "

"How so?" Underwood asked, with some surprise.

"Because the Kingdom – the Malekoot – is the same – for all it is the same." He spoke with a mystical fervour, as if the word "Malekoot," like that "blessed word

Mesopotamia," held a spell.

"The Malekoot?" Underwood repeated, for the word pleased him too.

"He says, if you are of the Malekoot, religions become to you like the coloured glass through

which the light shines in a mosque. There are many coloured pieces, Mohammed, Christ, Baha

'Ullah, and others, but the light is the same. You do not give attention to the window, whether it

is of red or blue or green glass, but you give attention to the light that shines through it."

"It is a convenient theory," said Underwood. "But what are we to understand by the light?"

Noureddin turned his great eyes on him with naive sincerity.

"He says, the light is knowledge of the Unity of God. And when one has that knowledge, one

knows God, and when one knows God, one must love Him, and when one loves Him, one must

love everybody, whether he is of Islam or a Christian, so that everybody is your brother and you love him very much."

"And do you love everybody very much?"

"Of course I do," said Noureddin, opening his eyes.

"But that's Christianity," said Underwood – he corrected himself – "as it was before it became respectable."

Noureddin looked at him in a puzzled way.

Mirza Hosseyn leant forward and pushed his plate away from him.

"He says he will tell you a story about the Bahai," translated Noureddin.

Underwood signified his attention.

The old man made a belching sound in his throat, lifted his glass to his mouth, as if he

enjoyed awakening his hearers' interest, and began, Noureddin translating sentence by

sentence –

"Four men – a Turk, a Persian, an Arab, and an Englishman – were walking towards a

certain town. As they were travelling on the same road, they made friends, though they could

only speak a few words of the others' languages. Presently the discussion fell on what they

should buy in the town for supper. The Turk said: 'One thing I shall need after this thirsty

journey, and that is uzum.' 'No,' said the Persian, 'we must buy angúr, and no strange thing.' 'I

will eat neither,' said the Arab; 'my whole soul craves for eynab.' 'You are fools,' said the

Englishman; 'it is the season for grapes – why not refresh ourselves with

them?' From  
discussion they fell into a quarrel, and from quarrelling they came to blows.  
Then a stranger  
came up and said, 'Oh, my friends! why are you disputing among yourselves?'  
They told him of  
the subject of their quarrel, and he said, 'Do not heat yourselves by fighting,  
but come into my  
garden hard by, for I have all the fruits which you mention.' So they went, and  
presently he  
brought them a large dish full of bunches of grapes. 'There,' said he, giving  
one to the Arab, 'is  
thy eynab; and there,' to the Turk, 'thy uzum; and there,' to the Persian, 'thy  
angúr; and there,'  
to the Englishman, 'thy grapes.' That man is like the Bahai."  
The old man drained off the rest of the water in his glass, and looked at  
Underwood, with an  
air of smiling triumph.  
"He says, what do you think of his story? Does it not put the matter in the  
palm of one  
hand?" asked Noureddin.  
"By Allah! It is well said," interjected Mirza Amin. "It is a story full of  
meaning," said  
Underwood.  
The aged Bahai beamed on him cordially, his child's soul in his eyes.  
A luxurious feeling, as if he had been transported into a fairy- tale in the  
Arabian Nights, was  
creeping over Underwood. The young Persian, his rapt eyes and girlish beauty,  
the old man  
uttering parables in his sonorous voice, the sober robes and turbans of both  
old men, carried  
him into another age. Only his own European dress, and Noureddin's, and the  
modern clock  
ticking in the corner reminded him that they were in the twentieth century. The  
spirit of leisure  
was present, the serious, discursive spirit of the wise East.  
"I'd give anything to know what religion means to people," she [Sabra] said.  
"Does it mean  
anything to you?"  
"Yes, I think it does," Underwood replied.  
"And to me, nothing. I'd willingly be any religion you'd name me if I could  
derive satisfaction  
from it. Sooner Moslem than any other though, I think, because it is a worship  
of Destiny, and I  
believe in Destiny – that is, I have an instinct for it. Have you seen Abdul  
Baha – the one they  
call the Master?"

"No."

"Is he a charlatan, do you think?"

"How can I say?" asked Underwood. "But he seems to me, from what Nouredin says, to be sincere enough, persuaded of his father's mission – they called his father the Manifestation, I believe – discourages any attempt to introduce the miraculous element, though some of his followers would like to exaggerate it, and spends his life in working for the cause, teaching, giving personal advice, and organising the movement throughout the world. I'd no idea that the thing was as spread as it is. They have converts all over the East, and, of course, in America."

"And how they love him!" said Sabra.

"They love him, it is true." He thought of Nouredin's shining eyes.

"Personality," said Sabra.

"Perhaps."

"But what are the teachings of their religion?" she asked. "They are teachings which, if they continue to spread rapidly in the East, may have a considerable political significance. A religion which can engraft tolerance and progress on to Islam and makes easy converts among Mohammedans is a political force."

"Perhaps that is why they were so persecuted in Persia?" she said.

"Of course."

"But tell me the teachings," she said. "I'm as ignorant as yourself. Nouredin lent me a very badly translated book on the subject, and that's about all I've been able to obtain, except what they tell me. As far as I can make out, the exoteric teachings are simple enough – there may be inner teachings, of course. It's a Utopian theory of the Universe – a mixture of Maeterlinckian mysticism with practical aims. It's love for one's kind followed out to its logical conclusion. For instance, love of humanity is to come before patriotism, with a Bahai. Chauvinism is positively wrong. National aggrandisement at the expense of others is as bad as personal aggrandisement at the expense of others. A nation has to be humble about itself, and to work for the common good, just as an individual should do. War, of course, is to be abolished. Race-feeling is to be abolished, a universal language taught in the national schools of every country, and a reign of universal tolerance and freedom of thought preached. Priests are

to disappear.

There's a sort of Communism about it, too, that follows naturally on the theory that you should

love your neighbour as yourself, not for the neighbour's sake, or for your sake, but for the sake of the God of Humanity."

"They're fine ideals," she said. "But, Lord how unpractical!"

"Christianity was rather unpractical," said he, "but it founded modern civilisation. Perhaps

this may found the civilisation of the future."

"Impossible! We have grown out of religions."

"Have we grown out of love, though we might propagate the species on a basis of reason?"

Her dark skin suddenly reddened.

"No."

"Religion is like love, I think," said Underwood. "We shall never grow out of it. And a

subconscious power, like that of religion, is necessary if they are ever to bring about their

Utopia."

"But I don't call it a religion," she said. "Haven't they any mosques? And no priests!"

Underwood laughed. "Does Christianity depend on bishops and churches?"

"Of course not, though personally I'm devoted to bishops. But you don't understand what I

mean. Bahaism isn't other-worldly enough to be a religion. Tolstoi might just as well say

Tolstoism is a religion."

"It hasn't dogmas, perhaps. But it has" – he hesitated – "what I should call an immense love

of God, and acquiescence in the Divine Will. Did you ever read the Fioretti or a Kempis's De

Imitatione Christi? They have that spirit in them – heaps of it. A sort of mediaeval mysticism, a

cheerful mysticism, which finds comradeship with all the world. Their Malekoot seems to me to

be identical with the 'divine enlightenment of the Franciscans."

"Love of God again," she said impatiently. "How can one? The Moslems don't ask you to.

They adore Him, as one bows to irresistible destiny. I can understand that. But to love – "

She sank into thought.

Then she suddenly looked up with a laugh, and exclaimed –

"There we are!"

"What?"

"Talking about religion. I told you it was infectious in this country. You've caught it from the

Persians, and now I am getting it from you! If we were in London we should no more dream of discussing such things than of flying. New Theology is associated with the suburbs, of course, and one could talk a little discreet theology with a nice old parson, or get sentimentally converted by Father Vaughan, but even then, it's only in a sort of dilettante way. Of course one goes to church when one is staying in the country, for the sake of the good example, and all that. But here! I suppose it is partly because when one sees the fellahin, one remembers that Christ was probably just such a one, and He lived in just such a dirty little mud hut as people of His rank in life live in nowadays. That makes one think to begin with. And when one sees a religion in the making, like this Bahatism, one can't help thinking that Christianity must have begun in the same way, with a very ordinary lot of men after all. It sounds irreverent, but I dare say the houses of the disciples were just as full of fleas, and just as insanitary as the houses of the fellahin to-day. When one sees how the best of people unconsciously exaggerate in this climate, one can see how lots of the unbelievable things grew up. And when one knows any Greeks, one wonders how any truth or life was left in Christianity at all after it made its headquarters in Constantinople."

"Switch it round in the other direction," said Underwood. "It's possible that, robbed of all those accretions, the fellah Christ is more inspiring than all the jewelled figures on Byzantine altars."

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Noureddin and his father were in the house of the Master on the hill, whither they went every evening. Sometimes they stayed to eat there, and Underwood missed them both when they did so. He had been pleasantly surprised that day. Noureddin had come in with a dish of wonderful oranges. "The Master sends you these. They are from his garden in Akka – from the Rizwan." On another occasion flowers had arrived with a similar message. What and who was this mysterious personage, and whence this kindly interest in

a stranger?

The house on the hill, new, white, and ordinary looking, conveyed nothing.

Underwood had

sometimes walked past the gates on his crutches and looked inside. One or two

Persians sat

outside, chatting together; a watch-dog yawned in the sun, and the big door

leading into the

house stood open, as if guests were expected. It was nearly always open. Now

and again a

Persian would enter, or issue; sometimes old men with the remembrance of deep waters in

their eyes, sometimes young men in European dress, fresh from the college at

Beyrout, who

occasionally bade him good-day in English.

A rough road bordered by prickly pears led beyond the house of mystery up the hillside – too

stony and steep, however, for Underwood to attempt it. It led up to the tomb of the Bab, half-

way up the side of Carmel, the great square building which dominated Haifa from its position on

the hillside. Nouredin and his father often climbed up there in the evening to drink tea in the

little rose garden overlooking the bay, and to talk to the other Persians, or to pray at the tomb.

Sometimes they told him that the Master had been there too, and that after drinking tea

together he had descended with them.

One day Underwood had driven up by the carriage road with Nouredin to the tomb, and

learnt how, some fifteen or twenty years ago, the body of the Persian saint had been brought by

a few faithful Bahais overland from its hiding-place in Persia to its resting-place on the Mountain

of God. And Underwood remembered what Whitby had said.

He looked inside. The tomb was in the inner chamber, so that he could not see it, but in the

outer chamber there was no adornment on the plain walls – its only furnishing was a piece of

grass-matting and a few chairs. Chairs were taken from it, in order that he and Nouredin might

sit on the rose-planted plateau before the tomb, whence they watched the wide horizon of sea

and sky and bay, and the town lying beneath them, while a dark-skinned, silent Persian

gardener, a black sheepskin cap on his long locks, gathered them roses from the sacred

garden.

It was all so simple.

There was none of the pomp or circumstance of sainthood.

Surely nothing was more unlike a sepulchre than this pleasant, airy room, where to smile

was not out of place, for the Persian guardian, who brought them glasses of over-sweetened

tea, laughed when Nouredin rallied him about something.

Underwood had felt the charm of these days and nights descend upon his soul with a

promise of peace. The atmosphere in which these people lived was about him; he breathed it –

drew it into his soul; it was daylit, and fresh and pure. To some, religion was a hard code of

rules, set prayers, recitations, and postures; for himself, perhaps, it was philosophy upon its

knees. But with these people, religion was an internal rhapsody, a singing of the heart, as

natural as the unfolding of the pimpernel in the sun or the glad impulse of the lark into the

spring sky.

Akka, which lies like an ivory phantom, a city of foam, on the long sickle of the bay when

seen from the palm gardens of Haifa, loses something of its whiteness as one leaves the half-

way house guarded by Turkish soldiers on the lonely sands between the two cities.

It has many names, this wall-girt Syrian town washed by the sea, and each name recalls a

vanished glory. Accho brings back some of its first splendours, when tall galleys bore their

freight of purple dyes and precious glass to Egypt and Carthage and Greece – for the murex,

the purple shell, lies on the shores of its bay; and by the Belus, the shallow river which empties

itself into the sea at the end of a dusty avenue of gum trees leading to the fortified gate, the first

glass was made by the Phoenicians for export into the wealthy cities of the classical world.

Ptolemais was its name in the days when Paul of Tarsus spent a busy day of his life in its

pagan walls. The word "Acre" brings back the splendid phantoms of Richard the Lion-Hearted

with his paladins, and the temporary triumph of the Cross over the Crescent.

But the Crescent

regained its supremacy and the stout little city held her own against Napoleon, who raised an

artificial mound against its walls and trained his guns against the fortifications in vain. You may still see his cannon balls within the streets. It was stubborn St. Jean d'Acre which checked his victorious progress through the Levant. He had dreams of becoming Mohammedan in those days, the great Napoleon, and of ruling Islam as its sacred Kaliph. He almost saw the mantle of the desert Prophet on his shoulders. The mound is there to this day – a silent monument over which Bedouin camels nibble in the spring-time. And, through the centuries, Akka remained within her walls, never building outside them, never enlarging her boundaries. Hence the pestilences which raged through her narrow streets, bordered by high houses and vaulted in from the sky; for the inhabitants built upwards since they might not build outwards. The Turkish Government have used it, therefore, as a penal settlement. Plague and pestilence are useful deputy executioners, and undesirable captives died natural deaths in the prisons – all of which was very convenient to the Sublime Porte. The proverb had it that a bird died if it flew over Akka. Since the Constitution, the little town, unhealthy as a pot-bound plant, has seen another era. Two new gates are being built – before there was but one – and concessions have been made to extend the city beyond its century-old limits. The awakening has come late – the ships that rock beside the walls of the old fortified khan have yearly become fewer, and Haifa on the other side of the bay, which has accommodated herself to the encroachments of progress while her prouder sister remained in seclusion, has waxed in favour and flourished, whilst the old glory of Akka has declined. But whereas in Haifa Christian women go unveiled and dress like the foreigner, in Akka even the handful of Greek Christians prefer to veil their women, and Islam, although its pomp and panoply are somewhat tattered, still lords it over submissive Christendom. Camels pad the streets, everywhere you are met by the aristocratic impassivity of the Moslem, by the dignified reticence which flies before imported civilisation. In Syria above all other places, Islam confers a kind of nobility: the Mohammedan is more or less

of a gentleman;  
the native Christian – too often-more or less of a cad.  
On this April day, there was a display of bunting in the streets. Everywhere  
the red flag with  
its white crescent and star fluttered, mingled occasionally in an entente  
cordiale with the  
tricolour, the stars and stripes, or the Union Jack. But not often – the red  
flag with the emblem  
of Islam was in predominance. For it was the anniversary of the dawning of the  
new era of  
freedom, the birth of Young Turkey. That lusty infant was just one year old.  
The decorations were almost the only signs of rejoicing. The new regime had not  
touched  
the life of the good people of Akka beyond certain externals. They permitted  
themselves to use  
firearms and to criticise the Government, they considered themselves entitled  
to a little more  
licence and disorder, and a peasant who before would have humbly dismounted  
when his  
Excellency the Mutessarif passed by, now rode on his way. This was how the  
Constitution was  
understood in Akka. On the other hand, it was vaguely suspected by a large  
proportion of the  
Mohammedan population that the security of Islam was threatened by the  
new-fangled  
methods of government in Constantinople. The new Sultan was a shadow to them,  
whereas the  
old had made his hand felt. They distrusted the Committee of Union and  
Progress, and shook  
their heads over the doings in Constantinople in the coffee-houses. Others  
there were who had  
an equally vague belief in the new régime. The few Christians mocked at it,  
were sceptical of it,  
but blessed it.  
Be this as it may, there was a show of jubilation on this hot April day. The  
red flags over the  
gateway of the old khan of the town, which tradition says was a nuns' cloister  
in the days of  
Richard the Lion-Heart, rose and fell languidly on the warm wind as a man in a  
black fez and  
European dress entered the square in front of it, took a seat on one of the  
rush-bottomed stools  
of the little coffee-house opposite, and unfurled a newspaper, settling his  
spectacles on his  
nose. The other coffee-drinkers exchanged greetings with him, but without much  
cordiality. He  
was a stranger – to judge by his silky black beard and fez – most probably

a Persian.

A young Syrian lolling at a table near by remarked with a scarcely lowered voice –

"An Irani, by Allah, come to see the Persian god!" He spat and uttered some foul references.

But the stranger read on, unperturbed, drank his coffee slowly, read his paper, paid his metallique, saluted the company courteously, and crossed the sunny square towards the khan.

Beyond the gateway the sun beat fiercely into the courtyard. Some beasts reposed in the shadow of the arcading, while some half-dozen camels were watering at the tank in the centre of the court, sucking up the muddy liquid into their throats through their loose and heavy lips with a hissing sound.

An uneven stone stairway led to the guest-rooms above, once the living-cells of mediaeval nuns, and up this stairway the man in the black fez went. The sun made deep shadows – if the courtyard was flooded with hot light, the cloister above was pleasantly cool and dark. One or two rusty petroleum tins filled with flowers – an ivy geranium and a carnation plant – placed here and there where they would catch the sunlight between the columns, spoke of permanent residents in this abode of wanderers; otherwise the rooms were hired out to wayfarers, native merchants, and sailors. At one of the doors so marked, the man in the black fez halted, then rapped. A quavering voice answered him in Arabic.

"Mm?" (Who is there).

"Man" (I), he answered, in Persian.

"Deign to enter," replied the quavering voice.

The man with the black fez obeyed.

An old, old man, whose scanty white hair flowed half-way to his waist beneath his turban, sat

on a bed within the simple little room. He wore the native Persian dress. This bed, a wooden chest or two, a basin, a divan spread with a rug and some faded cushions, were the only pieces of furniture; an elaborate specimen of Persian script in black and gold, framed and hung on the wall, was the only ornament which the room boasted, except for a glassful of scented stocks and coral-plant which stood on the wide sill.

On the divan a man in a European morning-suit and a fez was seated. At the

newcomer's

entry he averted his head quickly, as one who had no wish to be recognised.

"Fear not, Excellency," said the old man on the bed, in Arabic.

"Among the children of Baha there is no treachery to a guest. And this my friend is but newly come from Persia."

Then he greeted the man with the spectacles warmly.

"Allahu Abba!" (God is most bright).

"Allahu Abba!" returned the other. He spoke in Persian, and after the usual greetings had

been rapidly exchanged, looked inquiringly at the man who had averted his face.

"He is one of us?"

"No – a seeker. Inshallah, he may discover the great Light." He turned to his first guest and

repeated what he had said.

The newcomer added gravely in Arabic –

"Then he is in the first of the seven valleys, of which it was said, 'Not until the traveller

migrates from himself and has accomplished these journeys will he arrive at the sea of

nearness and union, or taste of the peerless Wine. The Steed upon which to journey through

the Valley of Search, is Patience.' "

"Well said," put in the old man.

The newcomer stroked his silky black beard.

"I admire your Arabic, effendi," said the first guest. And the words which you have uttered

are, I perceive, from a Sufi author."

"Nay, they were spoken by Baha 'Ullah himself in answer to questions asked by Sheikh

Abdur Rahman at Bagdad."

"But Sheikh Abdur Rahman was a Sufi."

"That is why your Excellency thought the answer revealed by Baha 'Ullah to be Sufi. To the

Sunni he spake<sup>4</sup> as a Sunni, to the Sufi as a Sufi, to the Jew as a Jew, to the Christian as a

Christian – even as God Himself hath spoken. What are the different creeds save the different

languages of God? The Speaker is the same, but the words differ according to the medium. If

the medium be Our Lord Mohammed well, if the medium be His Holiness Jesus, well also."

"The mollahs would not approve of your commendable utterance, effendi."

"That does not trouble us. We look for the approval of God and our own hearts, and not that

of the mollahs."

It was said with delicate irony, and all three men laughed. "Are you as brave

in Persia?"

asked the first guest.

"Effendi-we have given our lives and those of our children – yes, even the honour of our wives and daughters has been sacrificed for the truth."

The other man looked at him sharply.

"I have been ready to give as much for freedom."

"There is only one complete freedom," said the Persian. "That is freedom from the tyranny of

one's prejudices. Love and fellowship are the true freedom; there is no other."

"I have worked for political freedom."

"Do you think we have not worked for that also? But that is only one part of the greater

freedom." His eyes glowed through his spectacles. "The Blessed Perfection said concerning

this, 'Glory is not for him who loveth his native land, but glory is for him who loveth the world.' In

a city a man preserves order and harmony in his own household not that his family may be

enabled to devour their neighbours, but that they may live honourably as citizens. So it should

be with that greater city the world, and the families the nations. Turkey has set her house in

order, Persia has set her house in order, but it must be for the greater rather than the lesser

good, or disaster will ensue."

"Yes, yes – but what have you done?" asked the first guest abruptly. It was perhaps his

European blood which spoke, though he did not know it. "What have you done? We have exiled

Abdul Hamid. Have you anything but words to show?"

"Does a man die for words? What are we doing? We are working steadily in the Cause of

Unity. We have schools in the West as well as the East; we have a chain of believers all round

the world, so that in the West you may find Western men who are working steadily with us as

blood-brothers, in the East a Bahai may sojourn with Bahais in any country from Japan to India,

Sic.; soll heißen „spoke“

in the North there is a Great Power who has, by the grace of Allah, given secret support to our

emissaries because they see in us the apostles of progress in Islam. And in our own country

thousands of devoted believers have sprung from the blood of the martyrs, ready to sow

another bloody harvest if need be."

"The apostles of progress in Islam," repeated the other, as if the words impressed him.

Then he made a movement as if to brush the impression away. "Words, words," he said. "That

is what chokes us. It is choking Young Turkey. We talk of a thing, and imagine it done. In

Europe they do a thing, and talk of it afterwards. That's the paralysis which is on us – the paralysis of words."

"God's apostles of progress in Islam," repeated the Persian earnestly, paying no heed to the outburst. "What movement has ever lived among the children of Shem that was not religious?

What is the sword which pierces the heart of Young Turkey, of Young Persia? of enlightenment

all through Asia and Africa? It is fanaticism. Disbelief in God learnt in European cities is no

weapon to parry its thrusts. There is only one weapon which will prevail – a religion inspired by

God, a religion that burns up prejudice like a flame, that sets men's hearts on fire, that

intoxicates them with the wine of enthusiasm – the revelation of the '

Blessed Perfection, the command of God Himself."

He spoke with intense emotion; his eyes burnt with conviction, his spectacles making them unnaturally large.

"By Allah," cried the old man on the bed, in his shaking voice, "it is well said, it is the truth!

By Allah, it is the truth!"

There was a moment's silence, vibrant, charged with mental excitement, and then the light

died out of the eyes of the Persian, and his face resumed a more ordinary expression.

"And now, Mirza Mushkin," said he, "I beg you to show me the writing, if it is finished, for I

leave to-morrow."

The old man shuffled off the bed, and going to a wooden chest took from it, after a little

search, a roll of parchment-like paper. Then he drew his tottering old limbs beneath him on the

bed again, and handed the roll to the Persian.

The latter, with a gracious movement, opened it so that Mirza Mushkin's other guest might

share the sight of it.

But both men uttered an exclamation of wonder and admiration as they looked. To

the Oriental, decorative calligraphy holds a high place among the arts; and the peacock in three coloured inks, its feathers composed of rows of exquisitely fine Persian writing embellished by fanciful curves which showed the adept's touch, was to them a triumph of handicraft, a masterpiece of imagination. To the initiated, too, the arrangement of the letters had a mystical significance – for each letter has its numerical value, and an esoteric meaning attaches to these.

"Can your Excellency read it?" asked the Persian.

"It is in Persian – nevertheless I can read a word here and there. What is it, by your permission?"

"It is a tablet revealed by the Blessed Perfection," said the Persian, in a reverent voice. Then he added very simply: "When my brother was put to death eighteen years ago in Teheran, he recited this tablet while tortures were applied; it was but newly revealed by the Blessed Perfection in Akka. And many of the bystanders were moved to tears and came afterwards to my uncle and became Bahai. I was one of them." He looked a long time at the odd decorative bird in silence. Perhaps memory had misted over his spectacles. "By the mercy of Allah," he ended.

"There is my signature," said the old man, in a piping voice. He put his thin scraggy finger in the corner. The Persian translated it. "Mushkin Kalam, slave of Abdul Baha." "They know that for my signature anywhere from Bombay to Damascus," said the Mirza, his aged face lit up with a senile smile. "For seventy years – for seventy years – I am very old."

"But your hand does not shake," said his guest.

"El hamdu'lillah! My hand is sure. They do not understand how to write nowadays; they are too quick. The values of the letters are nothing to them. They even write on tables. There is only one way to write perfectly, and that is to hold the paper in the palm of the hand. And when one is learning, one should practise by night – there is no light like candlelight. But there are few who can write – "

His thin voice was like a lament.

"The Mirza had great fame in Persia," said the man with the spectacles. "He was celebrated as a wit as well as a writer. He was welcome in the house of princes. But he left it all in order to share the banishment of the Blessed Perfection, and Abdul Baha after him." "Yes, all of it I left, el hamdu'lillah," repeated the old man. His sparse white hair, long like a woman's, betokening his rank, gave him an eldritch look, as of something not of this world. But there was a youthful triumph in the worn old eyes that had worked so long over the making of beautiful things. "I am content," he said. "I shall die in Akka, near Abdul Baha, near the holy places. He sent for me to come from India, whither I had been sent by the Blessed Perfection. He recalled me. He knew that I should want to die in Akka. I am content." He looked out towards the window, from which one could see the masts of vessels swaying gently against a gentian-blue sea, lost in dreams of his own, the child-like dreams of those who have lived so long that Heaven is as near to them as in their infancy. The Persian gave the other man a quick glance, which said: "He forgets that we are here." Aloud he said, "I leave to-morrow for Persia; if your Excellency comes to Teheran, I shall hope to offer you hospitality." He produced a card, upon which was written a name in Persian, Arabic, and French. The other man read it in silence, and then produced his own pocketbook, from which he too extracted a card. "Your Highness will forgive me if I ask you to let no one see this card," said he. "But I have the Mirza's word for it that I can trust a Bahai. I have reasons which make it necessary that I should conceal my stay in Akka." The Persian read the name. "I have seen the name of Schmidt Pasha in the Turkish newspapers, Excellence." He put the card into an inner recess of his notebook. "It was in a worthy cause, Inshallah, it will serve a worthier cause yet." He placed five Turkish pounds beside the still dreaming calligraphist, and with a salutation quietly withdrew. At the closing of the door, Mirza Mushkin came back to his surroundings with a start.

"The prince is gone," said Schmidt Pasha.

"A lot of people are coming," said Sabra, lifting her brown eyes, wet with tears, to the horizon. "Look along the ramparts. Noureddin and his cousin are with them; I can see their black fezes, and I should know Noureddin's walk anywhere. And so is that old man with the bent head we met in their house—Mirza Hosseyn." Approaching slowly along the ramparts were some five or six men. Underwood saw that they were all Persians by the dress of the older men. But at a slight distance before the others walked a single figure. He was clothed in a long, loose iron-grey coat, beneath which his dress was white, as was his turban. The rest walked behind, with their hands folded beneath their hearts and their heads slightly bent. Presently the figure in front paused, and turning, addressed a few words to one of the party. Noureddin suddenly detached himself, and came swiftly towards the wall beneath which Sabra and Underwood were seated. His eyes were shining, his voice breathless.

"Mr. Robert! Mr. Underwood! Will you come? The Master has told me to fetch you. I told him that you were the friend of Mr. Whitby, and he said, 'Bring him to me.'" Underwood rose with the young Persian's eager help, and made his way, as quickly as his crutches would let him, to where the little group stood. Before him stood the figure with the iron-grey cloak. His beard was white, his hair, which was long, was doubled up beneath his turban, from which a snowy strand or two escaped. Underwood met the penetrating and kindly gaze of a pair of blue eyes set beneath overhanging eyebrows. It was one of the most commanding countenances that he had ever seen. Strength was in every line of it. The transparency of the skin showed the spirit triumphing over a somewhat tired body; his erect, dignified carriage, keen self-possession, and look of transcendent sweetness, that the conquest was continual and complete. The nose was hooked, and very cleanly chiselled; there were lines of gentle humour about his eyes. The whole aspect of the man gave an impression of indomitable will, mingled with something difficult to define,

which made him lovable. Spirituality is an abused word, but it might stand for it.

"Please tell the effendi that I am glad to have the opportunity of thanking him in person for the fruit and flowers which he sent."

The man in the iron-grey cloak spoke. His voice was sonorous and yet sweet.

"He says that it is nothing. That he is pleased to serve you. That Christ has commanded us

to serve each other, whether the creed and nation of those we serve be the same as our own or

not. He says that he is glad that you have come to the Mountain of God."

"Please say, Nouredin, that I should like to call on him one day if he will allow me to do so."

"It is allowed," said Nouredin.

The little procession moved on in the glare of the noonday, the figure of Abdul Baha moving

in front, white and silver against the stainless blue.

"Was the old man who walked first the One they call the Master?" asked Sabra, standing up

to look after them as soon as Underwood returned.

"Old man?" repeated Underwood. Then he realised that the strength and sunlight on the

face of the man with whom he had spoken had somehow given him the impression of eternal

youth and beauty. Then he added, "Yes, that was he."

The garden of the Rizwan lay in the fork of the river Namein, or Belus, which winds

sluggishly down to the sea on either side of the flowery island, to unite its streams again before

emptying itself over long, flat sands into the sea. The carriage stopped at a wooden gate.

Nouredin dismounted, and had to knock several times before there was a reply.

At last,

however, the door was unbolted, and the young Persian came back to help Underwood to

dismount from the high vehicle.

An old woman, muffled up to the eyes, admitted them into a little garden over a wooden

bridge, and then disappeared down the flower-bordered walks like a rusty black ghost. The

sirocco lay heavy still upon the earth, the sky was obscured, and the heat made a thick pall of

the sky. In this sultry, moist, and sullen atmosphere, the colours of the garden seemed to glow

with a light of their own. The oranges that hung on the trees shone golden under their glossy

leaves, the coral plant flamed in the grey air, the lilies rose transcendently

white, the roses were  
audaciously red. Verbenas, geraniums, jasmine, a riot and tangle of other  
sub-tropical plants,  
daturas, oleanders, and the flaming glory of the bougainvillaea, made a rare  
and beautiful  
paradise of this island set in a waste. Noureddin told Underwood that it had  
been tilled by the  
Persian exiles as soon as the rigour of their gaolers permitted it, in order  
that their beloved  
leader, Baha 'Ullah, might come sometimes from the stifling streets of the  
penal town where he  
was confined, to breathe the purer air and sweeter fragrances of the little  
pleasaunce. So this  
garden of love was planted after the Persian fashion in beds divided from each  
other by tiles  
and interlacing paths, over the ordered primness of which, here and there deft  
gardeners had  
allowed the marigolds to spill their gold in audacious and spendthrift patches.  
Noureddin excused himself to his guests for a moment, and following the centre  
path they  
found themselves in a little paved court by the river's edge, shaded by two  
great mulberry trees,  
around which wide wooden benches painted blue and white had been spread with  
carpets for  
the reception of the foreign guests; carpets made fifty years ago on hand-loom  
by cunning  
master-workmen in distant Tabriz.

Noureddin rejoined them a moment later, followed by the old woman, who bore a  
large  
trayful of freshly picked lettuces, and in the midst of them a china bowl full  
of a clear amber  
liquid. This last proved to be sweetened vinegar.  
"I went to fetch you these," said Noureddin. "It is a Persian custom. We dip  
the lettuces in  
the vinegar and eat them so. Rizwaniya will be sorry she is not here. She is  
very greedy,  
Rizwaniya."  
"Oh, we'll take some back to her," Sabra exclaimed, with a smile. "Poor darling  
Rizwaniya!"  
Presently she uttered a little exclamation, for down the middle of the court,  
in a marble  
channel, a stream of water was flowing. It made its plashing way down the steps  
which led to  
the river. It was fed from a small white fountain in the scented garden above,  
which was now  
sending a crystal jet into the air.

"Is it magic, Nouredin?"

"No, it is the horse. It is working the wheel which sets the fountain in motion."

"It's magical in its effect, anyway," she said.

The trickling, plashing water, the call of some peacocks at the farther end of the flowery

walks, the sleepy rustle of the garden in the still grey air, the enchanted atmosphere, the palms

on the opposite bank gently swaying as from an unfelt wind, produced a drowsiness in her that

was overpowering. Oblivion suddenly descended on her like a soft mantle, blotting out the little

courtyard, and the river, and the thick foliage of the ancient mulberries. She slept.

They walked slowly up the hill to her house.

He looked up at the mountain.

Its long ridge cut sharply into the satin-green sky; the pine trees and cypresses on its dusky

slope were dark as the plumage of black swans. Stately, benevolent, silent, the mountain

seemed almost a divine presence, with something of the brooding dignity of the vast images

carved by primitive races in the virgin rock to symbolise the income-prehensible.

"It is still to-night," said Sabra, lifting her head.

"Very still," he answered.

Moths fluttered past them. Fireflies carried their fugitive lights before them like flying sparks

of blue flame, hither and thither, as if without purpose.

They turned in at the gate of her villa. Larifé was in the porch, wondering at their belated

coming.

"It is good to be here again," Underwood said simply, as he sat at the table.

"It's not much of a meal, I'm afraid," she responded.

"I love your little dinners. It isn't that. It's you. I've missed you."

"And I you," she replied sincerely.

"Do you remember my first meal here – lunch, wasn't it? – and how Whitby was expected,

but didn't turn up?"

"Mr. Whitby! It seems a year ago since I met him with you at the hotel. And now he is in

Teheran – or should be."

"Yes, the Persians have had news of him."

"I can't understand," said she, "how a man like Mr. Whitby – " She paused.

"Well, I think I can. I can understand how a man of Whitby's temperament could become a

mystic instead of only a scholar. Did I tell you of my studies with Nouredin?"

"Yes, you did."

"I scribbled down some disjointed verses of the translations he showed me, because I thought they might interest you. Read them, and then tell me if they remind you of anything."

She took the page of manuscript which he drew from his pocket, and read it by the light of the red-shaded candles.

"O Son of Spirit! I have created thee rich: Why dost thou make thyself poor? Noble have I made thee: Why dost thou degrade thyself? Of the essence of Knowledge have I manifested thee: Why searchest thou for another than Me? From the clay of Love I have kneaded thee: Why seekest thou another? Turn thy sight unto thyself that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, Powerful, Mighty, and Supreme."

"O Son of the Highest Sight! I have placed within thee a spirit from Me, that thou mightest be

My Lover: Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought to love another?"

"O Son of the Supreme! I made death for thee as glad-tidings: Why art thou in despair at its

approach? I made light for thee a splendour: Why dost thou hide from it?"

"O Son of Existence! Thy heart is My Home; purify it for My Descent: Thy spirit is My

Outlook; prepare it for My Manifestation."

"O Son of Clay! Be blind, that thou mayest behold My Beauty: Be deaf, that thou mayest

hear My Sweet Melody and Voice: Be ignorant, that thou mayest enjoy a portion from My

Knowledge: Be poor, that thou mayest obtain an everlasting share from the sea of My Eternal Wealth."

"O My Children! I fear that, without having enjoyed the melody of the Nightingale, ye may

return to the region of mortality; and, without seeing the beauty of the Rose, ye may return to the water and clay."

"O Son of Passion! The people of wisdom and insight struggled for years, and failed to attain

the meeting of the Exalted One, hastened all their lives and did not see the Most Beautiful;

whilst thou hast arrived at home without hastening, and hast attained the goal without search.

Yet, after gaining all these degrees and ranks, thou wert so veiled with thyself that thine eyes

did not behold the Beauty of the Beloved, and thine hand did not reach to the

Hem of the

Friend. Therefore marvel at this, O possessors of insight!"

"O Servant of the World! At many a dawn has the breeze of My Grace passed through thee, and found thee asleep upon the bed of neglect, and returning back it wept over thy condition."

"It sounds pretty," she said, – "and poetical. Yes, it reminds me of the Imitation of Christ, if that's what you mean. My aunt had one."

"And you read it?"

"I used to read it in church during the sermon as a variation to the funeral and marriage services, and the churcing of women, with the psalm that all men are liars. I didn't understand it much. I always imagined that the lover who would eventually marry me would talk like that. I made a childish confusion of the thing. I've often told you I've no religious sense – not a scrap.

You have, I believe, or you couldn't enjoy talking to the Persians so much.

Tell me, you saw

Abdul Baha?"

"Yes," he said, taking the paper again and returning it to his pocket.

"Won't you leave it with me?" she said. "I'd like to read it more carefully and see if I can make any sense out of it."

He smiled, and handed the paper to her.

"What did you think of him?" she asked, reverting to her question, when dinner was over and they sat in the garden. "Of the Master, I mean."

"I think," he said, more to himself than to her, "that he is one of the sails of the world."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, some one – is it Maeterlinck? – once said that there were some rare spirits that carry the ship of humanity forward – beautiful ardent sails that fill with the winds of enthusiasm and genius and bear the boat forward. One need never be afraid of crowding too much sail on – for every white and wind-eager sail there are millions of heavy and prudent souls that will provide the necessary ballast and keep the keel down in the waters of matter-of-fact."

"But supposing that a generation came which produced nothing but sails?" she asked, lifting her cigarette from her mouth.

"Then we should fly away into the ideal, I suppose."

"That would be uncomfortable for some of us," said Sabra, with a sigh. "I don't see anything

attractive in the prospect. Idealism is draughty. I hate idealists. They are usually people who don't know how to dress and belong to small societies that issue pamphlets and invite you to lunch at Eustace Miles'."

Underwood was somewhat chilled. Her persistent clinging to her hedonistic principles, her adoration of the pagan in life, her refusal to see anything admirable in the spiritual in human nature, was something more than inability to understand. She could understand, if she would.

She had understood, perhaps, once. But her blindness was obstinate. She defied the gods,

while she suffered. Like Prometheus, who pilfered the fire to animate a thing of flesh, she had

risked her all in order to lavish it upon that which was least worthy. Had

Prometheus stolen the

divine fire for a godlike use, he need never have known the tortures of the vulture.

"Surely, Sabra, you believe in some kind of idealism?" he said. "I mean some lifting of the

head of the brute beast in us, towards a higher horizon. Good Lord! If it weren't for that – "

"You wouldn't be able to stand living," she ended for him, in a softer voice.

"Yes, I

understand. But ... at best, it's a kind of consolation, a cowardice, this spiritual life. The Persians

are children. They walk like little Tommy-head-in-Air. And you have the gift for it too. You, and

people like Father Patrick on the hill, and some of these German peasants. ...

But I can't find

any pleasure in it, and never should. It's not an acquired taste, like tomatoes. It's got to be born

in you. It wasn't born in me, and there's an end of it. They say women are religious. I think they

are not. They like it as a soporific, an anaesthetic, or a mild form of intoxicant. What do most

women pray about? Their lovers, or their husbands, or their children. Is that spiritual, or is it a

sort of fetish-propitiation?"

She drummed her fingers upon her knee and smoked without further speech.

Then, after there had been a long silence between them, she lifted the cigarette from her

mouth and spoke again, in a softer, more wistful voice.

"And yet," she confessed, – "I don't know. There must be something in it, after all."

"Why not?" said Underwood. "I prefer the fighting chance."

— The Mountain of God (Used by permission of the curator)