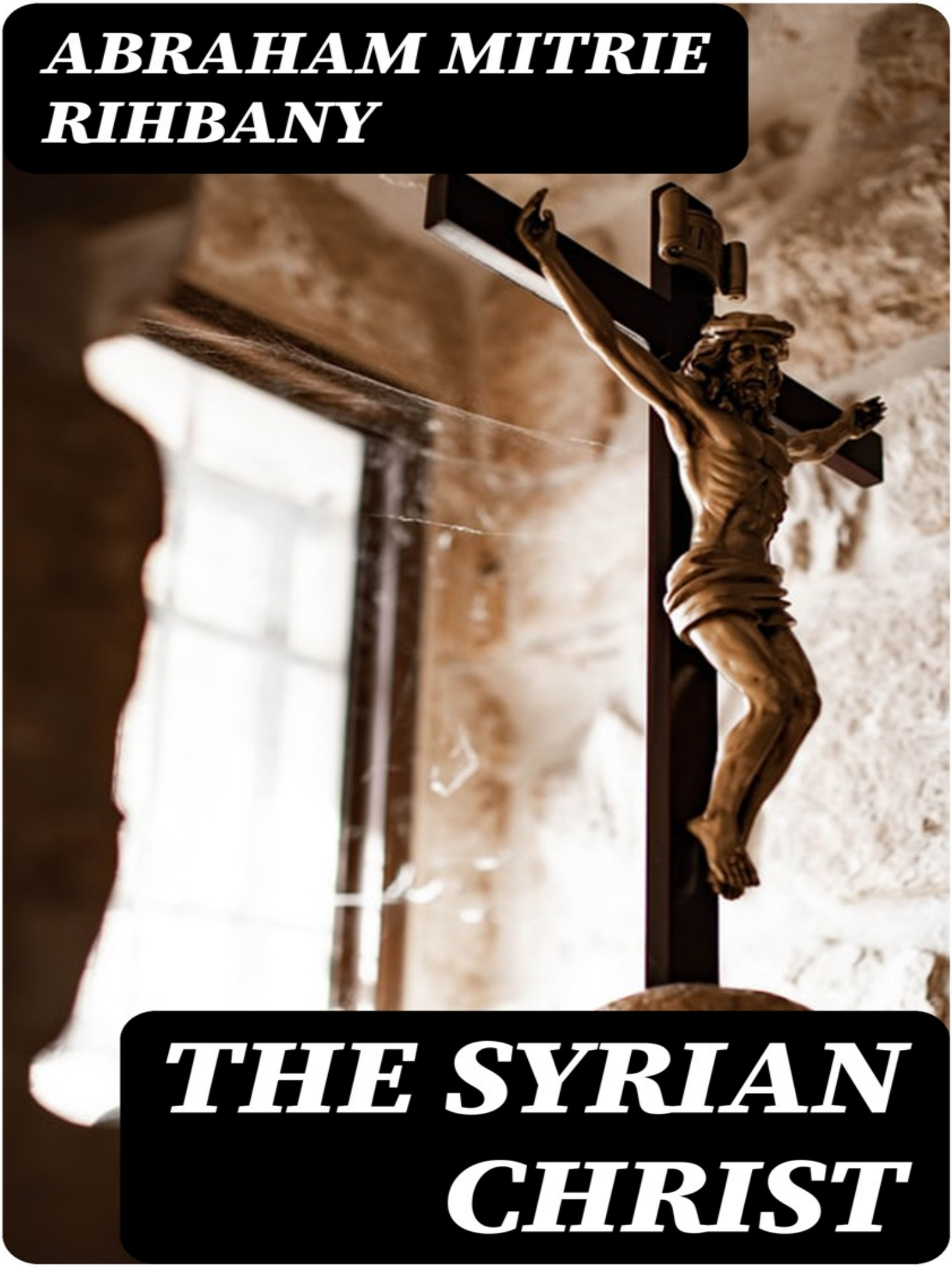
ABRAHAM MITRIE RIHBANY



THE SYRIAN CHRIST

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CHAPTER I

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SON OF THE EAST

Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the spirit of God, seer, teacher of the verities of the spiritual life, and preacher of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, is, in a higher sense, "a man without a country." As a prophet and a seer Jesus belongs to all races and all ages. Wherever the minds of men respond to simple truth, wherever the hearts of men thrill with pure love, wherever a temple of religion is dedicated to the worship of God and the service of man, there is Jesus' country and there are his friends. Therefore, in speaking of Jesus as the son of a certain country, I do not mean in the least to localize his Gospel, or to set bounds and limits to the flow of his spirit and the workings of his love.

Nor is it my aim in these chapters to imitate the astute theologians by wrestling with the problem of Jesus' personality. To me the secret of personality, human and divine, is an impenetrable mystery. My more modest purpose in this writing is to remind the reader that, whatever else Jesus was, as regards his modes of thought and life and his method of teaching, he was a Syrian of the Syrians. According to authentic history Jesus never saw any other country than Palestine. There he was born; there he grew up to manhood, taught his Gospel, and died for it.

It is most natural, then, that Gospel truths should have come down to the succeeding generations—and to the

nations of the West—cast in Oriental moulds of thought, and intimately intermingled with the simple domestic and social habits of Syria. The gold of the Gospel carries with it the sand and dust of its original home.

From the foregoing, therefore, it may be seen that my reason for undertaking to throw fresh light on the life and teachings of Christ, and other portions of the Bible whose correct understanding depends on accurate knowledge of their original environment, is not any claim on my part to great learning or a profound insight into the spiritual mysteries of the Gospel. The real reason is rather an accident of birth. From the fact that I was born not far from where the Master was born, and brought up under almost the identical conditions under which he lived, I have an "inside view" of the Bible which, by the nature of things, a Westerner cannot have. And I know that the conditions of life in Syria of to-day are essentially as they were in the time of Christ, not from the study of the mutilated tablets of the archæologist and the antiquarian, precious as such discoveries are, but from the simple fact that, as a sojourner in this Western world, whenever I open my Bible it reads like a letter from home.

Its unrestrained effusiveness of expression; its vivid, almost flashy and fantastic imagery; its naïve narrations; the rugged unstudied simplicity of its parables; its unconventional (and to the more modest West rather unseemly) portrayal of certain human relations; as well as its all-permeating spiritual mysticism,—so far as these qualities are concerned, the Bible might all have been

written in my primitive village home, on the western slopes of Mount Lebanon some thirty years ago.

Nor do I mean to assert or even to imply that the Western world has never succeeded in knowing the mind of Christ. Such an assertion would do violent injustice, not only to the Occidental mind, but to the Gospel itself as well, by making it an enigma, utterly foreign to the native spirituality of the majority of mankind. But what I have learned from intimate associations with the Western mind, during almost a score of years in the American pulpit, is that, with the exception of the few specialists, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a people to understand fully a literature which has not sprung from that people's own racial life. As a repository of divine revelation the Bible knows no geographical limits. Its spiritual truths are from God to man. But as a literature the Bible is an imported article in the Western world, especially in the home of the Anglo-Saxon race. The language of the Scriptures, the mentality and the habits of life which form the setting of their spiritual precepts, and the mystic atmosphere of those precepts themselves, have come forth from the soul of a people far removed from the races of the West in almost all the modes of its earthly life.

You cannot study the life of a people successfully from the outside. You may by so doing succeed in discerning the few fundamental traits of character in their local colors, and in satisfying your curiosity with surface observations of the general modes of behavior; but the little things, the common things, those subtle connectives in the social vocabulary of a people, those agencies which are born and

not made, and which give a race its rich distinctiveness, are bound to elude your grasp. There is so much in the life of a people which a stranger to that people must receive by way of unconscious absorption. Like a little child, he must learn so many things by involuntary imitation. An outside observer, though wise, is only a photographer. He deals with externals. He can be converted into an artist and portray the life of a race by working from the soul outward, only through long, actual, and sympathetic associations with that race.

From the foregoing it may be seen that I deem it rather hazardous for a six-weeks tourist in that country to publish a book on the *life* of Syria. A first-class camera and "an eye to business" are hardly sufficient qualifications for the undertaking of such a task. It is very easy, indeed, to take a photograph, but not so easy to relate such a picture to the inner life of a race, and to know what moral and social forces lie behind such externals. The hasty traveler may easily state what certain modes of thought and life in a strange land mean to *him*, but does that necessarily mean that *his* understanding of such things is also the understanding of the *people* of that land themselves?

With the passing of the years, this thought gains in significance with me, as a Syrian immigrant. At about the end of my second year of residence in this country, I felt confident that I could write a book on America and the Americans whose accuracy no one could challenge. It was so easy for me to grasp the significance of certain general aspects of American life that I felt I was fully competent to state how the American people lived, what their racial,

political, and religious tendencies were, what their idioms of speech meant, and to interpret their amorous, martial, dolorous, and joyous moods with perfect accuracy and ease. But now, after a residence of about twenty-four years in America—years which I have spent in most intimate association with Americans, largely of the "original stock"—I do not feel half so confident that I am qualified to write such a book. The more intimate I become with American thought, the deeper I penetrate the American spirit, the more enlightened my associations become with American fathers, mothers, and children in the joys and sorrows of life, the more fully do I realize how extremely difficult, if not impossible, it is for one to interpret successfully the life of an alien people before one has actually *lived it* himself.

Many Westerners have written very meritorious books on the thought and life of the East. But these are not of the "tourist" type. Such writers have been those who, first, had the initial wisdom to realize that the beggars for *bakhsheesh* in the thoroughfares of Syrian cities, and those who hitch a woman with an ox to the plough in some dark recesses of Palestine, did not possibly represent the deep soul of that ancient East, which gave birth to the Bible and to the glorious company of prophets, apostles, and saints. Second, such writers knew, also, that the fine roots of a people's life do not lie on the surface. Such feeders of life are both deep and fine; not only long residence among a people, but intimate association and genuine sympathy with them are necessary to reveal to a stranger the hidden meaning of their life. Social life, like biological life, energizes from within, and from within it must be studied.

And it is those common things of Syrian life, so indissolubly interwoven with the spiritual truths of the Bible, which cause the Western readers of holy writ to stumble, and which rob those truths for them of much of their richness. By sheer force of genius, the aggressive, systematic Anglo-Saxon mind seeks to press into logical unity and creedal uniformity those undesigned, artless, and most natural manifestations of Oriental life, in order to "understand the Scriptures."

"Yet show I unto you a more excellent way," by personally conducting you into the inner chambers of Syrian life, and showing you, if I can, how simple it is for a humble fellow countryman of Christ to understand those social phases of the Scriptural passages which so greatly puzzle the august minds of the West.

CHAPTER II

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BIRTH OF A MAN CHILD

In the Gospel story of Jesus' life there is not a single incident that is not in perfect harmony with the prevailing modes of thought and the current speech of the land of its origin. I do not know how many times I heard it stated in my native land and at our own fireside that heavenly messengers in the forms of patron saints or angels came to pious, childless wives, in dreams and visions, and cheered

them with the promise of maternity. It was nothing uncommon for such women to spend a whole night in a shrine "wrestling in prayer," either with the blessed Virgin or some other saint, for such a divine assurance; and I remember a few of my own kindred to have done so.

Perhaps the most romantic religious practice in this connection is the *zeara*. Interpreted literally, the word *zeara* means simply a visit. In its social use it is the equivalent of a call of long or short duration. But religiously the *zeara* means a pilgrimage to a shrine. However, strictly speaking, the word "pilgrimage" means to the Syrians a journey of great religious significance whose supreme purpose is the securing of a blessing for the pilgrim, with no reference to a special need. The *zeara* is a pilgrimage with a specific purpose. The *zayir* (visitor to a shrine) comes seeking either to be healed of a certain ailment, to atone for a sin, or to be divinely helped in some other way. Unlike a pilgrimage also, a *zeara* may be made by one person in behalf of another. When, for example, a person is too ill to travel, or is indifferent to a spiritual need which such a visit is supposed to fill, his parents or other close friends may make a *zeara* in his behalf. But much more often a *zeara* is undertaken by women for the purpose of securing the blessing of fecundity, or consecrating an approaching issue of wedlock (if it should prove to be a male) to God, and to the patron saint of the visited sanctuary.

Again the word "pilgrimage" is used only to describe a visit by a Christian to Jerusalem, or by a Mohammedan to Mecca, while the *zeara* describes a visit to any one of the lesser shrines.

The happy journey is often made on foot, the parties most concerned walking all the way "on the flesh of their feet"; that is, with neither shoes nor sandals on. This great sacrifice is made as a mark of sincere humility which is deemed to be pleasing to God and his holy saints. However, the wearing of shoes and even the use of mounts is not considered a sinful practice on such occasions, and is indulged in by many of the well-to-do families. The state of the heart is, of course, the chief thing to be considered.

In the fourth chapter of the Second Book of Kings we are told that "the Shunammite woman" used an ass when she sought Elisha to restore her dead son to her. In the twenty-second verse (the Revised Version), we are told, "And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the servants, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.... Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slacken me not the riding, except I bid thee. So she went, and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel."

Fasting and prayer on the way are often pronounced phases of a *zeara*. However, wine-drinking by the men in the company and noisy gayety are not deemed altogether incompatible with the solemnity of the occasion. The pious visitors carry with them presents to the abbot and to the monks who serve the shrine. A silver or even gold candlestick, or a crown of either metal for the saint, is also carried to the altar. The young mother in whose behalf the *zeara* is undertaken is tenderly cared for by every member of the party. She is "the chosen vessel of the Lord."

The *zûwar* (visitors) remain at the holy shrine for one or two nights, or until the "presence" is revealed; that is, until the saint manifests himself. The prayerfully longed-for manifestation comes almost invariably in a dream, either to the mother or some other worthy in the party. How like the story of Joseph all this is! In the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, the twentieth verse, it is said of Joseph, "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins."

In this manner the promise is made to the waiting mother, who "keeps these things, and ponders them in her heart."

The promise thus secured, the mother and the father vow that the child shall be a *nedher*; that is, consecrated to the saint who made the promise to the mother. The vow may mean one of several things. Either that a sum of money be "given to the saint" upon the advent of the child, or that the child be carried to the same sanctuary on another *zeara* with gifts, and so forth, or that his hair will not be cut until he is seven years old, and then cut for the first time before the image of his patron saint at the shrine, or some other act of pious fulfillment.

The last form of a vow, the consecration of the hair of the head for a certain period, is practiced by men of all ages. The vow is made as a petition for healing from a serious illness, rescue from danger, or purely as an act of

consecration. In the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Acts, the eighteenth verse, we have the statement: "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; *having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow*." It was also in connection with this practice that Paul was induced by the "brethren" at Jerusalem to make a compromise which cost him dearly. In the twenty-first chapter of Acts, the twenty-third verse, we are told that those brethren said to Paul, "We have four men who have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges for them, that they may *shave their heads*."

The last service of this kind which I attended in Syria was for a cousin of mine, a boy of twelve, who was a *nedher*, or as the word is rendered in the English Bible, a Nazarite. We assembled in the church of St. George of Sûk. The occasion was very solemn. A mass was celebrated after the order of the Greek Orthodox Church. Near the close of the service the tender lad was brought by his parents in front of the Royal Door at the altar. While repeating a prayer, the priest cut the hair on the crown of the boy's head with the scissors, in the shape of a cross. The simple act released the child and his parents of their solemn vow.

"Twentieth-century culture" is prone to call all such practices superstitions. So they are to a large extent. But I deem it the higher duty of this culture to *interpret* sympathetically rather than to condemn superstition in a sweeping fashion. I am a lover of a rational theology and a reasonable faith, but I feel that in our enthusiasm for such a

theology and such a faith we often fail to appreciate the deep spiritual longing which is expressed in superstitious forms of worship. What is there in such religious practices as those I have mentioned but the expression of the heart-burning of those parents for the spiritual welfare and security of their children? What do we find here but evidences of a deep and sincere yearning for divine blessings to come upon the family and the home? Thoughts of God at the marriage altar; thoughts of God when the promise of parenthood becomes evident; thoughts of God when a child comes into the world; thoughts of God and of his holy prophets and saints as friends and companions in all the changes and chances of the world. Here the challenge to modern rationalism is not to content itself with rebuking superstitions, but to give the world deeper spiritual visions than those which superstitions reveal, and to compass childhood and youth by the gracious presence of the living God.

In a most literal sense we always understood the saying of the psalmist, "Children are a heritage from the Lord." Above and beyond all natural agencies, it was He who turned barrenness to fecundity and worked the miracle of birth. To us every birth was miraculous, and childlessness an evidence of divine disfavor. From this it may be inferred how tenderly and reverently agreeable to the Syrian ear is the angel's salutation to Mary, "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women!—Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son."[1]

A miracle? Yes. But a miracle means one thing to your Western science, which seeks to know what nature is and does by dealing with secondary causes, and quite another thing to an Oriental, to whom God's will is the law and gospel of nature. In times of intellectual trouble this man takes refuge in his all-embracing faith,—the faith that to God all things are possible.

The Oriental does not try to meet an assault upon his belief in miracles by seeking to establish the historicity of concrete reports of miracles. His poetical, mystical temperament seeks its ends in another way. Relying upon his fundamental faith in the omnipotence of God, he throws the burden of proof upon his assailant by challenging him to substantiate his *denial* of the miracles. So did Paul (in the twenty-sixth chapter of the Book of Acts) put his opponents at a great disadvantage by asking, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"

But the story of Jesus' birth and kindred Bible records disclose not only the predisposition of the Syrian mind to accept miracles as divine acts, without critical examination, but also its attitude toward conception and birth,—an attitude which differs fundamentally from that of the Anglo-Saxon mind. With the feeling of one who has been reminded of having ignorantly committed an improper act, I remember the time when kind American friends admonished me not to read from the pulpit such scriptural passages as detailed the accounts of conception and birth, but only to allude to them in a general way. I learned in a very short time to obey the kindly advice, but it was a long time before

I could swing my psychology around and understand why in America such narratives were so greatly modified in transmission.

The very fact that such stories are found in the Bible shows that in my native land no such sifting of these narratives is ever undertaken when they are read to the people. From childhood I had been accustomed to hear them read at our church, related at the fireside, and discussed reverently by men and women at all times and places. There is nothing in the phraseology of such statements which is not in perfect harmony with the common, everyday speech of my people.

To the Syrians, as I say, "children are a heritage from the Lord." From the days of Israel to the present time, barrenness has been looked upon as a sign of divine disfavor, an intolerable calamity. Rachel's cry, "Give me children, or else I die,"[2] does not exaggerate the agony of a childless Syrian wife. When Rebecca was about to depart from her father's house to become Isaac's wife, her mother's ardent and effusively expressed wish for her was, "Be thou the mother of thousands of millions."[3] This mother's last message to her daughter was not spoken in a corner. I can see her following the bride to the door, lifting her open palms and turning her face toward heaven, and making her affectionate petition in the hearing of a multitude of guests, who must have echoed her words in chorus.

In the congratulations of guests at a marriage feast the central wish for the bridegroom and bride is invariably thus expressed: "May you be happy, live long, and have many

children!" And what contrasts very sharply with the American reticence in such matters is the fact that shortly after the wedding, the friends of the young couple, both men and women, begin to ask them about their "prospects" for an heir. No more does a prospective mother undertake in any way to disguise the signs of the approaching event, than an American lady to conceal her engagement ring. Much mirth is enjoyed in such cases, also, when friends and neighbors, by consulting the stars, or computing the number of letters in the names of the parents and the month in which the miracle of conception is supposed to have occurred, undertake to foretell whether the promised offspring will be a son or a daughter. In that part of the country where I was brought up, such wise prognosticators believed, and made us all believe, that if the calculations resulted in an odd number the birth would be a son, but if in an even number, a daughter, which, as a rule, is not considered so desirable.

Back of all these social traits, and beyond the free realism of the Syrian in speaking of conception and birth, lies a deeper fact. To Eastern peoples, especially the Semites, reproduction in all the world of life is profoundly sacred. It is God's life reproducing itself in the life of man and in the living world below man; therefore the evidences of this reproduction should be looked upon and spoken of with rejoicing.

Notwithstanding the many and fundamental intellectual changes which I have undergone in this country of my adoption, I count as among the most precious memories of my childhood my going with my father to the vineyard, just

as the vines began to "come out," and hearing him say as he touched the swelling buds, "Blessed be the Creator. He is the Supreme Giver. May He protect the blessed increase." Of this I almost always think when I read the words of the psalmist, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof!"

Now I do not feel at all inclined to say whether the undisguised realism of the Orientals in speaking of reproduction is better than the delicate reserve of the Anglo-Saxons. In fact, I have been so reconstructed under Anglo-Saxon auspices as to feel that the excessive reserve of this race with regard to such things is not a serious fault, but rather the defect of a great virtue. My purpose is to show that the unreconstructed Oriental, to whom reproduction is the most sublime manifestation of God's life, cannot see why one should be ashamed to speak anywhere in the world of the fruits of wedlock, of a "woman with child." One might as well be ashamed to speak of the creative power as it reveals itself in the gardens of roses and the fruiting trees.

Here we have the background of the stories of Sarah, when the angel-guest prophesied fecundity for her in her old age; of Rebecca, and the wish of her mother for her, that she might become "the mother of thousands"; of Elizabeth, when the "babe leaped in her womb," as she saw her cousin Mary; and of the declaration of the angel to Joseph's spouse; "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son."

Here it is explained, also, why upon the birth of a "man-child," well-wishers troop into the house,—even on the very day of birth,—bring their presents, and congratulate the parents on the divine gift to them. It was because of this

custom that those strangers, the three "Wise Men" and Magi of the Far East, were permitted to come in and see the little Galilean family, while the mother was yet in childbed. So runs the Gospel narrative: "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts,—gold, frankincense, and myrrh."[4]

So also were the humble shepherds privileged to see the wondrous child shortly after birth. "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go to Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger."[5]

In the twelfth verse of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, the English version says, "And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Here the word "clothes" is somewhat misleading. The Arabic version gives a perfect rendering of the fact by saying, "Ye shall find a *swaddled* babe, *laid* in a manger."

According to general Syrian custom, in earliest infancy a child is not really clothed, it is only swaddled. Upon birth the infant is washed in tepid water by the midwife, then salted, or rubbed gently with salt pulverized in a stone mortar especially for the occasion. (The salt commonly used in Syrian homes is coarse-chipped.) Next the babe is sprinkled with *rehan*,—a powder made of dried myrtle leaves,—and then swaddled.

The swaddle is a piece of stout cloth about a yard square, to one corner of which is attached a long narrow band. The infant, with its arms pressed close to its sides, and its feet stretched full length and laid close together, is wrapped in the swaddle, and the narrow band wound around the little body, from the shoulders to the ankles, giving the little one the exact appearance of an Egyptian mummy. Only a few of the good things of this mortal life were more pleasant to me when I was a boy than to carry in my arms a swaddled babe. The "salted" and "peppered" little creature felt so soft and so light, and was so appealingly helpless, that to cuddle it was to me an unspeakable benediction.

Such was the "babe of Bethlehem" that was sought by the Wise Men and the shepherds in the wondrous story of the Nativity.

And in describing such Oriental customs it may be significant to point out that, in certain localities in Syria, to say to a person that he was not "salted" upon birth is to invite trouble. Only a *bendûq*, or the child of an unrecognized father, is so neglected. And here may be realized the full meaning of that terrible arraignment of Jerusalem in the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. The Holy City had done iniquity, and therefore ceased to be the legitimate daughter of Jehovah. So the prophet cries, "The Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, and say, Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity are of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother a Hittite. And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born—neither wast thou washed in water to supple[6]

thee; *thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all*. No eye pitied thee, to do any of these things for thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day thou wast born."

[1] Luke i: 28, 31.

[2] Gen. xxx; 1.

[3] Gen. xxiv: 60.

[4] Matt. ii: 11.

[5] Luke ii: 15-16.

[6] "Cleanse" in the Revised Version.

CHAPTER III

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THE STAR

How natural to the thought of the East the story of the "star of Bethlehem" is! To the Orientals "the heavens declare the glory of God," and the stars reveal many wondrous things to men. They are the messengers of good and evil, and objects of the loftiest idealization, as well as of the crudest superstitions. Those who have gazed upon the stars in the deep, clear Syrian heavens can find no difficulty in entering into the spirit of the majestic strains of the writer

of the eighth Psalm. "When I consider thy heavens," says this ancient singer, "the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Deeps beyond deeps are revealed through that dry, soft, and clear atmosphere of the "land of promise," yet the constellations seem as near to the beholder as parlor lamps. "My soul longeth" for the vision of the heavens from the heights of my native Lebanon, and the hills of Palestine. It is no wonder to me that my people have always considered the stars as guides and companions, and as awe-inspiring manifestations of the Creator's power, wisdom, and glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night sheweth knowledge."[1]

So great is the host of the stars seen by the naked eye in that land that the people of Syria have always likened a great multitude to the stars of heaven or the sand of the sea. Of a great assemblage of people we always said, "They are *methel-ennijoom*—like the stars" (in number). So it is written in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, the sixty-second verse, "And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were *as the stars of heaven for multitude*; because thou wouldst not obey the voice of the Lord thy God." According to that great narrative in Genesis, God promised Abraham that his progeny would be as the stars in number. In the fifteenth chapter, the fifth verse, it is said, "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." In

speaking of the omniscience of God the writer of the one hundred and forty-seventh Psalm says, "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite."

But the numberless lights of the firmament were brought even closer to us through the belief that they had vital connection with the lives of men on the earth. I was brought up to believe that every human being had a star in heaven which held the secret of his destiny and which watched over him wherever he went. In speaking of an amiable person it is said, "His star is attractive" (*nejmo jeddeeb*). Persons love one another when "their stars are in harmony." A person is in unfavorable circumstances when his star is in the sphere of "misfortune" (*nehiss*), and so forth. The stars indicated the time to us when we were traveling by night, marked the seasons, and thus fulfilled their Creator's purpose by serving "for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years."

In every community we had "star-gazers" who could tell each person's star. We placed much confidence in such mysterious men, who could "arrest" an absent person's star in its course and learn from it whether it was well or ill with the absent one.

Like a remote dream, it comes to me that as a child of about ten I went out one night with my mother to seek a "star-gazer" to locate my father's star and question the shining orb about him. My father had been away from home for some time, and owing to the meagerness of the means of communication in that country, especially in those days, we had no news of him at all. During that afternoon my

mother said that she felt "heavy-hearted" for no reason that she knew; therefore she feared that some ill must have befallen the head of our household, and sought to "know" whether her fear was well grounded. The "star-arrester," leaning against an aged mulberry tree, turned his eyes toward the stellar world, while his lips moved rapidly and silently as if he were repeating words of awful import. Presently he said, "I see him. He is sitting on a cushion, leaning against the wall and smoking his *narghile*. There are others with him, and he is in his usual health." The man took pains to point out the "star" to my mother, who, after much sympathetic effort, felt constrained to say that she did see what the star-gazer claimed he saw. But at any rate, mother declared that she was no longer "heavy-hearted."

In my most keen eagerness to see my father and his *narghile* in the star, at least for mere intellectual delight, I clung to the arm of the reader of the heavens like a frightened kitten, and insisted upon "seeing." The harder he tried to shake me off, the deeper did my organs of apprehension sink into his sleeve. At last the combined efforts of my mother and the heir of the ancient astrologers forced me to believe that I was "too young to behold such sights."

It was the excessive leaning of his people upon such practices that led Isaiah to cry, "Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flames."