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Victor Dingelstedt ^a

^a Corr. Member, R.S.G.S. ,

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THE YEZIDS.

By VICTOR DINGELSTEDT, Corr. Member, R.S.G.S.

(With a Map.)

THERE is less love than hatred and dislike between nations, and it is not so much antagonistic interests as ignorance and misconception that are at the bottom of it. Anything serves as a pretext for mutual hatred, and the pretext is the more easily found the less the parties know of each other. Among small but ancient nations, that have more particularly suffered from the ill-feeling of their neighbours and the world in general, and which still remain under a cloud of misconception, and are consequently objects of aversion, must be reckoned the Yezids, akin to the Kurds, but differing from them in their creed and manners. They are consequently known as devil-worshippers, and though the worship of the Devil, if not outwardly yet all the more sincerely in spirit, is not at all uncommon or severely reprehended even among the most Christian and civilised nations, yet the horror inspired in pious people at the very mention of respect for such a disreputable though fantastic personage is very great indeed. Do not we find in the monumental and otherwise really splendid encyclopædic work published in Edinburgh, the following information about these poor Yezids? "Yezidis," says Albrecht Socin, Ph.D., professor in Tübingen (vol. xvi. p. 49, *Encyclopædia Britannica*), "form the population of the Sinjar range." "He who encounters the uncanny figure of one of these people will hardly be able to restrain a slight shudder, especially if he remembers the graphic description of the Yezidi robbers in Morier's *Ayesha*." We confess to having no recollection of those terrible robbers, and we are convinced that a people is not to be fairly judged by its real, much less its imaginary, robbers. Unfortunately, in the whole encyclopædia of twenty-four big volumes, this is the only notice of the Yezids, which is the more to be deplored as they are neither robbers nor, strictly speaking, devil-worshippers. At any rate their Devil is not so black as he is painted. If it were only to redress the injustice done to them, the study of this small people would certainly have some attraction in the eyes of most readers of this journal; but there is also another motive for approaching it. The social and ecclesiastical organisation of the Yezids, their customs, habits, and ideas, certainly possess some historical and truly scientific interest. In their case we have to do, not with a savage people, like that of the interior of Western Australia, so graphically described in the *Magazine* by that indomitable traveller, the Hon. David Carnegie, nor with such devil-worshippers as the Kondhs and Kols in Central India (if they also are not calumniated), but with a remnant of an ancient, formerly rich and prosperous, community, long ago arrived at a certain degree of culture, but arrested in its progress by adverse circumstances, and now sadly contemplating the loss of its comparative prosperity and independence along

with all that is dear to them. It is a state the ancestors of many civilised nations have passed through, and it is also a fast disappearing state, of which, before long, hardly any vestige will remain. Though the subject of this paper is properly the Yezids, yet we may be allowed, perhaps, to speak occasionally of their congeners the Kurds, with whom they have much in common, but who detest them cordially.

Besides some personal knowledge the author of this article had opportunities of acquiring during his long sojourn in the Russian province of Erivan, partly inhabited by Yezids, he has gathered his principal information about this people from a reliable Russian source, viz., two contributions to the *Zapiski* of the Caucasian section of the I. Russian Geographical Society from the pen of Mr. Eghiazarof, who is very familiar with the Yezids, and by Mr. Kartsef, formerly Russian consul in Mosul. After a few words about the distribution, number, and language of the Yezids, we will speak about their religious and social organisation, their family life, their habits, and the position of women among them.

Geographical Distribution.—Kurds, under their ancient name Gadru, known in Persian writings as Kudraha, and as Kardoukhoui and Gorduaioi to the Greeks, inhabited from time immemorial the eastern Taurus, east of the Euphrates (not the Taurus in Cilicia), and the Zagros or Zagorus range. In course of time they spread farther, and now occupy a vast country limited on the west by the Euphrates, on the south by the plains of Mesopotamia and the mountains of Luristan, on the east by the chain of Takh-Verdy, and on the north by the Araxes. There are Kurdish tribes considerably beyond these limits, as in Khorassan, in the Russian provinces of Erivan and Kars, and west of the Euphrates, but within these limits they constitute the majority of population. This is the country of the Kurds or "Kurdistan" in its proper sense, though this name is sometimes applied only to the province of Ardilan, or Persian Kurdistan. In this region, with the exceptions of the country immediately to the north-east and south of Lake Van and the sanjak of Hakkiari on the east of Judi, where is found a considerable Armenian and Nestorian urban population, the Kurds constitute a very considerable majority, not only of the rural, but also of the urban inhabitants. They are concentrated in the mountains of Bingol-dagh (in the old sanjak of Dersim—vilayet Mahmuret-el-Aziz), on the southern slopes of the Kharzan-dagh and Judi, in the mountains of Zagros and in the greater part of the Persian provinces of Ardilan and Kerman.

The Yezids dwell principally in the mountains of Sinjar in the province of El-Jezireh, north and west of the ruins of Nineveh, but a certain number of them are to be found on the west of Ararat and in the Russian district of Kaghysman.

The entire area of the country, where the Kurds greatly outnumber the other elements of the population, may be roughly estimated at 145,530 square miles, about that of Prussia, Würtemberg, and Baden taken together. On the whole, it is a rough, dry, inhospitable, roadless country, traversed by numerous chains of mountains—Kysylky-dagh, Bingol-dagh, Ala-dagh, Palanteken on its northern border, Shah-Verdy and Zagros on the south-east, Judi and Kharzan-dagh in the middle.

Of the rivers may be mentioned the Euphrates, Zab, Diyala, Albagh, Kara-su.

Number.—The exact number of the Kurds is not known. Col. Kartsef estimates them at from two and a half to three millions, the Yezids furnishing only a very small contingent. Until the beginning of the present century they constituted, however, a rich and powerful community, but in 1832 the Sunnite Kurds, under the leadership of the Pasha of Revanduz, made a war of extermination against them, and since then their number has considerably declined and is still diminishing. According to the estimate of the Russian consul in Mosul in 1880, they were then about one hundred and ten thousand, of whom some fifty thousand were settled in Turkey, seventy-two thousand were nomads, and ten thousand lived in Russian territory. According to a more recent estimate of Colonel Kartsef (*Zapiski* of the Cauc. Sect. vol. xix.) they number only from thirty to forty thousand.

Language.—The Yezids, in common with Kurds, have a language appertaining to the Iranian group of the Indo-European or Indo-Germanic stock. This Kurmanji possesses a number of dialects, not differing much from one another, except the "Zaza" dialect, which is spoken in Eastern Mesopotamia (or Murad-chai) by the Dersimly Kurds, or Ali-Alla. Its main characteristics are the great brevity of its words and an astonishing simplicity of grammatical forms. Suffixes and prefixes, distributed with apparent capriciousness, are very numerous and important. The spoken language makes no agreeable impression on the hearer, for though fairly rich in vowels it is yet richer in deep guttural sounds, while the letter *r* is pronounced with a strong roll from the very bottom of the chest. This is not the place to enter into minute particulars, and it will be sufficient to mention that Kurmanji was studied a hundred years ago by the missionary, Father Garzoni (*Grammatica e Vocabolario della Lingua Kurda*), and more recently by numerous linguists, of whom the most noteworthy are Rich, Lerkh, A. J. Khodsko, Fr. Miller, Rae, Socin, Yusti, Aug. Zhaba, Zagurski and Eghiazarof. The transcription of Kurmanji into a written language presents enormous difficulty, and there is little probability that a European, who has studied this language only from books, will be understood by a Kurd or Yezid.

Physical Formation.—The Yezids, as indeed the Kurds in general, present a typical example of a close relation between the character of a country and that of its inhabitants—wild, rough, uncultivated, healthy country, and wild, hardy, sturdy, uncultured inhabitants. On the whole, they are a fine manly race. Tall, or of middle stature (from 65·2 to 66 inches), they are slender, strong, graceful, powerfully built, with a large chest from which issues a strong deep voice, audible afar, and a clear, keen eye, open and confident, fierce and angry alternately. They have regular features, the nose of moderate length (about 56 mm.). They are dolichocephalous and have a rather small head (the mean circumference 534 mm. or 21 inches). The legs are rather short and the sole of the foot rather large (256 mm.). Their hair is usually brown, as are also their eyes. But there are two different types; the most frequent

is taller, with auburn or black hair, fine regular nose and brown, sometimes blue, eyes; and the other, of shorter stature, has longer features, light brown eyes, and a large, irregular nose. The Yezids shave the hair on the head, leaving only a long, thin forelock.

Religion.—As the Yezids have a theocratic organisation, and as their creed not only serves them as a national bond, but exercises also a powerful influence on their minds, we must necessarily dwell at greater length on this subject.

There has been much controversy about the religion of the Yezids, some considering them as Mussulmans, others as Nestorians, and others again as followers of Zoroaster. Fearing persecution and contempt, the Yezids envelop their creed in mystery, so that it is difficult for foreigners, whom they distrust, to obtain a thorough knowledge of it. Being unlettered and very ignorant, they have, on the other hand, but vague and pretty divergent ideas themselves as to what they ought to believe or to reject. The difficulty of learning the substance of their creed is further increased by their hypocritical behaviour in the presence of Mussulmans, whose wrath they fear. According to Mr. Layard, who lived among them, they have a sacred volume, containing their traditions, their hymns, directions for the performance of their rites and other matters connected with their religion; but it is so jealously guarded (at Baasani or Baasheikha), and is regarded with so much superstitious reverence, that it is impossible to obtain a copy of it, or even to see it, either for love or money. It is known that they respect the Devil, represented as a peacock, and carry about his image. According to a natural tendency of the human mind to exaggerate whatever seems evil, this respect paid by the Yezids to Melek-Taüs, or the fallen angel, as they call him, has been thoroughly misconstrued. Very unfortunately for them it has been interpreted by their neighbours as a formal worship of the Devil, and consequently their belief in God has been denied. We believe that this is a great error. In fact, they have a monotheistic doctrine of their own, bearing some analogy with the teaching of Zoroaster, and certainly influenced, as in the case of other religious creeds, by the various tenets of their neighbours. They do not directly worship the Devil, as is shown by the text of their principal prayer, which we give *in extenso*.

The Yezids' chief Prayer.—"Amen, Amen, Amen! Sole, Almighty Creator of the Heavens. I invoke Thee, through the intermediation of Shamsedin, Phakredin, Nasredin, Sijedin, Shekhisin, Sheikh Bakra and Kadir-Rakhmana.¹ Lord! Thou art merciful and gracious. Thou art God, and from eternity Thou art eternal. Thou art King of all lands and kingdoms, of all creatures seen and unseen, of all saints. Thou art the fountain of life and happiness, Thou art worthy of praise and thanksgiving, Thou art the source of blessings and boundless love, Thou art terrible and glorious. Thy abode is beyond the heavens. Lord! Thou art the protector of travellers, Sovereign of the moon and of the darkness, Master of the heavenly throne. Thou art a God of benevo-

¹ The meaning of these names is not certain. Some believe that they are archangels, others different attributes of God. Perhaps they are the seven Amshaspands of Zoroaster.

lence, supreme Judge of kings and subjects, Thou art the administrator of the whole world. Lord! Thou hast created the sinner Adam, Jesus and Mary. Thou art the fountain of joy and beatitude. Lord! Nobody knows Thy appearance: Thou hast no face; it is not known what is Thy stature, or Thy movements, or Thy substance. Thou art not a substance, Thou hast neither feathers, nor wings, nor arms, nor voice, nor colour. Lord! Thou art an enthroned King and I am a fallen sinner; a sinner, but not abandoned by Thee; Thou hast led me out of darkness into light. Lord! pardon my guilt and my sins. Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! 'Amen.'

There is, then, no mention of Melek-Taüs, the supposed divinity of the Yezids. In fact, they consider him only as an archangel temporarily in disgrace; they believe that God will pardon him and allow him again to occupy the foremost place in the hierarchy of angels. There are some who believe that he is already reconciled with God. At any rate, the Yezids do not arrogate to themselves the right to interfere in the relations of God with his angels; they venerate them all alike. As to the reason why God was displeased with his former chief servant there is some disagreement among them. Some ascribe it to the deceit he practised on Adam and Eve, others to his unwillingness to recognise the superiority of Adam, as demanded by God. The Yezids have certainly accepted some of the doctrines introduced by the followers of Zoroaster in later times, when his original monotheism was corrupted into a theological dualism. They recognise, for instance, seven divinities, which are, of course, the seven Amshaspands or immortal saints of the Zend-Avesta; but, curiously enough, these divinities bear the names of seven disciples of Sheikh Adi, the supposed founder of their creed, viz. Melek-Taüs, Sheikh Hassan, Sheikh Shems (the sun), Michael Abu-Bekr, Asrail-Sijedin, Shatmail-Nasredin, Nurail Fakhredin. As already mentioned, Melek-Taüs, the angel-bird, is represented in the form of a peacock; his images, placed in the temple of Lalish and in the houses of the Sheikh and the Emir, are carried about at the collection of gifts for these dignitaries. There are two explanations of this apparent worship of the Evil Spirit. We have already given the first, according to which it is not the part of man to interfere in the relations of God with his angels, fallen or not; but their duty is to venerate them all alike. According to the second version the Yezids do not believe in the Devil at all. In opposition to the belief of their neighbours they do not regard Melek-Taüs as an evil spirit, but as a true divinity. There is in the history of religions many instances of such a confusion, in consequence of which the God of one people is the Devil of another. While in the Avesta, to take one example, the evil spirits are called *daëva* (Persian *div*), the Aryans of India, in common with the Romans, Celts, Letts, and Slavs, gave the name of *dëva* (*divin*, divine, *divny*) to their good or God-like spirits. Asura is a deity in the Rig-Veda, and an evil spirit only in later Brahman theology. Zoroaster or Zardusht taught that the beings whom his opponents worshipped as gods, under the name of *daëva*, were in reality powers by whom mankind are unwittingly led to their destruction. False gods in the minds of many

people—and they are all false gods which are not ours—are equivalent to devils.

The Yezids worship also the Sun (Sheikh-Shems) and the Moon. They see in the former a reflection of God's light, and repeat a prayer at sunrise. They consider also as sacred the four elements, or *gysm*, viz. earth, water, air, and fire. The most sacred of these is fire, for in it they see God's spirit, and believe that at doomsday fire will destroy everything evil and unclean on the earth, and thus restore it to its primeval purity. As with all Kurds, with them the hearth is a sacred place. The Yezids recognise one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets, among whom the founder of their creed, Sheikh Adi, is the chief. Their creed commands them to believe in God and love Him, to respect prophets and parents, to practise charity, and mutually to succour one another; it prescribes prayer, fasting, and sacrifice; it declares the equality of men before God, and the immortality of the soul. It forbids blasphemy, falsehood, calumny, the taking of an oath, murder, vengeance, adultery, incest, marriage with one of another caste, usury, and cupidity. Theoretically he who breaks these commands ceases to be a Yezid, and can no longer be accepted as such. Such is the substance of this creed.

We will not linger over the very childish conceptions of the Yezids about the creation of the world, given at some length by Mr. Eghiazarof (*Zapiski*, vol. xiii.), and before him by Mr. N. Siuffi in the *Journal Asiatique*, 1885. In the main it is only a variation of the account in Genesis; the most striking variation being the belief, not however concurred in unanimously, that Eve was formed from one of Adam's ribs, not by God, but by Melek-Taüs. There is also a controversy as to the initiative in the first sin: according to some, Melek-Taüs seduced our first parents to eat grapes and thus caused them their first pain (stomach-ache); while, according to others, God himself directed Melek-Taüs to devise some means of peopling the earth, and for this end to lead Adam and Eve out of Paradise. They had two sons and two daughters, who, on arriving at puberty, intermarried, and thus committed the sin of incest. When Eve became old, Adam married a *hori* (hourî), and thus first introduced bigamy and infidelity.

The Origin of the Yezids.—Like most oriental peoples the Yezids consider themselves to be of very ancient origin. *Yezd*, or *Ezd*, signifies, in old Persian, God, and therefore *Yezd'i*, as the Yezids or Yezidi call themselves, signifies "of God" or "God's." In the traditions of this people *Yezd* must be an abbreviation of *aez-da-Khûda*, that is, "created by God." *Yezd* is represented in material form as half angel and half man. He remained a bachelor long after the marriage of Adam, say the Yezids, but at last, goaded on by desire, and unable to marry a mortal's daughter, being himself half angel, sought the assistance of Melek-Taüs, who presented to him a *hori*, and from this union originated a pious people, the Yezidi or Yezids. The question whether the name Yezid is derived from that of some kalif of the Ommiad dynasty is a subject of controversy. Some Yezids deny all connection with the kalif of this name, accused by Shiites of the treacherous murder of Ali's son Hossein, who is considered by them as their true Imam. But it is not impossible that

this rejection comes only from fear of persecution on the part of the Shiites, for the Kalif Yezid is venerated by the Turkish Yezids as the forerunner of the founder of their creed, Sheikh Adi. However it may be, the Yezids are certainly considered by Shiites as descendants of the Kalif whose name is odious to them, and this belief was, and still subsists, as an effectual motive for hatred and persecution. For different motives the Yezids are equally hated by Turkish and Russian Kurds, and in fact by all their neighbours, Christian and non-Christian. This aversion has stamped on the character of this people, otherwise estimable, an unamiable distrust of all strangers.

It is pretty certain that the sect of the Yezids was founded by Sheikh Adi. He is a historical personage, though it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to establish any historical facts out of the thick mist of very fantastic stories current about him. According to an Arab author—Kasi-Akhmed-Ibn-Khallikhân—an extract from whose work was published by Mr. Siuffi in the January number of the *Journal Asiatique* for 1885, his family originated in Hakkari, or Hekari, Kurdistan, but he himself was born in Syria, near Baalbec, in the village of Bekdar, about the year 465 of the Hejra (1086). His pedigree runs thus: Sheikh-Adi-ben-Mussapher, ben-Ismail, ben-Mussa, ben-Marvan, ben-el-Hassan, ben-Marvan-el-Hakkari. He lived ninety years. It is said that, at the head of his disciples, he attacked a Christian monastery, Lalish in Muzurdagh, some twenty-seven miles from the once flourishing town of Mosul, turned out the monks, and established there his sanctuary, which still exists. Through the death of Sheikh Adi, deified by his followers and credited with all kinds of power and virtues, Lalish has become the Mecca of the Yezids, who have attached to it a numerous staff of servants, and resort there for an annual festival, lasting seven days.

The present social organisation of the Yezids (already legally abolished in Russia) we will now consider in some detail. It is attributed to Sheikh Adi.

Social Organisation.—Though Kurds by origin, the Yezids have lived, in consequence of their schism, in great isolation from their conquerors and from their Christian neighbours, and have thus preserved, better than the Kurds, their judicial system, the mainspring of their solidarity. They are also more peacefully disposed, and lead a more sedentary, agricultural life. Otherwise, save their religious views, and everything that depends on them, they have much in common with the Kurds—language, customs, family organisation, costumes, etc.

Castes.—The most curious feature in the social organisation of Yezids is their division into two completely separate castes, *mirids* (laymen) and *ruhans* (clergymen), between whom any matrimonial bond is strictly prohibited, and is considered as incest. There is a further subdivision of the *mirids* into nobles and commoners, but this distinction is accidental, and the passage from one rank to the other is not impossible. *Ruhans*, on the other hand, fall into further subdivisions of a hierarchical order, having almost the same importance as the castes, and these are—(1) *Sheikhs*, called upon to perform all religious rites and ceremonies, and

boasting a descent from one of five saints or patriarchs (Shamsedin, Phakredin, Nasredin, Sejedin, and Sheikh-Sinn); (2) *Pirs*, ordinary priests; (3) *Fakirs*, mendicant priests, distinguished by their rags, and the severity of their abstinence from all worldly goods; (4) *Quaeval* or *Kaevals*, sheikh's messengers, intrusted with the collection of taxes, and also itinerant judges and popular bards and reciters of tales; (5) *Auhan* or *Avan*, also *Chavishi*, inferior clergy; and (6) *Kochaks* or *Kocheks*, properly servants in the temple of Lalish, but also expounders of oracles and healers.

All these different orders have their distinguishing headgear and dress, and their distinct regulations. Sheikhs wear black turbans and white garments; Pirs, a red turban and black garments; Quaevals carry with them on their official visits the emblem of their religion, or *sinjak*, in the form of a cock.

The clergy of all ranks enjoy particular respect, their persons and homes are held inviolate, they take precedence at public gatherings; and the first two orders, the Sheikhs and Pirs, possess the most dreaded power of excommunication.

The Head Sheikh.—The ruhans or clergy, being superior to the mirids, their head or chief sheikh is naturally the person of most consideration and authority among the Yezids. The chief sheikh, reputed to descend from Sheikh Adi, the founder of the creed, is their spiritual head, the principal interpreter of scripture, the chief spiritual judge, a sacred person, whose hearth is considered as a sanctuary only second in importance to the temple in Lalish, and whose will must be implicitly obeyed. He resides in Mosul. His powerful weapon is excommunication. He presides over a tribunal, composed of ecclesiastical superiors, which has jurisdiction in religious offences, questions relating to marriage, and disputes between the clergy. His charge is hereditary, in direct succession, but if his eldest son be considered unworthy he may appoint another to succeed him. He lives on voluntary offerings from his flock.

The Emir.—But the Yezids have also a secular chief, who exercises a secondary authority over them. He is a scion of the ancient and highly venerated family of the Beni-Ummeia, and resides in Badrish, or Badrie, a small place near Mosul. His title is Mir-Khoji or Emir-el-Khoji. He occupies a rather difficult position between the Turkish Government, which has not much respect for him—and whose favour he is obliged to buy at the cost of his dignity, and by heavy pecuniary sacrifices—and his subjects or co-religionists, who highly reverence him, and are naturally aggrieved at his dependence. He has now no more than the shadow of his former importance. Like the chief sheikh he lives on voluntary contributions, but has at his disposal fifty quaevals, who contrive to obtain for him, at their annual visits to each Yezid community, about six thousand Turkish pounds.

Tribal Divisions.—Besides this general division of all Yezids into the above two great social classes or castes, with their respective spiritual and secular heads, there exist among this people some gradually disappearing vestiges of their ancient tribal organisation. The institution of ecclesiastical and secular superiors, consequent on their adoption of the

teaching of Sheikh Adi, did not efface, though it has certainly weakened, their tribal organisation. With the Kurds the chief or head of a tribe is always called sheikh, whereas the Yezids reserve this name for their ecclesiastical dignitaries, calling their tribal headman or chieftain only *aga-e-el*,—*el* signifying tribe, and *aga*, master. A tribe (*ashiret* or *el*) is a union of several family stocks or small communities (*ruspiti*) recognising the same tribal chief. An enterprising and influential man can always form a new tribe. We do not know the actual number of the Yezid tribes, always very unequal in numerical importance. There are in Russian territory only two tribes, the Sipiki in the province of Kars, and the Hassannia in the Government of Erivan. A tribe may consist of an indefinite number of separate communities or *ruspitis*, each having at its head an elder or *ruspi*, appointed by the chieftain or *aga-e-el*. This man appertains usually to a most respected and ancient family in his tribe; he exercises a patriarchal, pretty absolute authority, considering his people as a kind of grown-up children, wanting in everything advice and protection. His office is hereditary, but an unworthy elder son may always be dispossessed in favour of a younger, more capable, brother, as also, of course, in favour of a representative of any other family that attains pre-eminence. Besides appointing the *ruspi*, the tribal chieftain or *aga* is considered as the natural judge, arbitrator, and administrator. He is the president of the tribal tribunal, a court of justice of the most simple description, held occasionally at some public place, open to every one, and in which the evidence is heard, the verdict given, and the sentence executed in public without formalities and without delay. The judge can consult whom he pleases, and is expected to grant a hearing to any one out of the audience who has evidence to give on the question. Proof is founded on the mere affirmation of the witnesses, and only occasionally is recourse had to an oath on the part of the accused. The usual formula is as follows: "May God destroy my house, and my children, and extinguish my hearth, if I am wrong, but may God be my avenger if you are wrong." The *aga*, as judge, has the right of inflicting a fine, corporal punishment, imprisonment, and, in the most serious cases, banishment and confiscation of property (*talán-kyryn*).

The *aga* receives from his tribesmen presents of various kinds (*bakshish* or *peshkesh*) on all important occasions, festive or mournful, such as feast-days, births, marriages, circumcision, funerals, etc.; and he also receives fees when called upon to arbitrate in a dispute, and on the nomination of a *ruspi*. These presents differ in value, according to the means of the donor, and the importance of the occasion, ranging from a sugarloaf, cotton, woollen or silk stuffs to a pair of oxen or horses. The *aga* has besides the right to exact certain personal services from his tribesmen, principally field and house work, such as reaping, gathering, carrying and threshing corn, sheep-shearing, the transport of his household during the summer migrations, etc. He has also a share of the fines imposed on criminals, and he succeeds to escheated and confiscated goods.

The *aga* is surrounded with considerable reverence, his person and family are held inviolate, his hearth is a sanctuary, a number of relatives

and servants accompany him in his journeys and execute his orders, and besides—a valued privilege—a numerous retinue of friends and men of consequence attend him on his visits. In return for all this the *aga* is expected to render himself useful to his people, to defend their interests, to protect their widows and orphans, to take the initiative in bringing help to the needy, sick, and sufferers from any other misfortune.

The Ruspi or Headman.—In all these functions the *aga* is directly assisted by the *ruspi*, the village headman, similar to the Indian *potail*, nominated or appointed by him. Like his chief, the *ruspi* combines administrative and judicial functions; he is also a policeman, collector of taxes, and general superintendent of the affairs of his *ruspiti*. When an itinerant tradesman visits his village he is expected to examine his goods and appraise them, and in default of his recommendation the tradesman has to depart. In case of disputes, broils, or damage committed he acts as mediator, calling to his aid, if he likes, the council of elders.

The Family.—Besides the tribe there is the family and the expansion of the latter into a *tagva*, as also the aggregation of a number of families constituting a *gund* or *obae* (gentes), another organised body distinct from the tribe, which may have preceded or accompanied the institution of the family proper. It is known that the patriarchal theory can no longer be accepted as explaining the history of the formation of the tribe. The question, whether the tribe is anterior to the family or not, is difficult to answer, but the examination of the actual, perhaps very advanced, organisation of the Yezids seems to show that family bonds are stronger with them than those of the tribe. In case of disputes arising in a family or a *tagva* the *aga* or *ruspi* invariably sends back the plaintiff with the words, "Go and obey thy elders." All members of a family or clan share one another's liabilities, and are collectively responsible for a murder committed by one of them. In case of the insolvency of the offender the fine (*serime*) imposed on him, or the *rira* (the price of blood), has to be paid by his nearest kin, and, in their default, by other members of the clan. The family proper consists of parents and their children, married or unmarried, living in the same house or under the same tent. When extended so as to include blood relations and connections to the second and third degree it is called a *tagva*—a stock or clan. A still wider expansion of the family constitutes a *gund* or *obae*, that is, village or camp, though perhaps this last, for all we know, may be only a sub-division of a tribe, necessitated by purely local circumstances. However this may be, there is a strong sense of solidarity between the members of a family proper and the *tagva*.

Respect for parents and older persons is enjoined by the religion of the Yezids, and is considered by them, as by the Kurds, a virtue. The head of a family is the sole proprietor of its possessions, and holds full control over his wife and children, who are bound to obey him. Only personal objects of dress and ornament are the separate property of a wife. The husband can inflict on her severe punishments, and even cut off her nose or ears in case of infidelity. A father can also punish his

children: he may send his son as servant to whomsoever he pleases, disinherit him, and marry his daughter against her will; but he is not allowed to kill them, and infanticide is abhorred.

This authority of the father over his children is maintained only as long as they live with him; after they have left his house he retains only a moral influence over them. In return, a father has the duty of maintaining his family, of defending its honour and interests, and of answering pecuniarily and otherwise for any serious injury or crime committed by any of its members, such as murder, theft, elopement, etc. After the father the next in authority in the family is his eldest son. The mother occupies a very subordinate position. The emblem of family life is the hearth. A good or obedient son is called *ochagsoda* (son of the hearth), whereas an outcast is *beochag* (hearthless).

The hearth is set up in the midst of the room or tent, and is formed of three stones arranged in an equilateral triangle. There are many superstitions concerning the fire, and there is a generally felt reluctance to lend the hearth to neighbours.

Position of Women.—Among the Yezids, as indeed the Kurds in general, the man esteems himself superior to the woman. He certainly takes a mean advantage of his greater strength—passing on to the woman work he could do as well, or better, himself; but, notwithstanding, the situation he creates for her is perhaps better than she occupies among the Tartars and Turks, and even some Christian peoples. His rude life, full of peril, precludes him from treating his wife with much tenderness, but he regards her as a useful companion, capable not only of managing his rudimentary household and rearing his children, but also of tending his cattle and even defending his goods against his numerous enemies. Women learn to ride and handle weapons as well as men, and when attacked in the absence of their husbands they do not hesitate to take up arms against the aggressor. They take care of their cattle and defend it against robbers and wild beasts; they keep watch in the dark night with a gun by their side. A woman showing cowardice is disgraced, and she impairs the reputations of herself and her daughters. Young men in the choice of a wife hold courage in high esteem, as young women appreciate the bravery of the men who are agreeable to them; and thus has been created among this people a type of courageous, dauntless women, who rival men in bravery and intrepidity. This trait is common to both Yezids and Kurds. It is this courage that has won for young girls their independence while unmarried. They are free to choose their friends and lovers among the men, and, far from blaming them for their libertinism, their mothers are often proud of their successes.

With marriage, all is changed. A married woman is bound to remain loyal to her husband, and obey him, under fear of terrible retribution. The faces of the women are far from being repulsive, at least until they grow old, when they become hideous. Young women have usually a small head, regular features, pale complexion, straight and well-formed nose, small and graceful mouth, white teeth, medium-sized brown eyes, auburn hair, and, in general, a sweet expression. They

divide their hair into a number of small, long plaits, which hang down on the shoulders beneath the mantle. Their tresses are ornamented with ribbons and glass beads. The women are clothed in a shirt of the same cut as that of the men, and a large blue tunic tied at the waist with a white cotton or woollen scarf. Like the men they wear on their head a conical felt hat, with a large handkerchief twisted round it, forming a turban. Under this headgear is placed a large piece of white or blue stuff, which envelopes the head and descends over the shoulders down to the belt. Those who do not wear this mantilla wrap round their shoulders a square piece of white stuff and tie it across the breast. Young girls do not wear turbans, but a small blue or red woollen cap ornamented with glass beads. A strip of light-coloured stuff descends from the cap on to the shoulders. The women converse freely with everybody, and do not hide their faces unless stared at too indiscreetly, when they draw a corner of the mantle over the face.

Marriage.—The Yezids are endogamic; they strictly forbid unions between persons of different tribes, and between the secular and religious classes, as also within a certain degree of relationship. Marriage is contracted for life, and is dissolved only in cases of apostasy and adultery. Though not prohibited, the practice of polygamy is restricted to a few *agas* and rich men, who have at most two wives. A man intending to marry must have money or cattle, *kalym*, to purchase a wife. A girl who respects herself will be bought only at a high price, and her parents, unless she be crippled or maimed, regard her as capital to be realised. This capital is not a very large one. In the case of an ordinary layman the *kalym* does not usually exceed thirty sheep or goats, or the price of them. The bridegroom also incurs some other small expenses before he can obtain possession of his wife—for presents to her parents and brothers, and for the *arekyryn*, the consent of the parents.

When no *kalym* can be raised, and the young people love one another, an elopement takes place. The ambition of the girl consenting to be carried off finds compensation for lack of fortune in the valour her lover must in this case display. For there is no jesting with her parents; they keep a vigilant watch over their daughter, and will not hesitate to pursue, and even kill, her ravisher. A young man, meditating an elopement, must win the support of some courageous and devoted companions, and assure himself of a safe retreat, where he may live undetected for some four weeks. The wrath of a Yezid is prompt but quickly appeased, and he also appreciates courage even when displayed at his own expense. If the ravisher succeeds in hiding his treasure only for a month he may reappear among his tribe, sure of remaining unmolested and of obtaining pardon. "Everything is pardoned to the brave," says a Kurdish proverb. On returning to his occupations the bold man may even enjoy a higher reputation. Nevertheless, elopements seldom occur.

The marriage-ceremonies of the Yezids do not essentially differ from those of the Kurds, and are very simple. Some time after the consent of the bride's parents has been obtained, given always with some pretended reluctance and with a certain solemnity, the kindred of the bridegroom proceed on an appointed day to the house of their future

connection for the betrothal (*daznigary*), where they noisily feast and dance; after that the young couple are allowed to arrange clandestine nocturnal meetings, not, indeed, without the connivance of some matron, who is rewarded with small presents. The wedding takes place later, sometimes a year after, and is performed by a sheikh in the presence of numerous friends and relatives, who dance, play, wrestle, and make great rejoicings on the occasion. In case of the early death of the husband the wife is usually passed on to his younger brother.

The Sheikh's Miridae.—On all occasions when a Yezid wants the assistance of a sheikh or priest he addresses himself to the sheikh he or his family are attached to, though he may dwell at some considerable distance. The flock of a sheikh, though dispersed and not living in a defined parish, constitutes his *miridae* or congregation. The attachment is a personal one, continued probably from the time when there were only nomadic camps gathered around their respective priests or leaders, and no agricultural communities (*gunds*).

Lalish.—The Yezid's Rome, his national and religious centre, is Lalish, where stands the temple of Sheikh Adi. It is situated near Mosul, in a deep, picturesque valley, the slopes of which are covered with dense wood, and at the bottom of which runs a sacred brook. The temple is quite unadorned, and its general appearance is dismal, a dim light penetrating into the interior through only a few windows. It is divided into three parts, a nave with colonnades, and two transepts, where are the tombs of Sheikh Adi and some other saints. On the tomb of the former are inscribed some verses of the Koran, with the object, as is perhaps erroneously asserted, of appeasing the wrath of Mussulmans.

Conclusion.—Our summary study of the Yezids has perhaps been unduly prolonged, and we hasten to conclude. Their social and religious organisation, as described above, is rapidly vanishing, being unsupported by sufficient independence, and vigorously opposed by the laws, institutions, and hostile feeling of the two states between whom the Yezids are divided. The quickest change is certainly taking place among the Yezids inhabiting the Transcaucasian provinces of Russia, which has introduced extensive reforms among them; the Turks are also doing their best, not indeed to reform, but simply to suppress and destroy this people. The great religious and moral reform undertaken in the corrupted Mussulman world by Sheikh Adi and his followers, though not without a certain success, has thus proved in the long-run abortive, like many other similar reforms in both the ancient and modern worlds. The Yezids have themselves done much to hasten their decline by their voluntary ignorance, instruction in reading and writing being a privilege restricted to few among them. They are dying out, but the spectacle of their decay, though sad, has a certain pathetic grandeur. They cling to their ancient chiefs, though their decisions have no longer any legal sanction; they isolate themselves more and more from the outer world, and while they see their number diminishing, they console themselves with the thought that they are Yezd'i—God's chosen.