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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TRAVEL TALES IN THE PROMISED LAND (PALESTINE) ***

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German Novelist Karl May's 1907/1908, Schamah [Wisdom's ForgivingLight] Travel Tales in the Promised Land (Palestine)

Translator: James D. Schoonover, MA, M.Ed., c. 2008, USA

Schamah, Reiseerzaehlung aus dem Gelobten Lande, von Karl May (c.1907/1908)

<http://karlmay.leo.org/kmg/primlit/erzaehl/reise/schamah/index.htm>

As soon as they step into my house and see my strange collection of travel keepsakes, all visitors' eyes are drawn to the Arabian saddle, which actually deserves credit as the inspiration and author of this story. It has Oriental-red velvet, richly decorated with gold embroidery. This Pasha saddle was fit for a tribal Turkish chieftain, having comfortable stirrups and an accompanying dreadful bit that could conquer the stubborn resistance of even the mightiest horse.

My magnificent saddle was a present from Mustafa [Mohammed] Bustani, a wealthy merchant and friend who worked equally well with Arabs and Jews. His shop is on the right hand side of the Marketplace El Bizar, along the way to the third most sacred Islamic mosque, Harem Esh Sheriff, where the Israelite King Solomon's Temple earlier stood. Try to understand the nature of Judaraber, these Arabs of the Holy Land who now live side-by-side with Jews. Little by little, they have given up their handed down-hatred against Hebrews, for they share the strict Old Testament views of "God's Chosen People." In this way, Judaraber are more inclined to think like Semites and less like those in Christendom.

With these Muslims, it is no more of a disgrace to become a Christian as to convert to Judaism. Anyway, this unique perspective only concerns inner opinions; especially regarding personal matters or simple business transactions, this peculiar outlook has hardly any influence. So, I was Mustafa Bustanis' friend, in spite of religious differences, just because we liked each other. When I bought things in Jerusalem, I purchased solely from him whenever possible. I preferred to deal with him, not only as a merchant, but much more as a good human being. He too knew this truth, and he repaid me through our friendship's deep affection. I felt that I possessed his complete trust and confidence.

I often stopped by his store, even if I had no particular reason to buy something. For many hours, we sat beside each other, reclining against a broad, Persian carpet-covered crate as we endlessly drank coffee that his African servant Bem prepared for us. We considered ourselves to be like brothers; thereto, we felt no need to keep secrets from each other. Every now and then, there were distinguished customers that he permitted to interrupt us. His assistant attended to them, even though he himself could have waited on them. Habakek was the name of Mustafa's helper, an exceptionally good-natured fellow—a delightful combination of magician, jack-of-all-trades, and Renaissance man who could accomplish anything that your eyes could imagine.

Mustafa Bustani was a big fan of fairy tales. He loved to hear or tell every kind of fairy tale—most of all, one which involved a belief in miracles or a situation wherein the dead and the living played a dynamic role. Yet in no way was he superstitious in the general sense. On the contrary, he was an educated man who spoke Arabic, Turkish, and Persian; with Westerners, he could reasonably communicate in French and in English.

Concerning religious faith, he showed commendable tolerance; however, earlier in life it was the opposite case. He had a brother who was banished from the family, due to the fact that he had been baptized as a Christian. Mustafa did not conceal this fact; at the time, he had totally agreed with his exile.

In contrast to the past, he now seemed to think otherwise about that banishment. In truth, I learned nothing more than that his brother had moved to East Jordan; there he had married a Christian woman. For that reason, all of the banned brother's attempts at reconciliation had been rejected. Thereafter, he vanished—yet, one knows all too well that family ties can never be completely ripped apart.

When my friend spoke of his "harem," he was using the Semitic culture's exclusive, figurative reference to the soul's most private and sacred sanctum. Therein, he seemed to be inspired by more compassionate convictions which he had not yet succeeded in shutting out. Harem? Yes, be certain that our mutually respectful confidence in each other had risen so high that we quite often did not avoid speaking of his or my "harem." Among Muslims, this open interchange is actually forbidden. Namely, only my wife was permitted to understand my most private sphere of thoughts, to know my "harem."

I have no children. As for Mustafa's spiritually-reserved harem, he confided in his wife, his eleven year old son, and in the family's black female cook. The other household servants were not included in this private circle of confidants. His son had the short, yet very meaningful name of Thar, which Bavarians would interpret as a "dashing fellow." Unlike the stereotypical, mistaken picture of Middle Eastern children, he was not a somber, moody, overly serious, nor slow-moving child. From the family's home which lay outside the inner city, this delightfully mischievous boy often came to his father's store. Whenever he met me, it seemed that he never tired of tossing me the most unbelievable heaps of questions about all kinds of matters concerning my homeland. From him, I learned the latest news about his father's harem—every broken pot and every captured mouse. In return for his youthful openness and his high regard for me, he expected me to report all of my secrets to him. Woe unto me if he ever believed that I failed to trust him in this relationship.

In the course of this friendly bond among father, son, and myself, I was invited as a guest and had the opportunity to meet the mother. I remember this well. I often spent entire evenings in the home of Mustafa Bustani. When I last said good-bye, I promised to bring along my wife on my next visit.

Nomen et [est] omen— a name may predict one's destiny. Within living memory of the Family Mustafa Bustanis, it had always been a custom to have a family member by the name of Thar. This stemmed from the family's bygone days as nomads. Presently, Mustafa's boy was the bearer of this namesake, as well as its legacy. Night and day, he tried as hard as he could to be a credit to his name. The name "Thar" means vengeance, retaliation, retribution, and a blood feud. This is the old, dreadful law which calls for the following: "Blood for blood! An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth!" In ancient times, among certain primitive folk and also nowadays, some have felt that there are reasons to retaliate. Under civilized conditions, it's not only reprehensible and criminal—it's just ridiculously laughable.

Ever since Thar became aware of his name's notoriety, he thoroughly came under the influence of his own imagination. Therein, he always contemplated some kind of recompense—and if none existed, he thought one up. In everything that he heard or saw, these events had to serve as a design for payback that stemmed from some past injury. Unfortunately, he didn't always find the heroic acclaim that he anticipated. His destiny misunderstood him. Instead of the planned retribution that was meant to achieve its intended, costly purpose, there was always a dumb turn of events in the end, which placed the boy himself in an unfavorable position. At this point, he inevitably found himself on the receiving end of retribution; thereto, he himself would be harmed by his own campaign. Even so, this reversal of roles did not hold him back; he remained true to his name and to his calling. Always and again, Thar was ready to make a fresh start.

To these preliminary notes, I add the fact that I had traveled from Sumatra to Egypt; I was supposed to meet my wife in Jerusalem. I had guided her through the Land of the Pharaohs and through the Arabian Desert; now, we found ourselves in the Promised Land. Yesterday, we arrived in Jerusalem by way of the Jaffa Gate. We wanted to stay a few weeks in order to take some regional side trips that included a visit to the Dead Sea. Next, we wanted to head towards Damascus. For travel purposes, we needed two saddles, one for a man and one for a woman. Automatically and without question, I contacted my friend Mustafa, for no one else could get everything that we needed. My wife accompanied me. Given my previous accounts concerning my spouse, Mustafa and his household seemed to know her almost as well as they knew me.

Even though he was a noble, Middle Eastern educated man, Mustafa erred at times in the upbringing of his young son. By way of comparison, his wife's disposition was exceptionally lively, loving, and kind. Seeing both parents' character traits come together in their child, the boy took on his mother's cheerful, joking nature and his father's very deadpan humor; thus, Thar almost always had the disposition to tease his dad, his mom, and the whole world.

We went through the Jaffa Gate, towards the Marketplace El Bizar, and there we found Mustafa. He didn't notice us right away, because he was involved in playing a trick on a customer who wanted to buy a new turban. In the middle of the shop, there stood a camel—which actually was his helper, Habakek. He had positioned himself on all fours and had adorned his disguise exactly like a camel that you see in a parade, having head bands jingling with ornaments and feathered plumes. The forelegs had a string of bells; draped over the costumed camel's sides was a gaudy, glass-beaded wool netting. To the rear, there was a kid-leather water bottle which one would need in the desert. Nearby stood Thar, dressed only in an over-sized, common blue shirt that sagged loosely from his elbows to his knees. The boy's face, arms, and legs were painted palm bark-brown.

Just as we entered the shop, the boy called out to their African servant Bem, who was squatting near the room's coffee-corner: "I'm the Bedouin Sheik, and I'm feeding my camel!" At that moment, he scooped up a handful of lettuce leaves which the next door shopkeeper had previously thrown into the street. He shoved the soiled greens into the submissively open mouth of the make-believe camel. Habakek loudly, deliberately, and delightedly chewed the fodder. You would have thought that this creature was just an ordinary dromedary—a downright authentic camel. Just by the way he behaved, one could not tell that this was Habakek. Due to the fact that his face was so completely painted with colorful crosses and dashes, he seemed to disappear beneath all that makeup. For that reason, Bem questioned Thar:

"Why then have you painted him up?"

Thar readily resounded: "Don't you know? This is the hide that I've painted. As you know, a camel has hairs on its face!"

In addition to this scene, we took note of the richly decorated donkey that stood in front of the neighboring store. In no way was this animal's owner a commoner. The donkey's important master had dismounted and stepped inside to buy something.

For the first time, the African saw me. At the moment, he was busy grinding coffee beans with a mortar and pestle. He was so overwhelmingly surprised that he tossed aside the coffee and the mortar and let out a piercing whoop of joy. Consequently, all of the others now drew their attention to me. Mustafa Bustani was so surprised to see me suddenly in front of him, that he stood completely still and said nothing. So much more in tune to the situation, Thar

happily leaped in the air, let out a triumphant cheer, pointed to my wife, and asked: "Is this she, the woman whom you promised to bring to us?"

"Yes, it is she," I answered.

He bowed three times before her and beckoned towards the camel: "Please sit upon this; it's bejeweled for you!"

All at once, the camel stood up on its hind legs and used its hands to wipe the fur from its face: "I have no more time for this! I need to attend to the store's business!"

As he happily greeted my wife and me, he tossed off the camel-costume jewelry and devoted his attention to the customer whom Mustafa had left to his own devices. Mustafa's joy was as great as it was genuine. He greeted me with the customary bows and pulled me close to his heart: "What a comfort to see you today! Give thanks to Allah. Dearest friend, sit down with me; you know that you're always welcome here!"

Mustafa then bowed three times to my wife; but as he tried to speak to her, his voice broke down, and tears burst from his eyes. He placed both hands to his face and softly sobbed. Thar cried too, gripping the pleat of my wife's white traveling dress. He then wiped away his tears and rubbed off the Bedouin-brown paint from his face and arms as he offered her the following explanation: "He weeps today, because you're here now—yet, she can't see you."

"Why is she unable to see me?" my wife asked, although she intuitively guessed that he meant his mother.

"She is dead. Didn't you know this?" he answered. We were both startled. There simply were no adequate words; yet the boy continued on: "She so much looked forward to seeing you, because your Effendi [Turkish title for a noble man] whom we all love, had sung your praises. Unlike other men who talk about their harems and always complain about the wife, in truth, he never said a mean word about you. He and my father consistently refrain from that. The sickness came and closed her eyes. I personally witnessed this. They carried her away. Whenever he thinks about her, my father continually cries. As for me, almost all of my days must be filled with devising a new avenging-quest—which makes my father laugh again. However, he no longer laughs, nor does he have the will to fight. All of this is so wrong!"

At the close of his words, he let his eyes wander throughout the shop. There he focused on the customer who had taken off his round turban-skullcap, placing it aside as he tried on a tasseled fez. In the Middle East, such a flat-crowned hat has long been associated with many speeches and counter arguments. His head was completely bald, glistening a slippery-bright, as if it were waxed and shined. It was just forty-five minutes ago that Thar had happily worn his theatrical makeup. Across his newly-wiped face, there now streaked a prankish thought which he put into action: "Hold on; another avenging plot is coming to me. Please don't disrupt me; simply look over there—where presently I'm not!"

He wriggled towards the store's back corner, where they kept all kinds of gadgets, including the stove for cooking coffee. Back there was also the African's space which he had left in order to fetch a couple of fluffy bales of material, a piece of carpet, and a divan for my wife. To overcome his grieving, Mustafa Bustani helped Bem with these tasks; he was not aware that his son had told us about his difficult mourning. When the divan was ready, we sat down. Accustomed to our earlier times together, I took my place on the crate with the Turkish water-pipe nearby. If we hadn't learned earlier about the death of his wife, our conversation normally would have begun. The words simply did not want to come forth. Blessedly, the shop gave rise to somewhat of a stopgap. Unfortunately, Mustafa Bustani's inventory did not include saddles, so he invited us to return tomorrow. In the meantime, he planned to fulfill all of our requests.

At this point, the shopper interrupted us; he was a country gentleman from Ain Kahrim, the birthplace of John the Baptist. He had put on his old cap again, along with his headscarf. Then, he pointed to the new items that he had selected, wanting to know the price of the fez and a colorful turban-cloth. In the Middle East, such a minor transaction normally doesn't proceed quickly. However, in order to send the customer on his way, Mustafa gave him the price so fast that the buyer paid his money without reservation and hastily exited.

This disruption now had the effect of reclaiming more life in our conversation. Among ourselves, we sensed that something on both sides had transpired in that time—something which we had not seen. In the process, Mustafa had seized every opportunity to bring Thar back, all in order to praise him. We had not been speaking softly, so the boy must have been able to hear us. Thar was crouched down in the corner by Bem, and it seemed that they were undertaking a change of scenes, which for now was concealed from us. In the way of materials for transforming a setting, Mustafa's shop lacked nothing; for almost everything imaginable was available for purchase, old as well as new. After the boy and Bem had completed their grand scheme, Thar slowly came striding out of the corner, proudly presenting himself to us.

He was now dressed as a famous hero, most likely ready to perform some kind of vendetta gain. Half of a clay water-crock served as his helmet, one that probably had been dug up and broken in the process. His breastplate consisted of a tin lamp shade, the kind that one places upright in front of the light. Onto his bare calves, he had fastened two gigantic knight's spurs, which possibly dated back to the medieval days of the Crusades. Into his rope-belt, he stuck the most outrageous weapons that one can imagine: three knives, two pairs of scissors, two corkscrews, and four candle-snuffers—all of which were arranged around his waist. Besides these, he added a mousetrap, a bow with quiver and arrows, and some left-over items which he carried in his hand: a corn-cutting sickle, a saber's sheath, and a shotgun barrel. His war paint consisted of two colors, precisely creating the exact impression that he intended. The right arm and the left leg were painted green; the left arm and the right leg were blue. On both cheeks and for a moustache, this skin too was blue. His chin had a grass-green hue. We laughed, as did Mustafa Bustani.

"Well then, who are you?" Mustafa asked the armed figure.

As he rattled all of his weapons, Thar answered in a battlefield tone: "I'm Gideon, the hero."

"Ever and always, he only takes his heroes from the Old Testament," his father explained. Turning to his son, he continued: "What is Gideon planning to do?"

"I have slain Baal's priests in order to destroy the Midianites!"

Newer and more intense saber rattling! Unfortunately, it was impossible to learn anything more about his valiant

purpose, because the scene was interrupted by the man from Ain Kahrim. At this moment, he came running back to the shop. Clearly in an urgent tizzy, this episode seemed to raise the man's agitation to its highest level. At first, he spoke so rapidly and indignantly that he could hardly be understood. We could only discern the words "fez - turban - barber - head - blue - soap - water - shame and disgrace!"

After we persuaded him to explain everything calmly and slowly, he did so; thus, we learned that he had been to the barber, just as he's accustomed whenever he comes to the city. For him, it was normal to see to the grooming of his beard and head, for this cleanliness of the head is prescribed by the Prophet Mohammed. This rite should only be performed by a licensed barber, not by any other man.

When he bared his head, all those present in the barber shop roared with laughter; for the hair of this old-timer was no longer white as usual. Instead, it had turned blue as the sky. As it turned out, the blue stain came from his headgear, which he had taken off at the barber's. Secretly, someone had poured blue dye into the hat. The barber had done his best to wash away the coloring, yet this had only made matters worse. The addition of water simply dispersed the heavens-blue pigment, which now more permanently corroded still deeper into his scalp. As he removed his skullcap and head scarf, he called out: "Allah have mercy! Here, look at me! Let the culprit step forward so that I can punish him!"

An entirely hairless skull of glistening heavens-blue hue? Include the fact that the man was not wearing the new fez; instead, he had again plopped the soiled cap on his head. One could hardly resist the giggles that came with the sight of this angry man. My wife was the first to burst out laughing. She found it impossible to restrain herself. The African Bem followed, then Habakek, and finally Mustafa and I. The hearty peal of laughter had a strange effect; instead of increasing the anger of this man from Ain Kahrim, it seemed to subdue him, probably through his own perception of his ridiculous appearance. Only the boy was not laughing. No train of thought stirred across his face. He stepped up to the man, loudly and seriously confessing: "I'm the one!"

"You?" the astonished man asked. "How can a child dare to do this, to insult the bare head of a Moslem!"

"I didn't uncover it! I did it as a justified payback, all in order for you to know that my name is Thar."

"Thar?" responded the bewildered man.

"Yes, Thar! Didn't you yourself say that a believer may only allow a barber to bare his head? Yet you have uncovered it here, and you even showed it to us! For this offense, I've punished you; I poured blue-retaliation upon your head's uncovered hull."

With the utmost astonishment, the blue-headed man asked us: "Is something like this possible? According to this boy, I'm the one who should be punished—not he! What does his father say about this?"

Mustafa would have answered the question, as best he could, but the boy spoke first: "If you require a father here, then fetch your own; for you may not borrow mine! I'm Gideon, the Hero of Manasseh. Good-bye!" In a dignified way, Thar nodded to the man, then proudly strode out of the shop. Still clad in his make-shift suit of armor, he climbed onto the stranger's donkey that was standing outside. From there, he trotted away on the animal. Everyone knows this: at a very young age, all Arabic boys regard the back of a donkey as the best of all playgrounds. It is rare to find a boy who lacks the courage to ride.

Now, the man from Ain Kahrim really didn't know what he was supposed to think. His mouth hung open. Without saying a word, he glanced towards the spot where he last saw the boy. Speaking in German and still laughing, my wife asked me: "Is this possible?" I had no time to answer her. The scene had changed.

The owner of the donkey was mostly concerned about the distance between him and his animal. He had figured out whom the strangely outfitted boy belonged to; from the neighboring shop, he now walked over to us. Whether by civil means or through a complaint to the police, he was determined to come closer to settling matters. "Who among you is Mustafa Bustani?" he inquired.

As my friend slid off the trunk and bowed low, he answered: "I."

"Do you know me?"

"Yes. Who wouldn't know you? You are Osman Achyr, the Ferik-Pasha of our Sovereign. May Allah bless him!"

"Your son has stolen my donkey!"

"He has not stolen the animal—just borrowed it. Thar will bring it back safe again!"

"Do I run a rent-a-donkey business? If I did, I would expect a person to ask me first!"

"I ask your pardon, sir!"

By official title, this man's ranking was that of a general. Even though he chose to wear unassuming, civilian clothes instead of a uniform, he carried himself like a nobleman. Now that he had to deal with yet one more infraction, he steadied his voice as he renewed his dogged determination to assert his authority: "No, I do not excuse him. The boy has stolen from me, and he has dishonored me. I demand that he be punished!" The Pasha now drew closer to Mustafa and asked: "Who are you? In your mind, what did he—?"

When the General saw the blue-skulled man, he halted in mid-sentence— the Pasha's eyes began to glisten and grow wider. Taking just the right amount of time to pause, the Blue-one began to narrate the boy's misdeeds—but he could go no further. Appealing to the stern General and to us, the heavens-blue man now cracked up, laughing like we had done earlier. His laughter was so contagious that we could not help but join him. In the middle of our merriment, the boy came riding back with a mass of children following him. The adults readily recognized him, but they were no longer concerned about Thar's outlandish pranks.

The boy brought the donkey back to the same spot where it formerly stood. In the same way he had left us, he returned to us with the same style of majestic dignity and seriousness. This made such an irresistible impression upon all of us, that our laughter momentarily turned to silence. Just as suddenly, it broke loose and doubled its intensity, as if it never wanted to end. Laughing with us too was the Blue-one. Once he began, he laughed the longest and was the last

to stop.

Thar also recognized the General. Right away, he positioned himself directly in front of him, smartly stood at attention, then sharply saluted just like he had seen soldiers whenever they met an officer. The Pasha then asked him: "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Then who am I?"

"You are Benaja, the Commander-in-chief of King Solomon's army!"

The General laughed: "Bravo! You're still playing your role. What are your weapons for?" The Pasha pointed to the scissors, corkscrew, and candle-snuffers. However, the boy was not ready to step out of character. His mouth still contained countless numbers of stories.

Better than any German boy's knowledge of his home city's chronicles, Thar knew all the legends and tall tales of Jerusalem's past. He was even consciously aware of his weapons' symbolism. He quickly answered, taking no time to reflect: "These are the 'Scorpions' wherewith the King of Judah pinched and pulled the ears of the people whenever they didn't want to obey him. I'm Gideon, the hero who hails from my ancestors of Manasseh. I borrowed your warhorse because I needed your steed to carry out my vendetta against the Midianites, the sons of Abraham. Your mount is too fat and has no endurance; so for this reason, I turned around and brought him back to you. I appreciate your loaning him to me, but he is really of no use."

Thar repeated his salute. The Pasha laughed so hard that tears streamed from his eyes. Without question, he seemed to be a very congenial gentleman. Mustafa hurriedly capitalized on the Pasha's good mood and seeming willingness to forego punishment of his son: "For what he has done, please forgive him! He's exceptionally bright and greatly gifted." Yet his words accomplished just the opposite of what he had intended. In a flash, the face of the Pasha became serious again, almost threatening: "No speech of yours can gain the boy's pardon. Your son has doubly transgressed— against me and against him over there." The Pasha pointed towards the man from Ain Kahrin: "For this, he deserves punishment instead of a reward; and by my own hand, I will personally administer his whipping. Is there a switch nearby which suits this purpose?"

The African Bem heard this request. From his corner of the room, he brought out a thin, knobby walking-stick which had been used for all kinds of educational procedures. When the boy saw this, he began to talk— instead of prudently staying silent. The General grabbed the cane and air-lashed it several times as he tested it to and fro. Satisfied with the reed, the Pasha nodded his head and slyly squinted his eyes as he looked sideways at the boy: "Of course, you understand that your offenses will be punished?"

Thar nodded and quickly answered: "Yes."

"Should I then pronounce judgment by using your given name?"

"Yes."

"And also carry out the punishment in your name?"

"Yes."

"So be it. By my own hand, the boy shall receive ten blows: five for injuries to me and five for you!" The General pointed to the blue-headed man from Ain Kahrin.

"Disappointedly, the man asked: "Isn't that too few?"

The Pasha snapped at him: "Be silent!"

"Who receives this corporal punishment—you or me?" the boy asked.

"You!"

In deference to the Pasha, Thar turned and said: "Surely you see that this is neither too little nor too much. Are you serious in your judgment of only ten lashes?" The General confirmed his decision: "Yes. For Gideon, this is actually not a great honor to be beaten with a cane!"

The boy agreed: "I think so too! However, I now have this misfortune—not merely to retaliate once, but to collect vengeance again! So I plead with you; at least grant me permission to put aside my hero's garb." His wish was granted, so he made his exit to the coffee-corner. He took off his warrior-weaponry, then returned in order to get on with the improvised administration of justice.

"Hold him!" the Pasha commanded the father. Mustafa obeyed. In the manner that all readers know full well, the father leaned forward, stuck out his left knee, and placed the Guardian-of-Blood-Feuds across his lap, thereby causing the back side of the Transgressor to be exposed. Without saying a word and without struggling, Thar allowed all this to happen. The Pasha positioned himself, took a swing with the cane, and counted the strokes: "One—two."

He continued no further. The execution could not go forward, because my wife had sprung from her chair, placed herself squarely between the competitors, and appealed for mercy. The Pasha asked who she was. She told him. For a moment, he reflected, then bowed to her and replied that he would grant her request—but not before the count of ten which he had dictated. Under all circumstances, he was obligated to uphold his word; therefore, he was unable to rescind his order. Admittedly, he could not mitigate the two strokes that he had already given. In regard to the outstanding eight which she now wished to administer, and rightly so, the Pasha would grant her heart's desire.

At this point, he handed her the cane, stepped back, and beckoned her to proceed. Since we were all in sympathy with the Delinquent, we were pleased that she accepted his offer. When she turned towards the Pasha, she no longer saw him. In the meantime, he had gone back to the shop next door. Just when the man from Ain Kahrin prepared to lodge his objection to a lighter sentence, Mustafa Bustani invited him to come back in one hour and pick out a present for himself. With just a few more words here and there, the gentleman left, for the time being.

Meanwhile, the boy whispered so that his father would not hear him: "He laughed— oh how he laughed! Did you see it? Oh how that makes me happy!" His good-hearted, loving-eyes lit up. Then he kissed my wife's hand and said: "I

thank you for the 'eight' which you have given me. They were tender and mild as pepperless home-baked cookies. For this, I'll never forget you. As you know, I'm a hero. Whenever you're in need, please call on me to rescue you."

On this note, Thar once again withdrew to the coffee-corner. With the help of African Bem, he somehow managed to change into a new outfit. His father once more took his place upon the crate in order to pick up the conversation where we had left off. Laughingly, he closed the matter with words about his darling Trickster's capers: "He was his mother's 'chosen one.' She saw everything in him! Whether the Pasha wants to believe it or not, he really is greatly gifted." I wanted to know how the boy had acquired his strange love for colors: "Was it also present in his childhood?"

Mustafa answered: "No. Understand that my Coffee Helper Bem and my dark-skinned cook are a married couple. For some time, their own young son has apprenticed himself to a whitewashing craftsman. With their help, my son has developed a lively interest in the multi-faceted kingdom of colors. It seems to me that he was born to be an artist. At first, we of course saw only the beginnings; but they soon became so evident that I began to think that my lovely revenue-earning store must have been seized by alien hands. According to Islam, the human body should not be illustrated nor copied. Yet for Thar and his sense of artistry, he sees how life holds such majesty and beauty— it seems to invite him to become a famous and honored painter. Among all of my acquaintances, they believe that something of great consequence has been planted within him. Is it not my duty to help him become a great man?"

He didn't speak softly, so the boy heard every word. As a result of this, Thar came out of his corner and said to me: "Effendi, you need to hear the whole story; my father is not fully informing you. Namely, it's this way: my Father says that I was 'most favored' by my Mother. In every way, she wanted to take care of me. She knew that I had talent, so she was confident that one day I would become a great artist. On the other hand, here is what Mother always said: 'I'm Father's favorite. In all things, he looks after me. Still, he has the talents of valiant heroes, and he shall become a great man.' When I attend school and listen to my teacher, he constantly says that I'm the 'chosen one' of my Father, of My mother, and of all my relatives; they follow everything I do. According to my teacher, I don't have the slightest amount of talent ever to become a great man—my prospects are surely limited to that of working in commerce, playing chess, and hatching hoaxes. So now you know, Effendi."

He said this so seriously. Truly, this was an earnest matter. Not only that, it was infinitely important. His father had no idea about the depth of meaning which lay in this child's honest words. However, my wife perceived the truth in what he said, because she looked at me and knowingly nodded.

In the meantime, the boy had changed his external appearance—not only in the way of colors, but even in relation to their arrangement. That which earlier had been green, now was blue, and what was once blue became green. The right leg, the left arm, and both cheeks were now green. His left leg, right arm, upper lip, and twisted-moustache were blue. Seeing this, I asked myself: "What's next?"

He answered promptly: "I'm Judas Maccabees, and I have a vendetta against the Syrians. I'll let that go for the time being, because I've heard what my Father said about me. I've told you what he thinks about me, how my Mother once thought of me, and the teacher's assessment of me. Now, I would also like to know your point of view, Effendi. First of all, please tell me your opinion about all this. Who's right? Father, Mother, or the teacher?"

As if to ask forgiveness, he blushed and cast a pleading glance toward his father when he answered his own question: "I love my Father and my Mother, but they're both mistaken. I have no affection for my teacher, but he's right." I was unable to respond—I could only pull the boy to my side and kiss him on his unpainted forehead. My heart wanted to overflow, and I also saw how deeply my wife was moved—her eyes filled with tears. It was nothing short of a sacred moment. All the while, his father sat next to me. Mustafa smiled at us, and yet he didn't have the slightest notion about the depth of innocence, the pure candor, and the spell-binding magic of the child's soul which had become so palpably open to us. "So, give me a little time, Thar. When we see each other again, you'll be different than you were previously. On that date, I'll form my opinion of you. Before I leave Jerusalem, I'll tell you what I think."

"Really?" he begged. "Yes, really," I answered. At that moment, his hand gently and tenderly touched my cheekbone as he solemnly declared: "Make no mistake; I also love you. This I know for sure. Do you want to see something that I've created, that I've actually painted?" I said "Yes."

"When are you coming again?" I responded, "Tomorrow at the same time." He quickly chimed in: "Well then, before noon. I must begin my work and finish the pictures this afternoon!" He thought for a couple of moments. A mischievous snicker quivered across his green cheeks and over his blue moustache. Then he asked his father: "May I have your permission to redecorate the garden house today?"

"What do you want to do there?" inquired Mustafa. Thar answered: "Paint two pictures; tomorrow, I'll show them to Effendi."

"Good, you may." Thar insisted: "But no one may disturb me. Unless I so desire, no one will be allowed to come into the garden house."

"Not even I?" asked Mustafa. "That includes you," said Thar.

"That's certainly interesting. I hope that you will be successful in showing Effendi something that's really good; so, I have nothing against your project." The boy exclaimed: "Thanks be to Allah! I'll begin right away!" In joyful anticipation, he turned a somersault and shot out of the shop. After a few minutes of silence, Mustafa Bustani asked: "Now, what do you say to him? What a good lad! An artist, right?"

"Wait," I answered. First, let's see. Such judgments should be weighed and regarded closely. I've prayed for an extension of time. Tomorrow will be the next time I see him."

This gave us the occasion to take our leave, so we parted company. It was close to noon, when the hottest time of

day begins and one best spends time in the coolness of a room. When the heat was past, we hiked towards the Mount of Olives in order to walk towards Bethany, and then return back to Jerusalem via the sites of Bethphage and Kafr et Tur. We took a photograph; my wife almost never travels without a camera. Due to the fact that carrying photography gear on a tour requires so much time and trouble, I'm always concerned that dealing with such things can greatly interfere with my personal and natural mobility. Yet my wife loves to bring home souvenir-photos that make her happy when she reminisces later on. So today, she also took a couple of pictures in Bethany; I've included one of those, because it shows the remnants of the city's stone wall. We climbed to the summit of the Mount of Olives, upon which there are places where you can see not only the mountains of East Jordan, but even a part of the Dead Sea. As we enjoyed this rich view, we talked about our visit with Mustafa Bustani. Contrasting his earlier, sad appearance, we knew that the years would actually pass quickly as he aged. The death of his wife had very deeply gripped him, which another Muslim might be capable of handling otherwise.

Add to this a second, almost equally deep sorrow and inner-soul-excitement which we were yet to discover. Up to this point, our attention had almost exclusively been directed to the East; we now turned to the West, to the city that lay before us. There in a secluded area near a carob bush, we saw a man sitting with his hands folded as if in prayer—staring motionless at the horizon. This was some time before the shadows of evening. We were compelled to look at him. When we came nearer, he stood up. It was our friend Mustafa Bustani. We mentioned how we had just been talking about him. However, he seemed to be self-conscious about our coincidental meeting. It was as if he were feeling caught in the act of doing something that no one was supposed to know about. His words, which shut down after our greeting, sounded as though he felt that he had a duty to apologize.

He told us how this place has been his favorite spot for some time, one which he visits daily as he looks towards the East. Instinctively, I had to think about his missing, banished brother who had disappeared in the East. We sat closely beside him and soon noticed that he thought it necessary to speak in a peculiar frame of mind which had an exceptionally soft-hearted undertone, one that gave the impression of emotional helplessness. In our enormously scene-gripping, surrounding locale, I didn't pry further. In his psyche, he himself was used to doing a lot of soul-searching.

I was right, for he very soon directed the conversation to his previously mentioned favorite subject, to the connection of the visible and invisible world and to the biblical claim that there are in fact miracles. Regarding this, he confessed to us that a dream drove him to this conclusion, a dream that had been so certain and so clear that it seemed he was awake and not sleeping at all. This clarity had been so great and so convincing, that he had written down its exact date: the 15th day of the Month of Adar. Half-way apologizing and half-way questioning, he added that he would not take on too much by being preoccupied with his dreams. We assured him that all of us were greatly interested in everything that concerned him, especially in matters of his spiritual life.

"Effendi, you know that my brother was cast out because he had become a Christian, and that we all rejected his attempts to reconcile, for he had even married a Christian woman. Ever since, no one has heard from him. Later on, no one could find out where he went. The events that followed even extended to our family's inheritance. He had the very same rights as I had. I became the sole heir; he was poor, poor as a beggar!"

I tried to soften the harshness by noting customary laws and governing families' rights. He pointed this out to me: "You are a Christian and therefore think differently when you try to make me feel better. For a full year, I felt no sense of unfairness about what we had committed against him. After all, possessions and religion are different matters, right? As a believer, am I permitted to change the order of things whenever my wealth changes to poverty? No! Even for such a little thing as wanting to become a Christian and not remain a Muslim, one can be pushed out of the family's circle of inheritance. However, this last thought did not come from me; rather, it came from my wife. In her heart, there lived a love and a kind-heartedness which were not present in me. Her graciousness began a difficult and heavy labor in me—but she succeeded. My hardness became softer, always more tender; and when the mother of my son passed away, she died as the victor. I promised her that I would search for my brother and share with him everything that I own. She thanked me, blessed me—then closed her eyes and departed.

He covered his face with his hands and became silent for a while as he tried to master his emotions; then, he continued: "In vain, I searched and searched. My brother had simply disappeared. Constantly, I thought about him and even more about my wife, whose death had taken even more away from me. Effendi, you probably know this already. This question came to me: 'What if my brother had already died, and he and my wife had found each other on the other side of this life, where they now talked and looked below?' I brooded over such thoughts. I awoke with these ideas, and I fell asleep with them."

"On the 15th day of the month of Adar, I dreamed that I was on my knees, praying in the mosque. Opened before me was the First Kiblah of the Holy Koran. My brother appeared to me and led me forth, wanting to help me realize what he wanted to say to me: 'I'm dead, but I live. You have not pardoned me, but I've forgiven you. I'll send you my forgiveness. She approaches from the East. Daily, keep a look-out for her and restore again what you have perpetrated against me!' His words resounded. Then, he disappeared. The Koran closed itself, and I awoke from the dream. This vision appeared to be so clear and so true to me, that I left my store for the entire day in order to ponder its meaning. Almost daily ever since, I am driven to come here as I look towards the East to see whether the dream is being fulfilled."

"Regularly, I sojourn for a short time in Bethany where I visit the grave of Lazarus. Why? I don't know. For me, it's as if this is the only place where I shall somehow meet with the messenger of my brother. Effendi, what do you say about this dream?"

"Listen to what you yourself are saying about your brother. Truly, your own feelings can lead you better than any separate perspective that I could give you."

"So, do you think that I should continue to take my daily walks to this place?" I replied: "Through someone or in some way, will they forbid you to visit this site?" He answered, "No." So I assured him, "Well then, there's no real

reason for you to stop.”

Relieved, Mustafa confided in me: “I thank you. At first, it was hard for me to tell you and your wife about these matters. Now that I’ve told you, I feel that my heart has grown much lighter. So, come! Twilight is coming, and we must go—otherwise, the darkness will overtake us on our way back.

He stood up, and we followed his example. He was right; the evening sank lower, so we hurried towards home. Along the way, he told us how he had taken care of some business for us. In Hebron, he had located an expensive, Arabian Pasha-saddle which was for sale. He would send a messenger to pick it up, then show the saddle to me. Just then, I remembered: “Oh yes, I personally must go towards Hebron. I want to show my wife the Grave of Abraham, Abraham’s Well, and the famous Oak of Mamre, where the three angels appeared to the Patriarch.”

He happily called out: “So, if you’ll permit me, I’ll accompany you. Since I have many important and pressing things to do there, it would be best if we could travel tomorrow.” I agreed: “Yes, we can do that. Any time that suits you is OK for us.” He seemed pleased: “Really? Then tomorrow is OK? And may I bring along my son Thar? It will be a real treat for him to accompany you and me, riding in a beautiful carriage to see an unknown part of the world. In that direction, he’s never traveled farther than Bethlehem.” We were happy to oblige: “If it’s OK with you, we have no objection to Thar coming with us.”

“Good. So it’s decided that we’ll make the trip; I’ll make the arrangements for a carriage. Since you’re now on your way to my home, please stay awhile longer at my house. I want you to see the joy which your invitation will bring to my boy.” Before we reached our destination, it became completely dark. Mustafa Bustani knocked on the inner gate’s locked door.

Shuffling foot steps drew near; the African cook opened the door for us. She had an oriental wind-lantern in her hand. By its light, we saw that her entire body had been wrapped in a white sheet, which now was so full of blue, green, red, and yellow smudges, that we hardly recognized its original surface.

When the master of the house saw her, he cried out: “Maschallah! Look at you!” As she proudly answered, a most satisfied grin almost doubled in size as it spread across her face: “This is art!” Bewildered, Mustafa pressed further: “Art? How so?” Maschallah replied: “We are painting the Red Sea. We began right after lunch, and we’re still not quite finished.”

“You—you’re painting too?” he asked. Certain, yet not exactly cheerful misgivings began to cross his mind. In a tone that seemed to have greater and greater self-satisfaction, she declared: “Yes, I. The ‘Favored One’ is painting only the water, the air, and the sun; I, however, paint the land green. Thar is not yet finished.” Mustafa quizzed further: “The green land? Well then, what does he paint on? Hopefully, only on paper.” Maschallah surprised him: “Upon paper? Oh no. That would be much too small. We’re painting on the wall.”

“Upon the wall? Where then?” She answered: “In the garden house.” Mustafa cried out: “Allah, Allah! On the wall in the garden house? That is outrageous! What will I see there? I must go there immediately.” He hurried away from the gate where he had been standing all this time. At this moment, the cook saw my wife and me. Her face lit up like a search light when she recognized me.

“Effendi!” she called out. “Already here today! The ‘Chosen One’ said that you were coming tomorrow. Hurry and follow me. The ‘Favored One’ said that you may see it, but his father is still forbidden to view it. We must quickly send him away. He may not come in!” She jogged along with her lantern as we followed more slowly. It was not far—hardly twenty paces. The main residence lay in the middle of the garden, and the garden house stood along the outer wall. Mustafa Bustani had not yet caught up with us. He would not have been able to restrain himself from entering into the room wherein we now set foot and saw “the art.” I remembered its former decor. I had often been inside of this little house. Its construction was square, with the doorway facing the garden. Without windows to offer a view to the outside world, the other three sides were painted ivory-yellow-white and decorated with gold-lettered maxims regarding cures. Due to its seclusion, cleanliness, aesthetic stillness, and modesty, this garden house had always impressed me as soothing. Not so on this night.

Suddenly, the door was jerked wide open. In front of it stood Mustafa Bustani. He had not yet entered, because his son resisted his doing so. From the ceiling hung a light fixture whose lamp burned with a bright flame. In the center of the room, we saw the artist. Before noon, his form and his shirt had been in two colors—now they appeared to be immersed in four: namely in sky-blue, poisonous green, sparkling yellow, and in scorching red. Such intensive, screaming-colors are upsetting to one who is highly sensitive about art. Amid all of this, it is no wonder the boy was not in a good mood. As we came still closer to the garden house, we heard Thar’s angry voice as he shouted to his father: “No! You promised me!” Mustafa Bustani answered: “But as you see, Effendi is here.”

“Where?” As the father pulled me to his side and showed me to his son, I announced myself: “Here.” Thar wondered aloud: “Today already? You were supposed to come tomorrow. Nevertheless, it’s good that you’re here now. It’s true that I have not yet finished, for you see that the sharks are still missing; but in due time, I’ll put them in—this will go very quickly. Both of you, please step in and—” His father interrupted: “And I too?”

“I wish to be kind and also allow you to enter, because both of the chief guests are present. I’m doing this only because you are occasionally lenient with me.” Mustafa agreed: “Unfortunately so! Allah knows that I am.” So not exactly in a mood of harmony and not quite used to this feeling, we got ready to enjoy the work of art. I have to note the plain truth about these circumstances—neither before nor afterwards did my eyes grasp the painting’s depth of understanding and the height of its elaboration. Its impact made us feel that we were standing in front of such an enormous, astonishing, unparalleled achievement. The absolute least I can do is to give a brief sketch of the situation. Like a painting by Rafael Santi or a masterpiece by Rembrandt van Rijn, it’s absolutely impossible to describe fully.

According to oriental custom, the garden house entrance was only open by way of the garden and thereby closed to the outside world. When we stepped through the open door, there were three walls that closed off the room—to the left, to the right, and straight ahead. As mentioned earlier, the walls were once painted ivory-yellow with gold-lettered claims concerning advice on healthy living. Now, these no longer existed. The middle wall was masculine-blood-red, or perhaps more of a scorching reddish hue. Both of the side walls were painted in a shade of ultimate-manly, juicy green color. Above these hues of red and green, everything was painted blue. High above on the ceiling, where the light fixture cord was attached, there sat a large yellow spot. At first, the blotch was probably round, but this form no longer held its shape as it ran together with the blue. On the right-hand wall, in the middle of the green, there stood a white house; it had two doors, a window, and three chimneys. In the middle of the green left-hand wall, a black house stood; it had three doors, no windows at all, and two chimneys. To the left of the mid-field of vision, where the red butted together with the green, one focused below on a black human heel that stretched upwards to half of the leg's calf. Midway and at the bottom portion of the right-hand wall, where the green jostled against the red, our eyes saw a white human instep that was connected to half of a shin bone, which appeared to extend out of the red. Thar had already announced that sharks were supposed to be added. Even if he put forth all of his effort on the three walls, I found only a narrow place where a shark would feel at home.

With a kind of superior look, his eyes glided over us: "All of you simply stand and marvel! Don't you know what it means? Effendi, do you know what it is?" Since he so directly referred to me, it was best for me to blur my judgment of the painting's merit. I was very diplomatic, mentioning nothing objectionable as to what the picture was supposed to be. In any case, I wanted to keep the artist's high esteem. For this reason, I simply answered in general terms, yet with a practicable enthusiasm for this artwork: "It is the pure Blue-green-red-yellow Wonder!"

He agreed with me: "Right! You never say something false. It has cost us a lot of effort and color. Just look this way!" He pointed down towards the floor, where half to entirely empty paint cans stood. All sorts of paint brushes lay scattered around, and it was impossible to count the number of clean-up rags and sponges. "We fetched these from the white-washer," he continued. "Since the time was too short and I would not be able to finish the work alone, the cook had to help me. She just painted the land, which is easy. As for the rest, I had to do this by myself; she has no talent to do more."

His father was extremely upset. With a great deal of effort, he suppressed his anger and asked: "Well then, who gave you permission to paint over these walls and the expensive inscriptions?" His son answered, "Of course, it was you!"

"I—?" stammered the father. Thar replied: "Yes, you yourself. I asked you if I could paint two pictures in the garden house, and you gave me permission to do so."

"Somehow, was I supposed to understand that you would paint them on the walls instead of on paper? Son, we'll talk further about this!" As if he had a stick in his hand, he gestured and added: "By the way, I see only one picture—not two." The boy spoke up: "I've changed my mind; there will be more than two. Here is the first. Still others will follow. Effendi wants to see what I can do, so I must show him as much as possible."

"Still more pictures? Like these? Are you crazy? Well then, which ones?" Thar answered: "Tomorrow, we are painting in the harem—the trumpets of Jericho and how the city's walls collapsed." Mustafa sighed: "Allah have pity on us. And the day after tomorrow?" The boy didn't hesitate: "The day after tomorrow, we are painting the bedrooms."

In disbelief, Mustafa asked: "But what?" Thar was quick to answer: "The downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah, complete with smoke and fire, lightening and thunder. I've already ordered the colors." Mustafa was dumbfounded: "Already ordered? This too? Lightening and thunder, smoke and fire in the bedroom? As for your art, it seems that nothing is impossible. I realize that I must set limits. What then is portrayed here? There is no train of thought in that!"

With his use of the word "limits," the father had again set something in motion—just like this morning when he wanted to take Thar across his knee. In spite of this threat, the boy had to laugh as he answered: "No thoughts? In there, we find all of the People of Israel, King Pharaoh, and all of his Egyptian soldiers!" Incredulous, the father inquired further: "How so? On the contrary, I see nothing of them!"

"That's because they're in the water! This picture shows the Children of Israel's passage through the Red Sea. Don't you see the Red Sea that is right in front of you? And over there is the blue air; directly above your head is the yellow sun, because the time of day is exactly noon. Here to the left, the green land, that is Egypt; and the house, that is the Palace of the Pharaoh. And here to the right, this green land is Palestine; the King of the Jebusites lives in the house that stands there. In between there lies the Red Sea. The Children of Israel were slaves in Egypt. Moses helped them break away. He fled with them into the Red Sea. Even now, all of them are stuck in there. With all of his armies, Pharaoh hurried after them. Look here! The last one of them has just now disappeared. You can still see his heel which is still above the water. On the other side over there, the Children of Israel are just now coming out of the water again. Already you can see the first one's toes which are half-way out of the water. As soon as all of them are high and dry, I'll paint in my sharks; then you'll see that Pharaoh and all of his soldiers will be devoured—not a single one of them will remain. More or less, aren't those the approximate ideas?"

He stretched himself out in front of his father and watched his dad's face as he thought about these explanations. Behind us rang out the reproachful voice of their African cook. She was standing next to the door with her wind-lantern. She had heard everything: "It was my hand that produced the entire green land of Egypt and all of Palestine's greenery. Tomorrow, I'm painting Jericho!" At that moment, the good Mustafa Bustani could no longer control himself. All of his temper burst forth. His voice thundered at them: "Tomorrow, you will learn what you can paint. March! Come away with me into the house!"

His angry voice shocked the African cook. She let loose of the lantern which shattered and extinguished—running

away as fast as her feet would carry her. Realizing the impact of his wrath, the merchant immediately tried to take back its harsh impact. He addressed us in an apologetic tone: "Forgive me. Such anger is never the right thing. Please allow me to accompany you."

We understood and gladly embraced him. He led us towards the gate through which we had come. It still stood open. There, he said this to us: "We'll keep our plans to travel early tomorrow morning. I'll pick you up at seven, European time. I don't yet know whether I'll bring my son along."

My wife then asked about his son whom she had grown so fond of: "Will you punish him very severely?" Mustafa answered with an unusually solemn tone: "In this situation, I'll have to think about who deserves the punishment here. With both of you here, it's as if a light has come to me. Since this morning, it seems as if I now have entirely new eyes and ears. How did it happen that you, without any kind of perceptible reason, came along the same path leading to the heights of the Mount of Olives—the one which I daily climb—precisely at the same time?" I gently tossed out this word: "Coincidence!"

"You say that without personally believing it. I know all too well that you consider the word "coincidence" to be an embarrassing fabrication. However, for now that's unimportant. Above all else this evening, I have to think about my son. I would like to be alone this evening. And without feeling ashamed, I can say to both of you that I must pray. This thought has come to me: I have placed the soul of my child upon the wrong path. Allah alone knows the hidden depths of our hearts. He wants to show me what is correct and what is false. Please, do not concern yourselves about the boy. He won't receive punishment which he doesn't deserve. Good night." Extending our hands to him, we also said "Good night." We were eager to see how tomorrow's affairs would develop.

II. Towards Hebron!

Oh what memories are connected to the name of this old and famous city of kings and descendants of Levi! Located just twenty miles south of Jerusalem, Hebron may be the oldest city in the Promised Land. It existed three thousand years before the birth of Christ. According to the traditional teachings of the Middle Ages, it is in this vicinity where God created Adam.

Seventeen miles southwest of Jerusalem, there's the city of Kirjath-arba, where mythical giants once lived. Later, Hebron was the capitol city of the Hittites, whose princes resided there. After the Children of Israel's conquest of Canaan, the city fell to the Family of Caleb. Later, King David spent the first seven years of his reign here. At the city gates, David's General Joab murdered Abner, the Commander-in-Chief of King Saul's army. Upon David's orders, it was here that the men who assassinated Saul's son Ishbosheth were hung. From Hebron, Absalom launched the rebellion against his father, King David. During the Israelites' captivity in Babylon, the city fell into the hands of the Edomites, Esau's people—which Judas Maccabaeus drove out. The Romans destroyed the city and sold its inhabitants into slavery. The Crusaders made Hebron their Bishop-City. It has also become ever more holy to Muslims, because it was the dwelling place of the Patriarchs. In the past, Abraham lived there, and Jacob's caravan to Egypt began at Hebron. The Muslims call Abraham the friend of merciful compassion; from this title, Hebron received its current Arabic name, El Chalil.

So, Hebron is highly revered—but unfortunately, the city is not friendly toward strangers, particularly Christians. In the entire land, Hebron's population is the most bigoted. There are approximately nine thousand Muslims and five hundred Jews, who in fact want to earn as much money as possible from a Christian—yet they consider him to be inferior and even an unclean enemy whose mere touch can make them dirty. Through Hebron's lanes, a Christian pedestrian gets along OK if he tries very hard to avoid looking into the eyes of "the true believers." Otherwise, trouble can easily happen. At the least, youth who follow him will not just shout out curse words—they will also throw solid objects. The most pronounced expression of this hostile relationship is evident in the fact that Hebron's inns are not open to Christians—even though the city's well-traveled roadway connects to Jerusalem. Today, it may be different; it was in the year 1900 when I last visited Hebron.

In light of Christians' common veneration of the patriarch Abraham, Europeans visit this city of historical names—in spite of its unfriendly population. When his wife Sarah died, Abraham purchased the double burial cave called Machpela; the Hittite Ephron sold him this grave site. Thus in a burial chamber, she was transformed. Some say that the following famous six are entombed here: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah. Among the Greek-speaking Jews, some say that the Byzantine Emperor Justinian lies here. Above this spot, a church was once established—which the Muslims converted into a mosque; unfortunately, Christians are not allowed to visit this site. Christians are only permitted to come near the outer perimeter of this shrine. In order to go beyond that limit, one must be a high-level, princely person—especially one that holds a firman, a royal decree from the Ottoman Empire. In this same region, upon Der el Arba'in, one finds the grave of Jesse, King David's father. A half hour from the city stands Abraham's Well, where some claim that this is the scene where once the Oaks of Mamre stood. [Mamre was the Amorite chief who gave his name to the plain where Abraham dwelt, Genesis 23: 19.] Almost every place in the surrounding area is intertwined with some memory of the patriarchs. So for this reason, it was also a desire of mine to visit Hebron as often as I was in Jerusalem. So it is now. (Photo, 148 KB-Jpg. The Apostles' fountain: on the road between Jerusalem and Bethany, which tradition says is the place where Jesus rested with his disciples.)

At exactly 7 o'clock the next morning, a comfortable, fully covered four-passenger carriage arrived at our door. Therein, sat Mustafa Bustani and Thar. When my wife saw them, she said: "So, he's allowed to come after all." I too was pleased about this. The boy sprang out of the carriage. He was festively dressed: golden shoes, white stockings, white pants, and a white Bedouin-shirt with a red vest that had Hungarian Hussar gold-braided cords. Upon his head sat a red fez, to which a white, silken neck-scarf was fastened. Today, the boy looked exceptionally distinguished. "We are here. Father bids you to come," said Thar. His voice had an official and powerful ring to it. In a softer and more confidential tone, he officially put forth this question: "Yesterday evening, did you also think that I would receive a good thrashing? No? I've thought a great deal about it. I wish that he had whipped me." For a moment, he pondered over this

—then he repeated these words: “Yes, yes, I wanted it that way!”

“Why?”

“If the beating were over, my father would no longer be angry and sad. It would no longer be painful for me either. As long as I have to await punishment, even as I do right now, he still has the sad eyes—and that causes me twice the pain.” I wanted to know the reason: “In what way is it doubled?”

“First, I’ll tell you about his eyes, then secondly about the thrashing which is yet to come. Due to the fact that the punishment usually never happens, I ceaselessly and hopelessly feel this way in advance. So today, it will perhaps be the same. Since yesterday evening, his sad eyes have hurt me. Mostly, he doesn’t say a word—not a single thing. Early today, he personally woke me up and helped me get dressed. When he stood so silently in my room, I could no longer bear it; I wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed him, begging him to punish me—soundly and vigorously. He just gently smiled and shook his head. Do you think he is doing the right thing?”

I gave him this advice: “At all times, what your father does is the right thing. You must come to understand this.” Thar questioned me: “Even when I regard his actions as wrong?” Here was my reply: “Then too! When you grow older, just as he is now, you will have an experience that will convince you that he was right. Oh well, come on! Your father is always so punctual—we shouldn’t keep him waiting.”

“Now just a moment,” he pleaded. “I still have something to tell you; today is Friday, a holiday. It’s forbidden for me to get dirty. For that reason, I didn’t bring along any colors. Nevertheless, I am a hero. You see, it isn’t required that a hero be painted up when he wants to conquer his enemies. There are also cases in which—“ At that point, my wife jokingly added this line: “—the victor actually has no paint at all. Yesterday, you told us that you wanted to paint the first storming of Palestine’s City of Jericho. Didn’t you think about that project on this special Friday?”

The boy answered her: “Anyway, nothing could be done about Jericho. I lack the means to capture the necessary noise. I can paint the trumpets and also the walls; but how am I supposed to insert the loud racket when I can’t portray that part of the picture? It’s really too bad—just a crying shame. So, now I’m ready. Let’s go.”

We broke off our conversation and went to the carriage. Just as we were climbing in, Lord Pasha Osman Achyr interrupted his morning excursion and came riding upon his fat donkey. For a moment, he reigned back on his steed, gave us a friendly greeting, then directed this question to the boy: “Well then, which hero are you today?” With his usual presence of mind, Thar answered: “I’m Joshua the Conqueror. I’m going into the Land of the Canaanites in order to show them that we are not afraid of them.” The Pasha played along: “Where does this land lie?” The boy replied: “In Gilgal.” The Pascha cautioned him: “My boy, be careful then. Without asking first about your reason for being there, the people will cut you down.” With that parting advice, he rode off.

Regarding what was necessary for our journey, Mustafa Bustani assured us that he had taken care of everything. Thar leapt onto the seat beside the coachman where he felt more free and higher than in the deeper part of the carriage beside us. The horses then began to pull forward. Our steep path went from the Jaffa Gate into the Hinnom Valley, which carries the Jewish and Islamic references to “hell.” We traveled farther to the Sultan’s Pool; and from there, again upward to the high and level Bethel. Thereon lies the Cloister of Rabbi Elijah, from which we could admire a broad and outstanding view. This monastery is associated with the Prophet Elijah, and nearby is a spring where the Holy Family reportedly drew water.

Beyond this monastery, you’ll find Rachel’s Crypt, the burial site of Patriarch Jacob’s wife. At this holy site, we read these words: “On the road to Ephratah, which is now called Bethlehem, Rachel died and was buried. So Jacob erected a memorial upon her grave; to this day, Rachel’s monument is still there.” The road divides at this place. To the left, it goes towards Bethlehem; straight ahead lies Hebron. We took the latter direction. After forty-five minutes, we came to the Three Pools of Solomon. Long before the Christian era, these aqua ducts were constructed in order to supply water to Jerusalem. Even though these pools and the region’s small castle hold historical and architectural significance, they have no bearing on our story—so for now, we’ll bypass them.

Of more interest to me is the broad Wadi a-‘Arish; midway between Jerusalem and Hebron, a “café” was erected, a place where men and animals can find a place to rest themselves. Don’t picture a European-style café. Instead, imagine a narrow, low-quality, jagged stone building wherein a rather squalid fellow boils dirty water in a filthy pot as he makes a brew which he calls “coffee”—a drink that he sells to European passersby, all at sinfully expensive prices.

Yet the sin does not stem from the price that he demands. Oh no, he’s too sly for that. This might result in a complaint that could lead to cancellation of his license to sell coffee. He works this more cleverly. For the locals, he sets the lowest possible price; but for foreigners, he always says this: “I’ll take what you give me!” In this way, he neither dissuades nor pleads. Since European travelers are almost always well-to-do, having extra money to afford elevated sentiments, the coffee-innkeeper gives them the impression that he’s needy—all with the aim that they will pay him a price which is more like a present, or even an excessive tariff. For a very small oriental cup, which contained no more than two or three thimbles-worth of coffee, he held out his hand long enough to receive more than a German Mark—whereas five Pfennig would have been entirely enough. I had always been generous towards him. However, the last time I stopped at his place, I saw how he was laughing at me as I rode away—so today, he shall pay dearly for that.

When we arrived at his “café,” we stopped and climbed out of the carriage. He rushed outside; and with an exaggerated deep bow, he asked about our “orders.” Mustafa Bustani first ordered five cups of coffee, then five more; for a third time, he ordered still another five. Altogether, that came to fifteen cups. The man melted into a downcast spirit; he knew that Mustafa Bustani was no foreigner and that he often stopped here on his business trips to Hebron. So, he could not treat him like a European. When we were preparing to leave and climbing into our carriage, I took out my money pouch. The shop owner’s face completely lit up. I asked how much it cost for the fifteen cups of coffee. “Give what you wish,” he said. “I’ll only pay the price that you demand,” I declared.

This accomplished nothing. He absolutely refused to set a price. So when I threatened to pay him nothing if he wouldn't give me a price, he simply answered with this: "OK, I'll give them to you as a present." This trick had always worked for him. He assumed that no European would allow him to give away his coffee. So, I acted just as he expected. Appearing to be overwhelmed with his generosity, I gave him a franc. In Palestine, the franc is the most prized silver coin. He looked at it, then handed it back to me and said: "I'm giving the money back to you." After taking the coin back, I first gave him two, then three francs. Once again, he declined the money and repeated these words: "I give these as presents to you." I understood how this man operated; I knew just how far I could take this. His greed for money grew with every increase of my offer. I gave him four, then finally five francs. With this last sum, he closed his hand and made a movement as if he wanted to pocket the money. At the same time, he inquisitively looked at me.

I put on my most good-natured face and raised my hand as if to reach into my money bag once again. This was too much for him; he could not resist. In a tone of voice which made it seem that any payment for the coffee was simply impossible, he handed me the five francs: "I also give these to you!" Ever so slowly and in a way that would not diminish the pleasure of this scene, I took back the money, put the coins in my bag, and answered him: "So, I give in to your kindness, and I accept your present. I thank you. Live long and well! May Allah bless you and your house for your noble generosity towards all foreign guests!"

Since we didn't want to hurry and thereby lessen the great effect of our departure, we slowly stood up and watched the expression on his face. Acting as if he wanted to keep us there, he held up his outstretched arms. His mouth gaped open. Upon his face lay an expression of confused dismay, one which bordered on outright shock. He was speechless, uttering neither word nor sound. To make up for lost time, the horses fell into a trot. When we came to the next curve in the road where we looked back, the man still stiffly stood there in the same spot. What followed was whole-hearted laughter—even the Arabic coachman joined in the fun.

The rest of the trip provided a lot of historical points of interest, which at the time seemed to have no connection to the former events. In Ain ed Dirwe, there is a beautiful hewn-stone fountain where the 8th chapter of Acts describes how the Christian Apostle Phillip converted and baptized the Ethiopian Queen Candace' royal treasurer. Farther on, we came across the ruins of Beth Zur, the "house of rock," just southwest of Jerusalem. Chapter 15, verse 58 in the Old Testament Book of Joshua notes the importance of Beth Zur in the time of the Hebrew hero Judas Maccabeus. Chapter 3, verse 16 of The Book of Nehemiah also cites its history.

A half hour later and perhaps 400 steps on the left-hand side of the roadway, we came to the large stone structure of Abraham's Cistern, more commonly called "Abraham's Well." At this place, we still had a lot to keep us thoroughly busy. Regarding this famous site, I offer one of my wife's photographs. There in the corner, I am sitting on the edge of the Cistern, clothed like an Arab—except for my bare head. Forward and to the right, is the Arabic Donkey Driver, whom I will introduce later on.

Before reaching this place near the city, imagine long ago when there were vineyards and gardens that even in olden times had a reputation for their good fruits. For example, it's said that this is where Moses' military scouts visited Hebron's Brook of Eschol and cut the gigantic cluster of grapes which they carried back to the camp of the Israelites as a proof of the fruitfulness of the land (Numbers 13: 23). From here to the city, it takes only a half hour.

In earlier days, whenever I traveled to Hebron, I called on my venerable and extraordinarily agreeable old acquaintance, Jew Eppstein. Since he comes from Germany, he speaks German exceptionally well. Regarding the local hatred of Christians which every German assumes to be the case, he very weakly subscribed to that prejudice. Since I was following Mustafa Bustani's travel plans, today I was unable to visit Eppstein. By stopping at a Jew's place, Mustafa would have forever damaged his reputation.

So we drove on, arriving at the address of one of his business friends, a place that had enough room to accommodate the horses and carriage. Was it also possible for him to accept my wife and me? Fortunately, he was a man who was among the few broad-minded, tolerant believers who live in Hebron. After some hesitation, we were taken in— but separate from Mustafa and his son. For us, there was a small, four-cornered room that had no windows. In order to have light, we had to leave the door open, which also let in the stinky, filthy air from the farmyard. If we were bold and daring enough, we could sit upon the room's single piece of furniture, a straw mat. After spending a half hour in there, someone brought us an old pitcher of stagnant water that was not drinkable.

When we sought answers to our questions, we could learn nothing more than this: due to the fact that we were Christians and not Muslims, this was the only kind of water that he was permitted to offer us. Besides, no one else would be permitted to drink from our pitcher, because it would now be considered "unclean." So, this was the hospitality of a so-called "tolerant" Muslim. How would we have fared with one who was intolerant? I asked Mustafa Bustani to come to our room. He came and brought along Thar. He apologized. The man told him that we had been well taken care of—befitting our social standing. We informed Mustafa that we now preferred to go to Jew Eppstein's.

Right away, Thar was determined to accompany us. His father didn't object. As much as Mustafa wished, he couldn't do otherwise. Now that he was already there, he pointed out the necessity of the meeting and the visit; this situation placed a demand upon him, but these matters didn't obligate his son. Thus, he was thankful that we wanted to take Thar with us. First of all, Mustafa suggested that he go to the Arab who had wanted to sell the saddle. It was on account of this saddle that he had made the journey, so it was readily understood that this matter had been settled earlier. At this time, my wife spoke up: "Since it is Friday, are you allowed to buy and sell?" Mustafa answered: "In this case, yes. We don't live here, so we are considered passers-by and customers who can't wait."

My wife reasoned further: "After all, we too are part of the hospitality reserved for passers-by, courtesies for those who can not wait. Why are Muslims pliable when it comes to making money, yet harshly inconsiderate whenever it comes to showing love and kind-heartedness to those same foreigners?" Mustafa Bustani pleaded his case:

"According to Islam, hospitality belongs to those who are virtuous, and no one is released from this obligation." She pressed him further: "Also when it comes to other religious faiths?" Unequivocally, he answered her: "Yes, this is true for Christians, Jews, and heathens."

She pressed him for more: "If the residents of Hebron then claim to be Muslims, yet they don't practice this commandment, how then can they be true confessors of the Prophet Mohammed?" Our friend conceded: "Arguably, no one can answer this." Here, I joined in: "On the contrary. Our Thar has already answered. Earlier today, he spoke with the Ferik-Pasha."

The boy had been listening to us. When he now learned that he had answered a question that his father believed to be unanswerable, he felt very important: "Yes, that's correct. I always know more than other people! Thus, our cook and her husband always call me 'The Chosen One.' Effendi, please tell me what I said." I recalled his description: "Figuratively speaking—but not without reasonable cause—you labeled Hebron's inhabitants as Canaanites."

"Oh yes. I always have reasons. Only on the surface are they Muslims—on the inside, they will always be Canaanites. In the process of refinement during Moses' time and that of Islam, they have been passed by, and now they are at the bottom of the barrel. Effendi, now I remember that I was the first to figure this out. I haven't forgotten the history of Moses' time, nor the origins of Islam. So, just how do we actually identify all the Palestinian people in Canaan? They go by these names: Hittites, Jebusites, Girgashites, Hivites, people of Arka, Amorites, Sidonians, Phenicians, those in Zemar, Arvadians, Hamathians, and all others dwelling in Zidon. You will probably not retain this information." I agreed: "Here is my notebook. Please write them for me."

From the inner pocket of his vest, he took out a small notebook and gave it to me. I was happy to see what it contained. What he had recorded was quite accurate and concerned fairly serious things. I noted the eleven names, then gave the small journal back to him. Right away, he began to read through the list, as if he were memorizing the words. In the meantime, his father went to the innkeeper, expressing our thanks for the hospitality. When he returned, we went in search of the owner of the saddle.

The trader picked it up and showed it to us. Without announcing the cost, he explained that he would sell it for a price that I would judge to be fair— not excessive. The object was really magnificent, and according to him, a bargain. Mustafa made the initial mistake of saying that I was the buyer, not he. Immediately, the Arab explained that he wanted nothing to do with me, a so-called infidel. It would be a sin to sell a Christian this saddle which a Muslim Pasha had owned—so, we must leave without achieving our purpose.

Mustafa Bustani was extremely outraged at this kind of treatment. Nevertheless, we were calmly determined to put this incident behind us. Mustafa wanted to accompany us to the Burial Site of Abraham, yet here too we had no luck. In every narrow and dirty alleyway through which we traveled, people looked at us with hostile eyes. Since we wanted to avoid running into danger and being mistreated at the hands of these people, we simply had to turn around at certain places and stations. On such an important occasion as today and as a Muslim, Mustafa Bustani should have felt ashamed to be leading two Christians to this holy site.

Never before had I personally experienced such intolerance. Actually, it was always the opposite case; I had been guided to the inner sanctuary, although I never went inside. Mustafa asked someone about the importance of today, so now we learned that this was both a birthday celebration and a commemoration of the expulsion of Ishmael, the eldest son of Abraham. Sarah had insisted that her husband banish his servant-maid Hagar and their son Ishmael to the desert. Now, we better understood the source of our inhospitable treatment from the bigoted saddle-merchant and from the mosque's fanatical officials.

The commemoration of their national ancestor's exile had absolutely doubled their existing abrasiveness. Jews were put on notice that they were not allowed to be seen—and the same was true for me. Given the fact that my wife was with me, this could easily have been taken as an act of defiance which would have heightened hostilities rather than minimize them. Thus, I had to give Mustafa Bustani my word that I would now go straight to Eppstein's home and eat at his house. I was to avoid the city streets, following only the outlying paths to Jew Eppstein's house. There were still two sites that we wanted to visit: Abraham's Oak of Mamre and the Sacred Heights of Hebron. As I've mentioned, the latter route is approximately 400 hundred paces from the road to Jerusalem. So we set the exact time when we would stop the carriage and leave Mustafa and Hebron behind us, thereby starting our journey to Eppstein's place. At the agreed upon time, we parted company. Thar was exceptionally happy that he was allowed to go with us. Without further words from his father, I didn't overlook the evident trust that his father had placed in me.

With all of his most generous hospitality, my brave and old friend Eppstein received us into his home. What is most commonly known as the home's "best room" was ours. It was a relatively airy room that was located on the flat roof top. In my wife's journal, wherein she happily noted such details, she wrote the following lines: "It was a very hot day. We were given a beautiful, cool, domed room that had two broadly curved arches. Three of the walls had windows, and the door was on the fourth. Conditions there were simply splendid. The room's furnishings consisted of two beds. To the side of one was a reconditioned couch with three antique pillows; next to it was a table with four wooden chairs. The other had a white-ruffled canopy bed. In the corner was a water pitcher that probably dated to the time of Christ. The walls were tinted with a bluish white-wash. A brass wash-service sat upon one of the chairs. I won't say a word about the pictures on the walls. We were served excellent Hebron wine, a bottle of which cost one franc. We dined on food that had required a great deal of preparation, all of which certainly was worth the effort." Considering the generous hospitality that we had received, we didn't need to send for the food that Mustafa Bustani had brought along. Those items were packed away in our carriage and would come in handy when we turned towards home.

In the course of the meal, Eppstein told us about today's big Children's Fitness-Festival, a birthday celebration in honor of the boy Ishmael. The children were drawn to the city's open spaces, where they were invited to take part in all kinds of peaceable and war-like games; adults were lining up to help supervise them. Since so many stories are told

about the expulsion and the injustices that were sustained, no person from another faith should even want to be a bystander. When Eppstein heard that we had the intention of riding to the Oak and on to Abraham's Well, he immediately advised us to cancel those plans. There could be trouble if a procession of children were to pass by these holy sites.

Filled with indignation, Thar yelled out: "Keep our distance? Flee? That is never the case with us. As for Effendi and me, we fear nothing. Regarding the Mrs., she too is not afraid, because I have told her that I'm a hero, and she can always call upon me in a time of need. Chuckling to himself, Eppstein considered how this child could have such self-esteem: "A hero?" With that remark, he came down on the wrong side of the boy. Thar rose from the table, came towards him, and answered that question: "You laugh at me? I will not tolerate that. My name is Thar, and woe to you if I should ever take revenge against you."

Jew Eppstein kept on joking: "Well, would that be really bad for me?" Thar was irritated: "So, you continue to laugh at me? Mind what you say! In truth, I'm just eleven years old, but in all of Jerusalem there isn't a single fourteen year old that I haven't wrestled to the ground!" Still smiling, Eppstein pressed further: "Do you also consider me to be such a fourteen year old?"

"No. Well then, how old are you?"

"Let's say sixty."

"For all I care, it's the same to me if you're a hundred. Now pay attention!"

Thar quickly slipped behind him, forcing his arms behind him. With a jerk and a squeeze, Eppstein ended up sitting on the ground—where previously he had stood. Naturally, this was the result of the boy's quickness and the way he managed to take the man by surprise. Even so, the boy had physical powers that exceeded the usual strength of an eleven year old. With a satisfied nod to Jew Eppstein, Thar returned to his place at the table: "At first, you laughed from above—now you laugh from below!"

"Tell me now, where did you develop such knack and quickness?"

Thar answered: "From the Lions Club."

"What is that? How and where?"

"It's in Jerusalem. We boys have four clubs where we can practice. The Lions Club meets in front of the western Jaffa Gate. At the northwestern Damascus Gate, you'll find The Elephant Club. Just outside of Stephen's Gate, The Hippos play. The Whales claim The Pool of Siloah as their practice grounds. As you know, these are strong and noble animals. With their speed and the power of their leaps, The Lions triumph, just as I've done here. As you already know, The Elephants trample together. The Hippos run with their heads linked together; in this way, the strongest roots himself to the spot while the others collapse inward. The Whales do battle only in the ocean. One ducks under the opposition, and with a mouth full of water he spews it into the air, just like whales do. Therein lies the victory! I'm a member of all four clubs; and to this day, no one has beaten me. Hey, do we want to work together like Hippos?"

Thar lowered his head and prepared to ram Mr. Eppstein, but he immediately stepped to the side and called out: "Leave me in peace. I am not one of those beasts! I only wanted to warn you about today's dangers—never considering that I would be treacherously ambushed. Should I contact a reliable rent-a-donkey business for the trip you're planning?" I answered: "Yes. Preferably one that does not devour Christians."

Mr. Eppstein was glad to help: "There is only one, so I'll ask him to come. It saddens me to acknowledge that today is such a Day of Hate. I'm sorry to say that your wife was only permitted to see the outside of the mosque. I have always said this, so I'll continue to repeat it: If the faith of these people were pure and noble, then they would not find it necessary to keep others away from their shrines."

He excused himself and sent for the donkey-lender. Thar pulled out his notebook and thoughtfully recorded this quote from Mr. Eppstein. For him, those words seemed important enough to remember. In a short time, the donkey-driver arrived and heard our requests. As our photograph shows, he looked Moorish, but he seemed to be good-natured and not a person to inconvenience us. He had no horses whatsoever; not even one donkey was available. On account of the festival, all animals had been reserved ahead of time. However, there were three mules that he could lend us. We could honestly say that they were only suited for pulling a cart, not for riding. One of them had an especially stubborn temperament, but we had to be thankful that these dear animals were still available. So we closed the deal with this merchant and asked that he bring the mules without delay.

Whenever a Middle Easterner, and particularly a donkey-driver promises to turn up without delay, this may mean that he will arrive one or even two hours from then. Yet this fellow was true to his word; in just thirty minutes, he showed up. He claimed that he would have come even sooner if he hadn't found it necessary to clean the animals before he delivered them to us. I don't care to describe them, so I'll simply confess that the sight of them was no minor fright for us.

They consisted of skin and bones. For well over a month, they had neither seen a washing, a scrubbing, nor a curry-comb. What was supposed to pass for a saddle and strapping was a sheer hodge-podge of things that didn't fit. The lady's saddle was such a boldly sad afterthought of improvisation. In light of the donkey-driver's freethinking and artistic invention, I paid him an extra baksheesh—an act for which he solemnly assured me that I had his everlasting love, loyalty, and devotion.

Needless to say, we wanted to provide feed for the poor animals. They fed on everything edible, including all the bread that we found in Eppstein's house—and still they were not full. The prettiest parts about them were their names. Mine was called "Guewerdschina," which means "dove." Naturally, I managed to pick the one that seemed to be the most ornery—and it proved to be true. In both a good and bad sense, we would have quite an experience with this one. After we paid the rental fee, mounted our mules, and prepared to ride away, it became evident that Guewerdschina didn't want to go along. She would not budge from her space.

I now applied all of my equestrian skills. The Donkey Driver himself gave it his best effort, and Eppstein's servants did the same—but all their efforts were in vain. They knew the stubborn nature of this dumb animal, so they were sure that it would rather die than take just two steps from its spot. What was I supposed to do? Like the Donkey Driver, should we too just walk along beside her? No! Once again, I mounted the mule and ordered the Driver to lead Guewerdschina. Of course, she followed him. Once we had left the city behind us and we had reached open fields, I had hoped to convince her to ride on—and I partially succeeded. Kind words and caressing didn't help at all, and whipping the animal accomplished even less. So I tried something with my thumb; from the side of "the dove," I pressed hard between the first two vertebrae. She shot forward and obeyed me for a little while, but not for long. I was convinced that I had to experiment from a new angle. During the entire journey, I agonized about what I should do with this contrary beast.

From the time we left the gardens till we reached the Oak of Abraham, a half hour passed. It's said that The Oak of Mamre originated during the time of the first patriarchs. This is an exaggeration. It belongs to the genus Quercus ilex pseudo-coccifera, which has a base circumference of approximately ten meters. At the height of four meters, this tree begins to fork and to form immense boughs. For the most part, the tree is already beginning to die as it branches out.

As early as the sixteenth century, this tree was venerated; anyway, it has a considerably different age—and it probably will not stand much longer than it already has. It belongs to the Russians who established a hospice here and built an observation tower; from its height, one can see all the way to the Dead Sea. For just a small fee, the key to this tower can be fetched inside the hospice. I sent Thar inside and asked him to bring me the key. After he did that errand, he brought me a cord that he had found.

While he was showing the rope to me, he said: "This is for your dear Guewerdschina. I want you to use this when you ride her away from here." I had my doubts about that: "Do you think you can make her move from this spot?"

"With no trouble at all."

"Well then, do you have some kind of remedy?"

"Yes, it works every time."

"Why didn't you tell me this earlier?"

Sly as a fox, he winked at me and laughed; his gorgeously white teeth glistened as he answered: "It's because I wanted to double your delight, and the cure can only be doubly pleasing when it follows prior turmoil. Watch this!" He took the middle of the rope and firmly tied a knot around the tail of "the dove," so that both ends of the cord hung down—then he climbed onto the saddle. We wanted to start out on our trip to Harem Ramet el Chalil, to the Sacred Heights of Hebron. My wife sat upon her mule, and I climbed onto the one that Thar had been riding. Now, we simply had to wait and see what the boy was going to do. The donkey driver handed him both ends of the rope, which he calmly held in his hands. "Now, watch how quickly this works," he said. "Make room; I'm riding on ahead."

We moved to the side. He goaded dear Guewerdschina. She swished her ears and wagged her tail, but she took no steps forward. He struck her, but that did no good. He screamed at her and slapped his feet into her sides—all to no avail. So he pulled on both ends of the rope. With that trick, the mule's tail flipped up and onto her rump. Thar then wrapped the cords around her belly and tied a knot, thereby firmly stretching the ropes in a way that they could not release backwards. Guewerdschina was visibly startled. Nothing like this had ever happened in her lifetime. Like the wings of a windmill, she flailed her ears. She also wanted to whisk her tail, but that couldn't happen. At this point, she let her ears droop down as she contemplated her troubles. To this spirited annoyance, the boy added a rambunctious swat. This caused "the dove" to turn her head to the right, trying to look behind her—but she saw nothing. So she turned to her left and tried to see what was behind. In spite of her tremendous efforts to move her tail so that she could see it, she couldn't.

"Now she's unbearably worried!" laughed Thar. "She thinks her tail is gone. She believes that some frightening thing is behind her. Now she will run for all she's worth!" The words were hardly out of his mouth when Guewerdschina let out a bone marrow-jarring hee-haw. She cringed and arched her back like a cat. She lunged to the right and to the left—then with sudden haste, she shot straight forward, as if she wanted to charge beyond her own head. It required a very good rider not to fall off; Thar effortlessly stayed in the saddle. Laughing heartily, we followed him as fast as we could. In light of the tragically comical, apprehensive demeanor of mules, it really was impossible to keep a straight face.

Our new route led us through the ruins of the village of Chirbet en Nasara, then on towards the road to Jerusalem. There we caught up with the boy, noting how the mule pretty much obeyed him. From this path, it was just 400 paces to Abraham's Well; in the corner of the photograph, note the large, square stone wall. No one knows why this wall exists, nor whether it was ever expanded. Now, it is simply a rubble. The blocks are often five meters long, yet they are no longer joined with mortar. In Baalbek, I have seen hewn stones that are over nineteen meters in length. Given the era of this wall's origin, a five meter stone was plenty to manhandle. Nearby is still another cistern; it's called "The Bath of Sarah," Ishmael's mother's well. In the nearby rugged rocks, two oil lamps have been affixed. Not far from the crumbled wall is a large church, most likely the basilica that Constantine the Great erected at "The Strong Terebinth Tree of Mamre." To this day, this place is called "The Valley of Terebinth," a place to search for acceptance and adoption.

When we reached the four-cornered wall, we saw a poorly clothed Arabic woman and her small daughter sitting in a corner near the well. As soon as they saw us, they stepped back from the water. After we dipped up some water for our animals and gave them time to drink, my wife found a spot to take a photograph. When the Donkey Driver saw her camera, he immediately removed himself and his mules to a place of safety—for he believed that only Christians and Jews were able to withstand the power of photography. Every other creature, whether man or beast, risked destruction.

Peering from behind a large stone, his curiosity drove him to see what was taking place. He saw “the eye of the monster,” the lens of the camera, which was pointed directly at me and towards the corner. He wanted to make sure that this “eye” did not focus on him—but a shaft of sunlight just so happened to shine on him. Actually, we no longer needed him and his mules. Since our present location was only a few hundred paces from the road where Mustafa Bustani was supposed to wait for us, I told him that we would just walk from here.

When the photography was finished, I paid him. In my business dealings with other people, it’s never been my nature nor my way to be a stingy man who haggles over the cost of things. Extending an open hand goes considerably further than acting like a miser. The same is true in this land. The Donkey Driver counted the money that I gave him: “Effendi, that is too much.” I insisted: “No, I gladly give you this money. You have been friendly and polite, so you’ve earned the baksheesh.”

“Even this tip is too much. Perhaps I can do still more that will justify this baksheesh. I will not leave this area until you also depart. I have nothing more to do, so nothing precludes me from serving you further.”

We had thought that Thar would want to take an interest in photography, but this was not the case. More than he realized, the exotic Arabic woman and her young daughter held a greater gravitational attraction than the cloud-black camera. He was looking for a way to meet them. In the way that boys do, he first meandered from a distance, then he came ever closer to them. Suddenly, he sat down between the two and began to talk with uncommon familiarity—as if he were an acquaintance from long ago, or even a relative of theirs.

After I had finished taking our photos, he brought the small girl to where my wife and I were seated on the edge of the cistern. Her mother remained sitting. The young girl had the most lovingly sensitive, wholesomely healthy face, with peach-red cheeks and large grey-blue velveteen eyes. Judging from her appearance, it seemed like some deep and undisturbed charming riddle was miraculously working inside of her. Like a fountain, her light brown hair flowed from under her desert-red scarf. One of her sunburned, delicate hands held a few long-stemmed Canterbury-bell flowers. She kept her other hand in the thin pleats of her spotlessly clean dress. I distinctly recall how her dainty, suntanned feet with miniature ivory nails partly emerged from elegant leather sandals. In light of this extraordinarily pleasant first impression of her, an endless sense of compassion filled my heart for this girl who was as poor as she was pretty. In my respect for her and her mother, I somehow felt more and more compelled to be prepared to offer them some great and suitably timely service. Later on, my wife told me that she too had felt this instant bonding—at precisely the same moment.

She turned to ask Thar: “Well then, what is her name?”

“I don’t know, but you yourself can ask her, right? In talking with her, I learned no more than these three things: she likes me; I’m her hero, and I’ll fight for her.”

“I’m called Schamah,” she said, putting an accent on the second syllable of her name. The fidgeting hand that formerly hid in the pleats of her dress now directed an outstretched forefinger as she pointed: “Over there is my mother.” Her voice sounded soft and tender, yet strikingly moving. Its tone had a hard-to-refuse ring. With open arms, my wife hugged the girl as she asked me this question: “What does the name Schamah mean?” So, I briefly explained: “It’s the East Jordanian pronunciation of Samah, which means ‘forgiveness.’”

Smiling as she talked to the child, my wife hugged her again: “Oh, innocently young and dear little soul, you’ve done nothing that requires forgiving.” With laughter in her voice, Schamah offered her colorful bouquet: “I bring you bells.” She held the Canterbury-bell flowers to my wife’s ear and lightly shook them: “Now, I’ll ring them. Can you hear them?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Isn’t it so? Quite softly, faintly, gently—like the sound is falling from heaven. When they grow up, they will be as grand as the ones that hang in churches; then, the entire world will hear their ringing.”

Thar joined in: “You speak of the church. Are you then a Christian?”

“Yes, I’m a Christian,” she nodded.

“And also your mother?”

“She too.”

He then clapped his hands and called out: “That’s beautiful! That’s wonderful! I’m glad to know that!”

“Why?”

“It’s precisely for these reasons: I’m a hero, and I want to put up a good fight for your rights. No one can properly perform heroic deeds for a Muslim girl. Unattractive as a frog, she wraps herself in fabrics and limps around with wooden slippers on her feet. By contrast, I can clearly see the Christian girl. That fact is essential whenever heroes like us are inspired to risk our lives for others. Do you know how I will look when I fight for you?”

“Like you are dressed today, right?”

“No. What I have on now is not bold enough. Do you know that certain colors can scare an enemy? For this reason, I put on war paint as soon as a conflict arises. One side of my face becomes blue, and the other side is painted green—”

“Phooey, phooey, phooey!”

“You don’t like that?” he asked, halfway astonished and partially disappointed.

“Not at all. I like you just the way you are—not all painted up!”

Thar was pleased with her answer: “Good, I’ll remain who I am. Now that I think more about what you’ve said, you’re right, very right. From now on, whenever I struggle with enemies, they may paint themselves blue, yellow, and green—but not I. I’ll bear that in mind. Our four clubs must have newer and better rules. Foremost, whoever presents himself in war paint will be judged as beatable. To please you, I’m ready to bound away from all rules that are good for nothing!” He then stretched his legs and flexed his muscles so convincingly that her eyes widened in wonder as she pointed to him and asked this question: “Yes, I already believe that you’re a hero; but what exactly could be a reason to knock someone down, just for my sake?”

“A cause can always be found if you look for it. Maybe it’s coming from over there. Look!”

He pointed in the direction of the church ruins, to people whom we hadn't previously seen—to those who were now coming towards us. There were ten or twelve men who were riding on donkeys. Behind them was a column of forty or fifty armed boys who were carrying all kinds of banners. This was one of those parades for children who excitedly circled the city on this festival day. "Isn't this a dangerous situation?" my wife asked. "We should leave quickly."

My answer was one of caution: "Under no circumstances and in no way should we hurry. This would merely show them that we have some reason to be fearful, something to hide from. We'll freely give them the water, but not right away. I hope they will give us some kind of greeting."

The procession had now arrived at our spot. The men stopped to talk with our Donkey Driver, asking some questions about us. They learned that we were Christians—be that as it may, that we were not bad people. Schamah's mother left her seat and came nearer to us. She feared the fanatical people of Hebron, so she begged us to pack up and leave. She was a Christian, a widow from the region called Al Karak, a city in Jordan that contains a famous Crusader castle. It's located on the other side of the Dead Sea. She and her young daughter were on a pilgrimage to the holy cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Truly, she was a simple and poor woman. Still, I'd like to extend my impression of her; in every way, her clothes were expressly Arabic and chic—like those customarily worn by a Middle Eastern woman, or even by a Bedouin. Her clothing was beautiful yet tasteful, with no suggestion of melancholy nor fascinating glamour. She was a daughter of sorrow, not a woman of good fortune. My wife extended her hand to Schamah's mother, drawing her close to her side. I advised her to put aside any concerns; nothing was going to happen to them.

The riders now came up to us. They stopped a few feet from us and climbed down from their donkeys. It was clear that they didn't intend to greet us. I couldn't tolerate that sort of contempt, because such insolence involved behavior that I wanted to bypass and avoid completely. Whenever you want others to know that you hold a certain air of strength, it's always effective to put on a special sort of image. I crafted such a first firm impression, and it seemed to work with the leader of the group. He shifted his weight, held his hand to his chest, slightly bowed and said: "Salam. Peace be upon you."

Those words sounded brusque. Just as curtly, I stood my ground and answered: "Salam." Before I could say more, Thar spoke up: "Here is my Effendi, the Supreme Secretary of Germany's Chancellor. From his briefcase flows the complete control of all tax revenue. He levies a tax on whomever he wants. He has just returned from Hebron where he sought to buy The Oak of Abraham from the Russians, then transport it home. Hail to Effendi!"

After he said that, he took his new girlfriend by the hand and went towards the boys from Hebron. Since I was still so overwhelmed with surprise that he would meddle and make such fantastic claims about me, I completely forgot to caution him. Thank God, something unforeseen did not happen. The men believed he was serious. They held a brief discussion, then they all bowed deeply as Abdullah said this to me: "Effendi, you are a great and powerful official. Unfortunately, you are also a Christian. For this reason, we are not permitted to invite you to be our guest. The children's games can only begin when you have left this site."

Indirectly, this was an invitation to leave only our dust behind. Taking their donkeys with them, the men moved to a more remote spot. A little more peaceable scene was taking place where Thar and Schamah met together with the boys from Hebron. The boys were very excited. Since so many of them were hollering, they shouted something that we didn't understand. Fearlessly, Thar stood there in front of the boys. As if protecting the girl, he put his left arm around the girl and gestured menacingly with his right—we could not hear what he was saying to the crowd. Schamah's mother was anxious about the safety of her daughter. I tried to reassure her. We drew closer to the aroused and animated group.

When Thar saw us coming, he called out to us: "Nothing will come of their threat. They want to drown Schamah—in the water close to where you have been sitting. They justify themselves by saying that she is a Christian who has defiled today's festival. I told them that I won't allow that, so I'll fight for her. They are now choosing the ringleader that I'm supposed to deal with. Ah, there he is!"

He pointed to a tall, robust boy who now stepped forward. Following the customary way that the adults had taught him, he gave his pre-battle speech. He struck a pose and called out to Thar, as well as to us: "You are a Christian-dog, and she is a Christian girl, which is even worse than a cur. We will drown her in the deepest part of the well, in a spot where she can not touch bottom. We are true, absolute, and obedient believers of the Prophet. In this celebration of Ishmael's birthday, we can not endure the sacrilege of a Christian's feet to touch this ground. So, she must die. But you want to fight for her, because you claim to be a hero. We are game for this, because we too are heroes. I demand that you state your conditions for combat!"

When Schamah's mother heard all of this, her fear reached its peak. I explained to her that it was probably not a case of violent rage that would actually be carried out—rather, it would be handled as a game. After all, today was supposed to be the "Day of Children's Games." She could rest assured that nothing would happen to her daughter. So, it was not necessary to take her away from our boy Thar.

Thar then spoke to Schamah: "You are Queen of the Games; and before your eyes, they are about to begin. Come and be seated!" She sat upon a stone bench, and he took his place beside her. Next, he took his notebook from his vest pocket, opened it, and began to deliver his counter-reply to the ringleader: "You call me a Christian-dog. On the contrary, I'm a Muslim from Jerusalem, and that is far greater than your Hebron sect. Who then are you?" He began to read the following lines: "You are all Canaanites: Hittites, Jebusites, Girgashites, Hivites, people of Arka, Amorites, Sidonians, Phenicians, those from Zemar, Arvadians, Hamathians, and all others dwelling in Zidon. In the refining process of Islam, you were found lacking and were passed over—now, you are simply sediment. If your faith were pure and noble, then your people would not find it so necessary to keep others away from your places of worship!"

He returned his notebook to its vest pocket and continued speaking: "You say that my young girl friend is worse

than a dog. A true hero would not say such a thing. By contrast, I'm a hero, I'm civil, and I oppose you. I'll fight with you, but not on your terms—all of you against only me. Instead, we'll follow the custom we practice in Jerusalem—one on one. You will find yourselves transformed into Lions, Elephants, Hippos, and Whales. From among you, select the boldest Lion, the most powerful Elephant, the strongest Hippo, and the largest Whale. I will fight all four beasts. When I defeat all four of your fighters, I'll receive—"

"My Canterbury-bells," Schamah called out. Her small hand raised the flowers upward.

"Yes, your bluebell flowers," Thar chimed in. "Palestinian Hebronites, sit down in front of her and me, and I'll explain to you what all of this has to do with Lions, Elephants, Hippos, and Whales.

With pleasure, they immediately obeyed him. For a few moments, they scurried helter-skelter, crawling over and under each other like crazed insects. A deep silence then took over, broken only by the boy's clarifying voice. When they all grasped the picture that he was describing, they began to cheer loudly. A thing like this had never happened before. Everyone pressed forward, wanting to be chosen as one of the beasts. In the midst of these would-be-juggernauts who strove for revenge, there sat Schamah, "Forgiveness." Without any fear of harm, she kept a peaceful smile on her loveable face. Curiously enough, the adult men were just as excited as the boys. They all flocked around. The Hebron men joined their boys in the process of selecting and appointing. They marked out the fight-arena. Abdullah, who was the Secretary of State for the Palestinian Sheik of Balad, even took it upon himself to appoint security police as part of the rules for this fight. What more can be said about hate and disputes among religious people.

The field for fighting formed four corners: Lions to the north, Hippos to the south, Elephants to the east, and Whales were confined to the west. Schamah sat on the southern side of her throne, where she could easily keep her eyes on everything. Guewerdschina the mule served as her throne, the most protected place that remained on that site. Musicians sat in the corner: a jar-drum, a tambourine, trumpets, and a fipple flute. If Thar were wrestled to the ground, they were supposed to make the loudest possible clamor. With the victory never tipping to their side, the Hebronite musicians had no chance to play their instruments.

They had chosen their strongest athletes. The competition's rules were very simple: the loser would be whoever was thrown to the ground in the first three beast-matches. The battle of the Whales would take place in the fountain. The winner had to dunk his opponent, then publicly spew a mouth full of water in his face. Before the matches began, the Four Heroes of Hebron were asked whether they wanted to withdraw their names from the competition. "For no amount of money!" they replied.

Secretary of State Abdullah then gave the signal for the battle of the Lions to begin. The Lion of Hebron stepped forward. He was the same tall, robust boy who first gave a speech. When he saw all eyes turn towards him, his face took on an overly confident expression.

Thar stood beside us: "Watch carefully! See how quickly this happens. The main thing is to give your enemy no time to think." He then stepped into the ring, bowed to Schamah, and positioned himself squarely in front of his foe. No doubt he had learned this knightly behavior from hearing some legend, or from some fairy tale. Abdullah now clapped his hands three times. In the blink of an eye, it happened. When his opponent hesitated, Thar lunged. He let him come quite close, then sprang to the side as he clenched the boy from behind and completely buckled him under. Just as he had wrestled old Eppstein down to the ground, he firmly held the young Hebron Lion as he called out to the musicians: "Now you can sound your notes of triumph for him!" Of course, they were silent. The loser slowly stood up; with his head lowered, he slinked away.

Next came the Battle of the Elephants. The opponent was a cumbersome guy who seemed to have twice the strength as our boy possessed. With a smile, Thar gave a nod to us. That was a good sign. He had told us how those in the Elephant Club had to do their trampling in unison. First here, then suddenly over there, he didn't simply take the kid down—he bounced him to the ground. When Abdullah gave the signal, Thar powerfully launched forward, swung himself upward, and simply sprang over that heap of a foe. In an instant, he put his knees upon the boy and called out to the musicians: "Loudly, loudly, now play your song of triumph for him!" All around, stillness reigned.

Only Secretary of State Abdullah angrily called out: "Oh my, two are already down. This is not acceptable. Let our Hippo come forth, and he will stomp him into the ground. The Hippo was a short, thick rascal who was not endowed with muscles, just a lot of fat. Fearlessly, he rolled his eyes; he had good courage. As the time drew nearer for the start of the match, he put his head down like a runner. Letting out a colossal hoo-ha, the Hebron Monster then lay down on the ground and stretched his legs into the air. He held his head with both hands and bellowed as if someone were planning to roast him on a grill. Thar just stood there erect; with a laugh, he teased the musicians: "You guys don't need to play your drums nor blow your horns, because he's making his own music."

Now the giants of the ocean would show what they could do. The former four sides of the ring now collapsed. Everyone headed to the deep well, wherein the final judgment was supposed to take place. Thar was the first to arrive at the cistern; he stood ready to descend into the water. The Hebronites came less quickly. Slowest of them all were the Whales. The very last one to arrive was the guy that was supposed to fight with Thar. With a very embarrassed look on his face, he came to the brink of the well, then looked away as he said: "I don't want this job anymore!" Abdullah responded: "You've already accepted the position, so you must go through with it!" As the boy turned and hurried away, he called out: "Not for any amount of money! I'm leaving!"

"So, we must choose someone else!" said Abdullah. From out of the throats of the remaining Whales, this chorus rang out: "You couldn't pay me enough money! I'm going—I'm leaving—I'm out of here!" One after another, they disappeared, until there were no more to be seen—except one in the distance. Without saying "adieu," the Lions followed those who had already left. In much the same way, the Hippos and the musicians made the same kind of exit. Most of the Elephants ambled off in single file, but some left in twos and threes. Without saying a word or grudgingly waving good-bye, the adults finally rode away.

Thar turned towards Schamah: "Now do you believe that I'm a hero?" She handed him the Canterbury-bells: "From the very beginning, I believed you. You've won, so here are your flowers." He accepted the prize, then he gave the bouquet to my wife, asking her to take care of them; she could do this better than he would.

In the distance, we now saw another considerably large procession, and it looked like it was coming our way. With their sharply trained eyes, our adversaries had already seen this approaching caravan. For that reason, they hurried away. They didn't want their disgrace to be discovered by the incoming crowd. We too no longer had a reason to stay, because the time was drawing nearer for us to move on and keep our appointment to meet Mustafa Bustani. Schamah's mother said that she and her daughter were headed towards The Oak of Abraham; from there, they wanted to travel to the Russian Hospice and spend the night. The Arabic widow had heard that penniless pilgrims could stay there free-of-charge. Our friendly Donkey Driver declared that the mother and daughter didn't have to walk that distance; since his return to the city would be the same route that they were traveling, they could ride with him.

When Thar heard this, he quietly asked me: "Effendi, do you have a 20 franc coin? Please, give it to me, but don't let anyone see it." I suspected why he wanted the money, so I said "Yes," and secretly slipped him the coin. Schamah and her mother climbed upon one of the mules, and the driver rode upon another. Thar vaulted onto the back of Guewertschina and said: "I'm riding with you. Once we reach the Oak, I'll walk back. Before my father arrives, I'll be there."

He tugged the dove's tail high into the air—she let out a loud hee-haw and shot down the road. My wife gave the widow our name and our address in Jerusalem and invited her to make every effort to visit us there. We would genuinely and whole-heartedly like to see her and her young daughter. She promised that she would assuredly do her best to visit us. So giving her word, she said good-bye as they rode away and tried to catch up with Thar. My wife and I then took a short walk on the surrounding area, making sure that we avoided any further encounters.

When we reached the rendezvous, Thar was already waiting for us: "They're so very poor. They only know that I was concerned about them and that I wanted to accompany them to the Hospice."

"Do they know your name?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And your father's name?"

"No. You may have heard that the Prophet tells us this: 'Whoever gives to the poor should give everything—only not in the name of his father.' Anyway, I'll see them again in Jerusalem. You can count on that."

Soon thereafter, Mustafa Bustani arrived with the carriage. He was very glad to hear that the local citizens did not harm us nor his son. He shared the fact that there had been several clashes between Muslims and Jews. In light of the fact that he personally was so angry about the rude reception from his business colleague, he had even refused to share a meal with the man. Now, he was hungry. As soon as we climbed in and were once again moving, we brought out the food that we had packed earlier. So, our on-the-go evening meal's setting was atop four rolling wheels.

On the return home, nothing happened that would be important enough to retell. When we reached the Hebron Valley, we once again stopped at the café. This time in a much more measured manner, the innkeeper stepped out and asked for our orders. Mustafa Bustani spoke up: "Five cups of coffee!" The drinks were served and sipped. I then pulled out my money pouch: "How much for the five?"

"Exactly one half franc," he answered.

"And the fifteen from forenoon?"

"One and a half francs."

"So, altogether for the twenty?"

"Two francs."

I gave him only two francs—not a fraction of a Turkish piaster more: "Here! Paid in full!" He quickly gripped the money and slipped it into his pocket. This time, he bowed deeply as he sincerely said: "Effendi, I thank you. You are fair as well as wise. May your journey home be a blessed one."

The trip was indeed a blessed one. Mustafa was angry about the fanaticism of his fellow believers; during the entire time, he had no objection to his son's crush on the small Christian girl. When we reached Bethlehem, he took a deep breath and said: "A lot of love and much goodness has come out of this small city, much more than any other large and famous pilgrimage places. Today, I was rightly and starkly reminded of my own zealot's mind-set. What have you ever done to the people of Hebron? Not a thing! Still, they transgressed against you. Such unkindness and injustice! What did my own brother do to me? Nothing. Yet, I banished him, my dear brother. I was much more unloving and far more unjust than the Canaanites of Hebron. Now that evening is finally here, I can tell you that thoughts of him were with me throughout the entire afternoon.

"What was his name?" my wife asked.

"Achmed Bustani. As you heard me say, we still kept the same family name. I now have no greater wish than that he is still alive and that he will find me!"

"Would you really divide your wealth with them?"

"Of course, immediately! It's not only because I promised my dying wife that I would do so—for me, it's a personal necessity. Ever since that dream that I told you about, I've had a very strange feeling about something more that I now must be concerned about as we make our way home. When we were outside of Abraham's Well, it seemed as if some invisible thing accompanied you when you climbed into the carriage—something that took hold of me and now doesn't want to release me again. Perhaps it's nothing more than realizing the wrongs that need to be righted. Yet in a strange sense, I'm not anxious; instead, it makes me feel much more at ease. There's a feeling of contentment. It burrows itself into me—not to torment, but rather to put me at ease. Are you going to laugh at me when I tell you something which you yourselves can not comprehend?"

"To laugh would not even occur to us!" I answered. "Be confident of that!"

"I have the feeling that today I shall again dream of my brother. Isn't that funny?"

"By no means."

"So, you believe that this is possible?"

"Certainly."

"Secretively, what do you think?"

"Oh no! All too often, we men make the mistake of treating completely natural things as if they were mystical. In the course of today's events, the picture of your brother has been shoved into your mind's consciousness. Until now, you have held all of this tightly inside of you, and it's become even more deeply embedded. Hence, it's no wonder, and indeed very understandable, that you would dream about him as you preoccupy yourself with your return home. Whenever we perceive something as wonderful, be certain that in spite of all our experiences, we misguidedly label the obvious things in nature as inconceivably miraculous."

As we now rolled on towards Rachel's Tomb and to the Prophet Elijah's memorial, we soon arrived in Jerusalem—at precisely the moment when nightfall tenderly entered the Holy City. Whatever was intended for me to learn in Hebron, I hadn't yet grasped it. As we would plainly see tomorrow, this here-to-fore unknown would turn out to be quite different and infinitely better. So it seems that life always takes care of things. If we are somehow denied some external, material wish, or if an unexpected grief gets in the way of the joy we were hoping for, our ignorance does not hesitate to quarrel with destiny. That which we were denied on the outside may now become an inner victory. Although this last truth may not be apparent if we oppose it like some kind of enemy, be quite certain that it still knocks on our door. Usually afterwards, we realize that we have gained life's less-valued, quite inexpensive gifts that we so very much long for. Concerning the saddle, this was also true. I was sure about my desire for it, but my wish to own it had to rely upon earlier circumstances that were directed otherwise. Looking back on those past events, we are most often too short-sighted and impatient to grasp the meaning of these things.

The next morning, we had barely risen and sat down to drink some coffee, when we heard a knock on our door. Who stepped in? It was Thar. European style, he stretched out his hand and greeted us: "Good morning!" We gave him our thanks and approvingly saw how he was fully dressed in fresh, spotlessly pure white clothes. "You are probably surprised, right?" he said. "The colors are no longer stylish. Our lady here first spoke about heroism that is authentic and doesn't need to be painted up. Since then, I've wanted to be a real hero—no artificial coloring. Secondly, you also heard how my new girlfriend Schamah yelled out 'Phooey!' when I wanted to paint my body with bold blue, green, red and yellow colors. What she said to me is worth more than past advice you have offered. I've definitely decided, that in the future, I'll lay aside the superficial paint and only deal with things that don't need artificial coloring. By the way, I'm only here on account of Schamah. If she and I are permitted to drink coffee, why then are your cups bigger than ours?"

He got what he wanted, so he sat down and continued to talk: "Next, I want you to know that as long as Schamah stays in Jerusalem, I'm withdrawing from all four clubs: the Lions, the Elephants, the Hippos, and the Whales. For this mission, I've now dressed in white in order to inform each of the clubs that I may no longer associate with beasts—at least for the time being. Schamah is so polite, and if I'm not nice too, then I'll feel ashamed of myself. She said 'Phooey!' much too readily. Well then, you must be aware of the fact that she's coming to Jerusalem today."

"How do you know this?" I asked.

"It is part of the conspiracy."

"So, there is a plot?"

In all seriousness, he nodded and said "Yes."

"Who is doing the plotting?"

"I am."

"With whom?"

"With the Donkey Driver."

"As of yesterday?"

"Yes. For that secret plan, I needed the twenty francs from you. Here is the money that I borrowed. Thank you." He took two golden ten franc coins out of his pocket and laid them on the table. However, I didn't pick them up—instead, I said: "Before I accept the money, I have to know what it was for. Instead of loaning you the money, I gave it to you."

In earnest, he said: "You're mistaken! I don't beg; I only borrow. Schamah and her mother are poor, very poor. At times, they don't have enough to eat. Without asking anyone, I came to this conclusion. In contrast, I'm rich, and I'm her friend. Thus, without their knowing, I took care of their room and board at the Hospice. Today, the Donkey Driver is bringing them to Jerusalem—of course, on better animals than they rode yesterday. They still do not know that it was I who paid for these things. When they arrive here, they won't go into the city. Instead, they'll veer to the right, riding into the Valley of Hinnom, then up the Mount of Olives towards Bethany. At that point, they'll meet my friend Abd en Nom.

"Who is Abd en Nom?"

"He is the father of both the greatest Whale in our club and the heaviest Hippo that ever was. He is a host to pilgrims. At the moment, his house is completely empty, so Schamah and her mother have more room than they really need. They'll also have meals there. Of course, Schamah believes that all of this was because the Hospice recommended them. Abd en Nom likes me. I'll be going with him as we make the preparations."

"And you are paying for all of this?"

"Yes, but I ask you not to reveal this to anyone. Schamah and her mother must never know this secret."

"Does your father know?"

"No."

"My dear boy, you know this will cost a lot of money!"

He happily laughed as he replied: "I have it."

"From whom?"

As he answered my question, Thar quickly became serious again: "From Mother—before she died. She loaned me the money, and every month, I receive the interest. Since Father is the trustee of her estate, he gives me the money. I'm not permitted to hold onto the money. I'm required to spend it—not on myself, but for poor, old, sick people who find themselves in need. That's the way Mother wanted it, so Father has to allow me to spend it how I wish. He may only counsel me if I use the money in a way that differs from Mother's instructions. That has never happened, because I loved my Mother. With every piaster that I spend, I think about how she would do the same or otherwise. To be truthful, before I borrowed the money from you, I first had to think about what my Mother would say. Before I went to sleep that night, I asked myself that question. As I awoke early this morning, I knew in my heart that she is in complete agreement—and that she's pleased about Schamah and her mother. Effendi, will you now take back the money you loaned me?"

"Yes," I answered and slipped the coins into my pocket. In recognition of his soul's goodness, my wife poured him a second cup of coffee. He took a sip, then spoke further: "Seriously, I want to look after her. I would like to be her guide to all of the holy sites, including Bethlehem and anywhere else she wants to visit. Do you know why I would do this?"

"Out of compassion," my wife said.

"Yes, I too first thought of this. Yet when I reflected on my heart's decision, just as I always do when I think of my Mother, it wasn't a feeling of sympathy. Rather, there was something else. Right now, I'm not sure what to call it, because I've never felt this way before. It's almost like a duty, and yet again, it may be more like something that I very much enjoy doing. Just as you witnessed yesterday, I would do battle with the whole world if it meant protecting Schamah and her mother. And yet, that is much, much too little; that's a long, long way from the right thing to do. I still want to think about this some more. When I've found the answer, I'll tell you. Now, may I leave you again? There's something very necessary that I must do. Remember what I said about going to the Lions, to the Elephants, to the Hippos, to the Whales, and to Abd en Nom! Father must know nothing about all of this."

"Does he know that you went to visit us?"

"I don't intend to tell him. As you know, he has such an extraordinary affection for you; if he learned that I planned to come here, you would be stuck with him for the entire day. Well then, may Allah protect you; I'm going now." He finished his cup of coffee, shook our hands, opened the door, went outside, and stood still. For a moment, he pondered, came inside again, then firmly closed the door behind him. It seemed as if he had some great secret that he wanted to entrust to us: "I simply must ask you a question. Don't you find this ridiculous? In a man's own country, he is called 'The Chosen One.'"

I tried to help him with the answer: "How did you arrive at this question?"

"In my hours of vanity, I have taken pride in this designation; but seriously, this title actually irritates me."

"So, be angry!" said my wife. "Your irritation is more justified than any pleasure from that title." As he meditated on that advice, he looked at her. Then he aimed his eyes on me, thoughtfully nodding: "I put a great deal of stock into what your wife has said. Perhaps you don't? Up to this point, she has always come up with just the right words. Now, I'm really going to do it! May Allah protect you!"

Hardly ten minutes after he left us, there was a knock on the door. Who was it? His father. He asked us to forgive him for disturbing us at such an inconvenient hour. Something had happened which he absolutely had to share with us. "Did you dream something?" I asked him.

"Yes, how did you know that?"

"No, I didn't know for sure—I simply had a hunch."

"You guessed correctly. Just think! In my dream, it was morning as I got out of bed and came into my living room. There sat my brother, as real as I am standing here. He smiled at me and said: 'I have come, and I want to see if I should remain.' In pure joy, I woke up. Now tell me, is that a phenomenon, or not?"

"A miracle? No, to me it is something more like a completely natural occurrence."

"After our conversation yesterday, I too felt comfortable about all of this. Yet in today's awakening, instantly after the dream, a thought came to me—almost as if this thought itself were to be the continuation of the dream. Do you know what my brother said to me in the previous dream I described to you?"

"That he would send you a sign of his forgiveness."

"Now then, do you recall the name of the child whom you met yesterday, the girl whom my son constantly talks about?"

"Schamah, the Forgiveness!"

My wife swiftly joined in: "Yes, that's true! That's exactly right! It might be—"

Imitating Old Jew Eppstein, I quickly interrupted: "Pssst! Still! Pssst! Don't try to force some kind of mystery from all this. Although 'Schamah' means 'forgiveness,' at the same time, it's also a girl's name." Mustafa interjected: "But as Thar told me, the girl's mother comes from the region of Al Karak, and that place is in East Jordan, where my brother went." In order to divert him from this subject, I asked him: "So, did you and Thar talk about her today?"

"It was yesterday evening that we talked. Today, he was up early, but he said practically nothing. Whenever his thoughts are focused on his mother, he acts this way. It always keeps him preoccupied as he looks for some kind of gift he can give or a good deed that he can perform for someone. Off he went without having anything to eat or drink for breakfast.

"Does he know that you are here with us?"

"I don't think so. If he knew that he could visit you as often as he wanted, he would stay beside you for the entire day. I must confess that his heart dearly loves both of you. Ever since yesterday, I've seen changes in him. The young girl seems to have made an impression on him, and that baffles me."

"Surely such a riddle is not a bad one?"

"Oh no, it's especially very pleasant and welcome. Compared to ordinary times, I too have changed. Yesterday was a festival; yet for me, it's as if the celebration is just now happening. I feel the same joy that I felt in my boyhood—when something long-desired finally promises to come true. Isn't that strange? Isn't that laughable?"

"It's not strange to me, and in no way is it absurd. Our souls are linked to an entirely different world than our bodies. This connection is so deeply intimate, that no reasonably sane man would ever doubt what we call our 'inner voices.' Did your dream clearly focus on your brother? Or was it merely a figure which you mistook for him?"

"Truly and clearly, it was so certain and distinct, that even in the dream I marveled at the joy I felt in seeing him appear precisely as he looked earlier. We were so extraordinarily similar that people often would mistake one for the other. We had fun with that, so he would often enhance that relationship by wearing the same clothes and by growing a beard just like mine. On the inside, we were very different. He was always tender, pliable, and prone to be at peace. By contrast, I was insensitive, unsympathetic, and always ready to play the role of lord and master. In the end, that separated us. However, today—" Something inside him stopped. He walked to the window, gazed outside and reconciled himself to what would come: "There lies the road to Bab en Nebi Daud, and that way goes to Bab el Amud. For me, it's the same, whichever path I take. They both lead me around the city and towards the Mount of Olives where I will wait to learn when and how the 'forgiveness' will come to me. Today, I am in suspense, and I can't relax. I'm going!"

He left, and I openly confess that a portion of his suspense stayed there with us. If I were to try to attach an artificial angle on his narration, one which differed from the view he had just shared with us, then I would have to rearrange the tale itself. The conclusion would be otherwise, even giving his story an extra chapter of its own. For me, it all seemed to follow a natural course of events, which was just as interesting as any literary embellishment that his son Thar would have added. So, I'll follow the examples from our brave boy Thar and simply report the plain, unvarnished facts. As long as Schamah dwelt among us, she renounced any synthetic coloring of green nor blue, neither yellow nor red.

That morning, we visited the Graves of the Kings and a couple of other nearby sites. In the afternoon, we wanted to go to Ain Kahrim, one of my favorite places. However, we could not undertake this outing. Just as we were preparing to eat our lunch, there was a third knocking at our door. Who appeared? Schamah and her mother. We were genuinely glad to see them, and we welcomed their noontime visit. Without hesitation, we invited them to eat with us. The mother was a loving, good-natured, and noble-minded woman. She had an inner pride that stemmed from her heart's solemn education. In spite of her humility, she spoke with a good deal of satisfaction about her Azerbaijan roots and the fact that she did not come from Syria. So, as far back as tradition stretched, her people had always been Christians. Due to her father's beliefs, he was oppressed and died as a poor army officer in Al Karah. Her husband was also very poor, but he was blessed with all of the virtues that are necessary to merit the attention and the love of all mankind. His name was Achmed Bustani, and he died from a sickness of the heart, a yearning that never stopped gnawing at him—until death delivered him from that ceaseless longing.

Achmed Bustani! Surely, you can imagine the impact this name had on us. Just think—the brother of our friend. As soon as the widow made this disclosure, both women intuitively knew that they had been drawn to each other—both outwardly and inwardly, sensing a bond of confidentiality between them. In spite of the few short lines that I now use to report this surprise, naturally, it took several hours for us to grasp what we had just learned. During the time she talked with us, her heart's restrained agony peered out from her moist, poignant eyes. Not wanting to increase her sadness by asking insensitive questions, it was especially hard for us to repress our normal curiosity about the details.

Quite simply, Achmed Bustani died of homesickness. At most, his love for his wife and child delayed his death, but nothing could prevent his dying. Knowing the inherent importance of very close family relationships among Semitic people, it cost him his life when he could not bear the thought of his father and his entire family banishing him and forever refusing to give him their support. Practically moments from death, he asked his wife to promise him that she and Schamah would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. If possible, she was to find his brother and seek reconciliation with him.

Originally, she had only wanted to hike from Abraham's Oak to Bethlehem. Her plans changed at the Hospice, where she received a slip of paper from an anonymous benefactor in Bethany, a village on Jerusalem's eastern slope of Olivet. The note assured them of free room and board in the Good Samaritan's house. At the same time, he had arranged for our Donkey Driver to take them to Jerusalem. From there, someone would pick them up and accompany them—all free of charge. It pleased her to recall the kindness of this man's heart. Likewise, she was thankful for the humanitarian aid they received in the Russian Hospice that stood near Abraham's Oak. They never suspected the truth, that our "Hero of the Blood Feud" was the one to whom they owed their thanks.

They did not go into the accursed Valley of Hinnom where the god Moloch was once worshipped. Nor did they ride straight to the house of their anonymous benefactor. They first wanted to ask if we thought it was "OK" for two lonely, Christian pilgrims to accept this man's invitation to stay in his home. We gave them as much information as we could and offered to accompany them to their host's house, for we too wanted to meet this man. They gratefully accepted our offer. Just as we were ready to depart, there was a fourth knock at our door—in stepped our lad Thar.

He was completely out of breath. When he saw Schamah and her mother, he excitedly called out: "So, what the Donkey Driver told me is true! Instead of riding straight to your host's house, you first stopped off here. But why are you staying here longer? Why didn't you travel directly towards Bethany, following the Hinnom Valley, just like I told the Donkey Driver to do?" He was coming close to revealing his other identity. I placed my hand on his shirt collar and brought him into the adjoining room: "I believe it's best that Schamah and her mother don't know that you and the Donkey Driver secretly instigated this part of their visit to Jerusalem. Are you now ready to tell everything?"

He seemed startled: "Allah, Allah! You're right—that was dumb of me! Still, put yourself in my shoes, Effendi. There I was with all of my Lions, Elephants, Hippos, and Whales, standing near the Pool of Siloam as we waited for Schamah. We were all set to provide a festive, multi-stage-parade as we escorted her to Bethany—"

"With the Hippos and Elephants?"

"Yes, of course!" he nodded. "I called them all together, because I wanted them to help me welcome my new

friend with a grand reception. They all wore their best costumes. We had decorated the entire neighborhood with flowers. We even took branches and swept the streets of the parade route. Upon her arrival, we had all planned to bow at the same time. Next, Firdusi was going to recite a poem. Thereafter, it would be my turn to give a good speech in her honor. Following this, there would be more bows, along with a song that included both singing and blowing our horns. Busiri's poem would come next. Finally, there would be a triumphant bellowing 'Huzzah!' At this point, our festive procession would begin to move—half of us ahead and half trailing. I would be riding between Schamah and her mother, leading both of their donkeys."

I laughed as I exclaimed, "Yes, you planned a delightful surprise!"

"You're right. Now, imagine how we waited for hours, yet no one came. When Schamah and her mother separated from the Donkey Driver and rode here to your door instead of taking the pre-arranged route, we agreed to modify our plan. Since this thought came to the Driver later on, it was just a few minutes ago that I realized how I might find them waiting here at your place. I hurried here to urge you to come right away—I don't want my Lions and Whales to lose patience!"

It made me sad to know that I had to dampen his enthusiasm, but I couldn't do otherwise—I had to follow through. I shared my reasons regarding why such a grand greeting would be impossible. Think. This would not befit a Christian pilgrim whose inner nature is humble and modest. Likewise, consider her reaction to hearing Islamic poems and the bellowing whoops of your triumphant reception.

He understood enough to see my point of view: "Good, Effendi. So, let's omit those things, but do this instead. Do you know "The Song of Bethany," telling how Jesus came to visit his siblings?"

"No."

"Alright, you'll soon hear that song. Are you now planning to take the road towards the Hinnom Valley and the Pool of Siloam?"

"Yes, my wife will likely take a photograph there."

"Good, that works. Please travel slowly. As for me, I'll rush on ahead of you."

I wanted to admonish him not to do anything inappropriate, but he waved me off as he hurriedly left in a cloud of dust. We followed him; and just as I thought, my wife reminded me to bring along the camera. She wanted to take a few pictures at the Pool of Siloam and a couple of photos in Bethany.

The purpose of this story is not to describe Jerusalem and its surroundings. For that, I'll let the path of our journey speak for itself. My wife's photographs clearly show the location and the appearance of the Pool of Siloam. In that photo, I'm not dressed like an Arab; instead, I'm wearing European clothes and a safari hat on my head. This partially explains the picture. According to The Book of John, Chapter 9: 7, it was here that Christ healed the man who was born blind.

When we arrived, we saw that no one else was there. I was glad about that. The solitude and stillness matched the moods that we found ourselves in. As we rode along, we limited ourselves to earnest conversations. Little Schamah acted like a lovely inner beam of sunshine that cast its light on our serious-minded subjects. The widow focused on the goal of her journey. One ceaseless, important question quaked inside of her: "Would her pilgrimage be favorably fulfilled, or not?" As for us and what we already knew, we eagerly held onto our high expectations that the moment of decision would soon come.

My wife wanted to have her picture taken with Schamah, but today the child did not trust the dark, dangling three-dimensional camera—so, she declined. I alone would have my picture taken beside the Pool. After the camera clicked and before we left the site, she took one last, close look, as if to memorize this part of our trip. Suddenly, the boys surprised us from the right and to the left, both from above and below, practically from all sides and from all heights where they had hidden themselves behind the rocks. They were singing a peculiar, two-part song in the Arabic language. It was "The Song of Bethany," when Jesus was on his way to visit brothers and sisters, stopping along the way to heal the sick at the Pool of Siloam. Picture our inner moods and the outer backdrop of the scenery; all of this seemed to be waiting for us. Here too, we were completely amazed when we heard the profoundly deep and strangely stirring "Song of Christ." That song left a lasting impression on us, one that almost brought us to our knees as we intently listened. Neither breath nor foot moved. The singers remained concealed in their hiding-places—they had a good stage director. From this moment on, I never doubted that our lad had been born with a natural talent for art.

From the Pool, we traveled toward Cedron, the brook that flows between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. We also wanted to see the so-called upper bridge at Gethsemane. On our way to Bethany, we passed by the Jewish burial grounds. Just outside the village, Thar stood all alone. He was waiting for our arrival, so he greeted us. Very softly, he asked me this question: "Have you seen them?"

"Whom?"

"The singers. They anticipated the time it would take for you to make the trip to Gethsemane, all in order to be here to sing for you once more. Come! I'll lead you to Abd en Nom; you'll want to see the living quarters that we've already reserved for Schamah. After that, we'll go to Lazarus' Tomb, and there you can take a photograph.

He took Schamah by the hand as they went on ahead of us. Abd en Nom's house was located near the site of Lazarus' Grave. The owner of the house stepped outside, bowing respectfully low as he greeted us. His two sons were there, both of whom we recognized from Thar's description of them: "the largest Whale that we have and the strongest Hippo that ever was." Both of them gave us an inspiring impression that they were quite friendly. The little guest house certainly appeared to be clean and cozy. It looked as if the guests would be very satisfied with their accommodations here. When we stepped inside, we saw that we had guessed correctly. Regarding the two rooms prepared for Schamah and her mother, the furnishings were so perfectly arranged that nothing more could be wished for. Besides all this, the rooms were decorated with flowers and palm branches that no doubt were part of the festive parade that Thar had planned.

Secretively, the lad gave me this explanation: "Since I had to hurry so much, everything here had to be put in place very quickly."

"Well now, where did you find all of the heroes?"

"Right away, you'll hear them." With these words, he went to the door and motioned to someone outside. Immediately, there arose a triumphant whoop that was at least fifty to sixty voices strong. The pitch and tone of this cheer were so shocking and unnatural, that all of this noise could not have come from real lions, elephants, hippos, and whales. "May Allah have mercy on you!" I called out. "That's enough. Please stop!" When he beckoned with his hand, everything quieted down. Still, we couldn't see where these "beasts" were hidden away. "That completes it," he said. "Just one last time, I had to let them blare. Now they've had their way, so they won't do it again. Well now, do we want to visit Lazarus' Grave where you can take some photos?"

We all agreed to go, because the sun was already beginning to sink; if we waited any longer, we wouldn't have enough daylight for a good picture. Thar and Schamah ran on ahead, but her mother asked to stay behind. Before it grew dark, she wanted to be sure that their rooms were ready for night time. Her request was such a natural one, that we fully understood her wish to remain at the house. So we went on without her and soon caught up with the children. We positioned the camera so that it was pointed toward the entrance of the tomb. As far as we knew, no one was inside.

From behind a door inside the cave, out stepped the official attendant, waving his arms in the air and shouting at us: "Not now! Not now! Now it is forbidden, because a Muslim is inside, a Follower of the Prophet!" Click! He was too late; my wife had just snapped the camera's shutter. In spite of our disobedience of his orders, we were thankful to have a good picture that illustrates this part of my narrative. Just as we were putting the camera away, we saw the "Believer of the Prophet" emerge from Lazarus' Tomb. When he recognized us, he happily hurried out to greet us. It was our good friend Mustafa Bustani. "How fitting and how right it feels that we should meet here!" he said. "On our way home, let's go through Kafr et Tur, just like we did yesterday." Turning towards his son, he asked: "And you too?" When he saw Schamah, he respectfully bowed: "And who is this small, lovely child?"

With ever-widening glistening eyes, Schamah stood there. Her petite face beamed with pure happiness. Jumping for joy, she stretched out her tiny arms, begging him to lift her up: "My Daddy! My Daddy!" Thrilled to see him, she clapped her hands together and cried out: "Mother told me so! My Mother said it would happen!" Having no idea that this girl was his son's new friend, the one Thar met just yesterday, Mustafa asked: "Which mother? What did she say?"

"On our way to the Grave of Lazarus, Mother told me that the Savior would resurrect you from the dead—just as He brought Lazarus back to life."

"Me?"

"Yes, you Daddy!"

Mustafa turned toward us: "She believes I'm her father! How strange! Who is this child?"

"My name is Schamah, the 'forgiveness,' and you'll find my Mother over there in the house." Once again holding up her outstretched hands, she pleaded: "Just like you used to, carry me in your arms as we go to her." His face lost its color. White as a corpse, he retreated a few steps backward. His voice faltered as he asked: "Schamah—the forgiveness?" He directed the next question to his son: "Was this really the small girl from yesterday?"

"Yes, it is she," he nodded.

"My word, oh my word! Do you know her father's name?"

Before the boy could answer, Schamah spoke up: "Truly, you are my Father! Your name is Achmed Bustani. Don't you know me anymore? If not, I can't help but cry. Lift me up and take me to Mother!"

It's impossible to describe what happened next. Simultaneously, Mustafa Bustani let out a cry and fell to his knees. He stretched out his arms to Schamah and pulled her towards him. Nonstop, he kissed her cheeks as he cried out: "Schamah—Schamah—the forgiveness! Just like he told me in my dream, has it happened? These were his words: 'I will send you my forgiveness— she comes here from the East. Every day, look for her!' I have done so, and now she has arrived!"

Suddenly, Schamah withdrew from his caresses. With both arms, she pushed him away, looking him straight in the eyes as she said this to him: "It's not true; it's not so! I like you, but you are not my Daddy. One more time, you must go back into the Tomb in order to be fully brought back to life."

He repeated her request: "Yet one more time back inside the Grave? Yes, I clearly understand. There is still something inside of me that must die. Until then and for the time being, I am your daddy's brother. Oh dear, dear child of my heart—from now on, you have my love, just as if I were your father." She smiled when she answered: "If you wish, then I'll do so. Now, carry me to my Mother!"

"First, please tell me something else."

"What?"

"Do you know the date when your daddy died?"

"Oh yes, Mother and I certainly remember that day. I can never forget that date, because she recalls it so often. He died on the fifteenth day of the Month of Adar, one day after the Jewish Holiday of Purim."

Mustafa leaped to his feet. His face took on an indescribable expression: "Did you hear what she just said? The 15th day of Adar! That's the same day of my dream. He told me that he had died and that he would send me his Schamah, his forgiveness. Allah, Allah! How wonderful all of this has turned out. I honor you. I treasure you. I adore you."

"To Mommy, to Mommy!" pleaded the child. What she saw and heard were all too much for her to understand just now.

He gathered Schamah into his arms and lifted her up: "Yes, I'll take you to your mother. Where will we find her?"

Clinging close to my side, Thar was ready to go with them: "At the home of Abd en Nom."

Still full of excitement, his father took almost hesitant steps in the direction of the house—where he soon vanished inside.

Thar thoughtfully pondered aloud: "If I may not go inside and hear what is said, I'll just have to speculate on what's taking place. Father is right; marvelous things still happen. I myself played a big part in today's miracle. Without my

father knowing, the Donkey Driver and I came up with the plan that involved a note which would eventually lead Schamah to this place—and at this time. Effendi, you and your wife have to agree that all of this could not have turned out any better. Wait for me here! As soon as I put all of this together, I'll ask you to hear me out."

He then left us. My wife and I went on to visit the ruins where we quietly shared our thoughts, almost as if we were in a church. We were completely alone. The site's guardian had already gone for the day. The entrance to the Tomb lay open. Oh what thoughts seemed to come forth from that wide-open door. Daylight began to wane. Oh what a pure and clean breath of fresh air drifted down on us from the heights of the Mount of Olives. Inside of me, I heard something—or was it from somewhere outside? Was someone standing behind us? No human presence could compare to this feeling of a powerful force that embraced us as it seemed to call out: "Lazarus, come out!" Yes, nothing is so surreal as the physical association with miracles that seems to connect the dead with the living.

From somewhere up above, softly sublime and aerial two-part harmony voices floated down to us—once again, the boys were singing "The Song of Bethany," recalling how the Savior went to visit His brothers and sisters. Per Thar's instructions, the boys had climbed behind the ruins and were now repeating the verses they had sung at the Pool of Siloam. It was the song of Christ, the one who caused the blind to see and the dead to live again. As I thought about this song, it almost seemed irreverent and profane to use common words to allude to matters of blindness and death. Such things are deeply rooted in feelings. Herein, I can't instruct you— I can only tell my story.

When the song faded away like an evening vesper from the time of Christ, Thar returned to us. He and his playmates had parted ways, and each had returned home. Once again, his father came out of the house. His sister-in-law and Schamah accompanied him. When I saw their expressions, these biblical words came to mind: "And their faces glistened brilliantly." Thar saw it too: "What an hour, what a blessed time," he said.

"Adding in the song, who could have arranged all this?" I asked.

Pointing to himself with both hands, the boy answered: "I was the one."

"Were you really the one who's responsible? To me, it seemed as if this was some sort of greeting from your mother."

The widow joined in: "It's also from my departed husband whose life ended, yet his spirit lives on as his dying wish now comes to fulfillment."

Mustafa Bustani turned to his son: "If all of this truly came about through your mother's and my brother's last requests—and not from you—surely you have done more than your share, and you deserve our thanks. Actually, Abd en Nom told us the name of the architect who orchestrated today's joint-ventures. The compassion which your mother planted in your young soul has born fruit and brought blessings upon us. Schamah, the forgiveness, will be living with us and—"

"In our house?" Thar quickly asked.

"Yes."

"With her mother?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"I hope it will be forever."

Upon hearing that, Thar shouted and leaped higher in the air than he ever had before: "Right away, I must hurry to tell them that they're coming!"

"Whom?"

"Why, all of our household: Habakek, Bem, his wife, the coffee grinder, and our cook."

"We still have plenty of time, because my sister-in-law will spend this evening here with Abd en Nom. After all the preparations are in place to welcome them with a festival, we'll pick them up tomorrow." With a second joyful leap, Thar cheered: "Their reception will be wildly festive! May I invite my Lions and my Elephants?" From the look on Mustafa's face, he didn't approve. When my wife waved her appeal to him, he gave in: "Yes, invite them."

"The Hippos too?"

"Yes."

"And the Whales?"

"Yes, they can also come. They can sit in the backyard and be entertained there—but quietly. Before they leave this evening, please have them sing "The Song of Bethany."

"Halleluja! My dearest and loving father, thank you. I'll hurry to tell them right away!"

Mustafa Bustani tried to hold him back: "Why this very minute?"

"Because I still have time to catch up with them. They left just a short while ago." He pulled away, quickly shook Schamah's little hand, and sprang to his feet.

As she adoringly watched the boy, Schamah asked: "Will I be staying with him?"

"Yes, you will," her mother answered. From now on, you two will be together."

"I too want it to be so. I'm very glad about that, because I love him so—such heroes need someone to keep an eye on them. But for now, I'm tired from the long journey. May I soon go to sleep?"

Schamah's desire to sleep now gave us a timely reason to say "Good night" as well. When we also said "Auf Wiedersehen," truly we could eagerly look forward to seeing everyone tomorrow. One more time before nightfall, mother and daughter went to Lazarus' Tomb as they performed a very personal duty which the Grave now seemed to give way to.

My wife, Mustafa Bustani, and I departed too, climbing the steep and familiar path to Bethpage and on towards Kafr et Tur. When we reached the height's Bread-bush of Jonathan, we paused for awhile. Now in the grasp of the distant horizon, the sun sank, then vanished. With its last beams of light, the sun embraced the earth's most holy city. Unless you yourself see and feel this marvelous sight that Jerusalem and The Mount of Olives offer at sunset, I can not describe its wondrous beauty. We stood there for a long time, completely absorbed in this vista.

Mustafa Bustani took a deep breath before he spoke: “Compared to this same time yesterday, it’s even more beautiful, a thousand times lovelier. You know, this kind of deep appreciation comes from inside of us. I’m a completely different man than I was yesterday—I feel and I see things in an entirely better light. There is a world of difference between yesterday and today. I know that you don’t expect me to talk for hours about events and my personal feelings. It’s “OK” with you when I feel the need to be silent. Please, go on without me. Leave me here, alone with my thoughts and alone with the brother who forgave me today—even though I once disowned him.

So my wife and I went on without him. As we reached the next bend in the road, the evening bells of the Holy City began to ring. An undulating sea of sacred music rose up to capture us—as if it wanted to take us towards heaven. When we looked behind us, we saw Mustafa Bustani on his knees—as church bells pealed, this Muslim was praying. Can I say more? No.

For those readers who can not tolerate gaps in stories, I’ll tell you that I eventually received the Pasha-saddle. Mustafa Bustani made it all possible, and I believe he did so with a great deal of personal sacrifice. Even though this showpiece may seem to be an impractical item in my home, I nevertheless love and treasure it. It reminds me of those two days in the Holy Land when Thar, Schamah, the “blood feud,” and “the forgiveness,” all combined to send me a sign from above. I shall never forget that.

[Translator’s Addendum]

To an unknown recipient of Karl May’s signed copy of his 1906 drama, Babel and the Bible, the playwright penned this poem of dedication on the play’s title page. Unfortunately, the recipient of May’s personalized, autographed copy is unknown. Possibly, this was Karl May’s final poetic work.

“Widmungsgedicht” [Poem of Dedication]

By Karl May. 22 February 1912

On that day when the Great Spirit awakened,
Where once He lay across world-dreaming waters
And thought upon the Word of the Most High;
Therein His Lord spoke this promise to Him:

“Now, I endow You with this thought: ‘Earth,
Go forth and humanely guide men’s lives
So that they may become righteous in the Love
Which you receive from your Father’s house!’”

In the East, the Light of Lights streaked forth—
This Life-tide eternally, endlessly springing.
In amazement, the Spirit saw face-to-face
God’s holy-harmonic image emerge.”

From Himmelsgedanken, Gedichte von Karl May
[Karl May’s Thoughts of Heaven Poems]

“Das Theater soll nicht ein Rendez-vous fuer bevorzugte Klassen,
sondern eine Volksschule im wahrsten und besten Sinne dieses Wortes sein.”

The theater should not be an elite meeting place for privileged classes of
people; in the truest and best sense of the word, it should be the “Peoples’ School.”

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TRAVEL TALES IN THE PROMISED LAND (PALESTINE) ***

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