

pigeon, he strains its neck over them in such a way that four small drops fall on each to form a cross. Amid the continued reading of the liturgy the cakes are carried around to the worshipers by the priests, who themselves pop them directly into the mouths of the members with the words, 'Marked be thou with the mark of the Living One.' The four deacons inside the *Mishkna* walk round to the rear of the altar and dig a little hole in which the body of the dead pigeon is then buried."

What a mosaic of ceremonies! No wonder that Professor Kessler calls Mandaism a most striking example of religious syncretism. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity engrafted on one old Chaldean trunk. Gnosticism, star-worship, baptisms, love-feast, sacrifice, and Ornithomaney in one confusion. And yet there is a method in it, and a system of dogma lies behind the mysteries of their cult. *Sabeanism is a book-religion.*

Among the large collection of their sacred writings the *Sidra Rabba*, or Great Book, holds the first place. It contains over five hundred large quarto pages of text, divided into two parts, a "right" and a "left-hand" testament. From this mass of diffuse and obscure material one can dig out the elements of a system of cosmogony, and on this is based all their ritual and ceremony.

First of all things was *Pera Rabba*, the great abyss. With him "Shining Ether" and the "Spirit of Glory" (*Mana Rabba*) form a primal triad. From the last named, who is the king of light, emanates *Yardena Rabba*, the great Jordan. *Mana Rabba* called into being the first of the æons, Primal Life, *Hayye kadema*. He is really the chief god of the Sabeans, and every one of their prayers begins by invoking him. From him proceed secondary emanations, *Yushamim*, "Jehovah of heaven," and *Manda Hayye*, "messenger of life" (the mediator of their system and whence their name). *Yushamim* was punished for attempting to raise himself above Primal Light, and now rules the world of inferior light. *Manda* still rests in the bosom of Primal Light, and had a series of incarnations, beginning with Abel (*Hibil*) and Seth, and ending with John the Baptist! Beside all these there is yet a third life, called 'Atika, the demiurge, who created the bodies of Adam and Eve, but could not make them stand upright.

The underworld has its score of rulers—*Zartay*, *Zartanay*, *Hag*, *Mag*, *Gaf*, *Gafan*, *Anatan*, and *Kin*, with hells and vestibules in plenteous confusion. *Hibil* descends here and obtains victories for *Manda*, and compels them to divulge the hidden name of darkness. From the fourth vestibule he carries away the female devil *Ruha*, daughter of *Kin*. This *Ruha*, Kessler affirms, is really an anti-Christian parody of the Holy Spirit. By her own son, *Ur*, *Ruha* becomes mother of the planets and signs of the zodiac. These are the source of all evil in the world, and control the sins of mankind. But the sky itself is an ocean of water, pure and clear, the abode of Light. The central sun is the Polar Star, with jeweled crown standing before the door of *Abathur*.