

one of the priests at Busrah. A recently published translation of their sacred writings into German contains only one fourth of the "great book" of the Mandæans. What is this great book? What does it teach? And what do these St. John Christians, falsely so called, really believe? Altho meeting Sabeans for the past four years, and being their guest on frequent journeys up and down the rivers, I found no satisfactory answer to these questions from their own lips. They turn to the North Star when they pray, and "baptize" every Sunday—these were the sole articles of faith that one could learn. Books gave fragmentary and conflicting statements, all hinging around these two plain facts. According to one account they were gross idolaters; another classed them with Christians. Light dawned from an unexpected quarter. An anonymous article appeared in the London *Standard*, entitled "A Prayer-Meeting of the Star-Worshippers." Whoever wrote it must be perfectly acquainted with their religious mysteries, or be one of themselves! When I translated it to a company of Sabeans at Amara, they were dumbfounded. Who had dared to expose all their secret ceremonies and beliefs to public view? Let me quote one paragraph only of this account, every minute particular of which the Sabeans assure me is true:

"Toward midnight the Star-worshippers, men and women, come slowly down to the *Mishkna* by the river-side. Each enters the tiny wattled hut by the southern wall, disrobes and bathes in the circular reservoir. . . . On emerging from the water each one robes him or herself in the *rasta*—that is, the ceremonial white garment, . . . crosses to the open space in front of the door of the tabernacle, and seats himself upon the ground, saluting those present with the customary '*Sood Havilakh*' ('blessing be upon thee'), and receiving the usual reply, '*Assootah de hai havilakh*' ('blessing of the Living One be upon thee'). . . . The sacred book, *Sidra Rabba*, is laid upon the altar folded back where the liturgy of the living is divided from the ritual of the dead. The high-priest takes one of the two live pigeons handed to him, extends his hands toward the Polar Star, upon which he fixes his eyes, and lets the bird fly, calling aloud: '*Bshmo d'hai rabba mshabba zivo kadmaya Elaha. Edmen Nafshi Eprah*' ('In the name of the Living One, blessed be the primitive light, the ancient light, the Divinity self-created'). [Then] . . . the reading being in progress, they prepare the *Peto Elayat* or high mystery, as they term their communion. One kindles a charcoal-fire in the earthenware stove by the side of the altar, and the other grinds small some of the barley brought by the deacon. He then expresses some oil from the sesame seed, and mixing the barley meal and oil, prepares a mass of dough which he kneads and separates into small cakes the size of a two-shilling piece. These are quickly thrust into the oven and baked. The fourth deacon now takes the pigeon left in the cage, cuts its throat quickly with a very sharp knife, taking care that no blood is lost. The little cakes are then brought to him by his colleagues, and still holding the dying