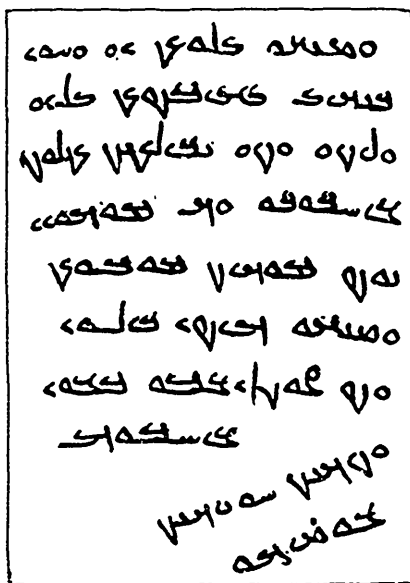


last remnant of the Chaldean polytheists into the Christians of St. John at Bussora." And yet the present Sabeans, although giving peculiar honor to John the Baptist, can in no sense be called Christians. Nor are they related, except indirectly, to any of the Judæo-Christian heresies of the early Church, such as, *e.g.*, the Hemero-baptists.

Isolated by creed, cult, and a language of their own, they love their isolation, and do not intermarry with strangers. Nearly all of them follow one of three trades: they raise the finest dairy produce of Mesopotamia; they build a peculiar kind of light canoes called Mashhoof; and for the rest are silversmiths. No traveler visits their villages without carrying away specimens of their beautiful inlaid work, black metal on silver and



A PASSAGE FROM THE SACRED BOOK OF THE  
MANDÆANS.

gold; rings, thimbles, bracelets, armlets, and ornaments of all kinds. A peaceful people are they; industrious, tho mostly poor, and living in harmony with their neighbors, they seldom afford trouble to their Turkish rulers. Both men and women have a remarkably fine physique; tall, of dark complexion, good features, and with long black beards, some of them are typical patriarchs—even as we imagine Abraham appeared when he left their present country for Haran. On ordinary days their dress does not distinguish them from Moslems or Jews, but on feast days they wear only white. Their women go about unveiled, and have a more masculine cast of features than Moslem women; they are also rather taller.

The two great things, however, that distinguish the Sabeans are their language and their religion. Naturally the bazaar-talk of all the river country is Arabic; all Sabeans speak it, and a goodly proportion read and write it; but beside this they have a household language of their own, the language of their sacred books, which is called Mandäitic. So closely related to Syriac that it might be called a dialect, it yet has its own peculiar alphâbet characters, resembling the older Palmyrene, and is not fully intelligible to the Syriac-speaking Christians from Mosul. Wright says it resembles most Nabathean and the language of the Babylonian Talmud. The oldest manuscripts in this dialect date from the sixteenth century, and are in European libraries. At present only the priests can read and write Mandäitic, but they refuse to teach those outside of their faith even the first lesson. The illustration given was copied for me by