

“. . . Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians and the Sabaeans, whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve . . .”:

and there are somewhat similar verses citing these religions in the chapters entitled ‘The Food’ and ‘The Pilgrimage’. The opinion of the learned today is that the people still surviving in Iraq and called “Subba” are not the real Sabaeans of the Quran at all, and are not, in consequence, of the Ahl-al-Kitab (cf. Maulawi Muhammad ‘Ali). About the true Sabaeans themselves<sup>1</sup> there are wide differences of identification, whether star-worshippers or not: and even over the derivation of the word, Sabaeans, whether derived from an Arabic or Syriac word: Arabic writers refer to the existing sect in Iraq generally as Al-mughtasibah (“those who wash themselves”). It is claimed they are from forebears who in the reign of Al-Ma‘mun (A.D. 830) attributed to themselves the traditional name of Subba, in order to escape the persecution meted out to non-scriptural pagans, but from which the Quranic limitation would spare Sabaeans, and the Arabs were deceived into acceptance of them at their claim, partly by the habit of the Mandaeans of turning to the pole-star in their devotions, and the original Sabaeans having disappeared or become obscure. Norberg wrote that the Mandaeans themselves derive “Subba” from the style they give John the Baptist—Abo Sabo Zakario: and Mrs. Drower, the latest writer, is of opinion that the appellation they give themselves—*Mandai*—is derived from *Manda* = a dwelling in their language, not from a word meaning ‘disciple’, or ‘those who know’, as others assert.

One of their own co-religionists, according to Mr. J. Van Ess in his *Arab of Mesopotamia*, wrote in a newspaper that:

“The Sabaeans are from among the ancient Egyptians, who emigrated to Jerusalem at the time of the prophet John, i.e. John the Baptist . . .”

but Mr. Van Ess, for many years in touch with the sect, declares that the John to whom the Mandaeans profess to adhere is certainly not a saint, i.e. therefore not the S. John Baptist of the Christian gospels at all. Another authority points out that the Mandaeans themselves never assumed the appellation ‘Christians of S. John’: that was the mistaken conclusion to which the early Catholic missionaries came in making Yahya Yuhanna, John the prophet of the Mandaeans, identical with the Precursor of Christ. The noted Arab writer, Zamakhshari, wrote about the Mandaeans:

“They apostatized from the religion of Christians and Jews, and worshipped angels. . . .”

According to the Shaikh, or priest of the Mandaeans interviewed by the author of the recent little book in Arabic translated by Saiyid Muhammad Ahmad of Basra, the Mandaeans

“at the beginning inhabited Harran: violent wars took place between the Mandaeans and the people of Harran, the Mandaeans fled to Tur Madai, where they settled. One of their old homes was Taib Matheh, which is known” (in Persian) “as the mountains of Pusht-i-Kuh. Some of them say that Mandali” (the chief place in Pusht-i-Kuh) “was one of their centres. . . . Yet another states that the Mandaeans remained in Egypt: the Egyptians slew them, and the survivors emigrated to Persia: the Persians slew them, so they came to Iraq.

“. . . The total number of their male population is 5,000” (Mr. J. Van Ess in the *Arab of Mesopotamia* estimated, however, that their total does not exceed 3,000 souls, internal strife being one reason for the decrease: further, many of their women have in late years been married to Muhammadans).

“Their religious works now extant are (a) *Sidra Rabba*—the great book, and also called

<sup>1</sup> e.g. *Die Sabier und Das Ssabismus* of Dr. Chlodwig Chwolson, S. Petersburg, 2 vols., 1868.