

SPIRITS REBELLIOUS

KAHLIL GIBRAN



"His power came from some great reservoir of spiritual life else it could not have been so universal and so potent, but the majesty and beauty of the language with which he clothed it were all his own."

— CLAUDE BRAGDON

THE BOOKS OF
KAHLIL GIBRAN

The Madman • 1918

Twenty Drawings • 1919

The Forerunner • 1920

The Prophet • 1923

Sand and Foam • 1926

Jesus the Son of Man • 1928

The Earth Gods • 1931

The Wanderer • 1932

The Garden of the Prophet • 1933

Prose Poems • 1934

Nymphs of the Valley • 1948

Spirits Rebellious • 1948

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This Man from Lebanon —

A Study of Kahlil Gibran

by Barbara Young

PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

SPIRITS REBELLIOUS

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BY
KAHLIL GIBRAN

*Translated from the Arabic, and with an
Introduction, by*
H. M. NAHMAD



NEW YORK • ALFRED A. KNOPF • MCMXLVIII

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FIRST AMERICAN EDITION

*To the spirit that did embrace my spirit. To
the heart that did pour out its secrets into my
heart. To the hand that did kindle the flame
of my love.*

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK,
PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

*Manufactured in the United States of America
Published simultaneously in Canada by The Ryerson Press*

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The four stories in this volume were completed in 1908, fifteen years before the emergence of *The Prophet*, which was not only to make Kahlil Gibran one of the foremost philosophers and most beloved writers of his generation, but also to place him in the first rank of those who have used the English language as a vehicle for their thoughts. Yet at the time when these stories made their appearance in print Gibran, who was then twenty-five years old, was unknown save to a handful of Arabic-speaking devotees — chiefly his own countrymen.

Spirits Rebellious is, in a way, a continuation and extension of Gibran's *Nymphs of the Valley*. The contents of this volume, though in story form, are really sermons and parables. They are bolder, more outspoken, more forceful, than the stories that preceded them. Their imagery and symbolism are, if anything, richer, and the language in which they are written is even more

beautiful. Through them Gibran delivers his message.

In the first story, "Wardé Al-Hani," the tale of an unhappy woman who leaves her husband and his wealth to live in poverty with the man she loves, Gibran seems to seek deliberately the undermining of the very foundations of stabilized society as we know it and to set at naught the sacredness of marriage vows. But in fact he is not doing so. Here he shows us a girl married against her will, as was largely the custom, to a man much older than herself. Between them there is neither love nor spiritual affinity. Are they husband and wife because, at the behest of parents steeped in a harsh tradition, a priest was made to pronounce a benediction over them? he asks in effect. When Wardé leaves her husband's house, society calls her an adulteress, a woman who has betrayed her lawful husband. Yet, in truth, does she not commit a greater sin by accepting the shelter, food, and riches of a man to whom she cannot give love or companionship?

"The Bridal Couch," the shortest story in this volume, is a simple tale of a wedding feast that began in joy and ended in sorrow. It takes place in a village of North Lebanon in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Here again Gibran paints a portrait of an unhappy girl forced into marriage

by custom and tradition. But unlike Wardé this bride does not see her true love consummated: she slays her lover, who is among the merrymakers, before plunging the knife into her own heart.

Like the preachers of old, Gibran clothes his sermons in parables. In *Nymphs of the Valley* he used as his mouthpiece the mad shepherd boy Yuhanna; in *Spirits Rebellious* it is Khalil the Heretic, in the story named after him, who awakens the people to the presence of evil men and evil things in their midst and bids them cast away their chains and fetters and appear once more as free children of God. Khalil is a more robust personality than Yuhanna, and he lives to see right triumph over wrong.

"The Cry of the Graves" is another Lebanese tale of bygone days, but its message is timeless and universal. It is a story repeated time and time again in our own as in other ages — of the oppression of the weak at the hands of the strong; of the crushing of a people's liberty by a tyrannous authority, and of the condemning of innocent men and women by judges set up in office by corrupt hands.

H. M. NAHMAD

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IN THIS VOLUME
ARE REPRODUCED FROM
ORIGINAL DRAWINGS BY
THE AUTHOR

WARDÉ AL-HANI

I

Unhappy is the man who loves a maiden and takes her for his lifemate, pouring out at her feet the sweat of his brow and his heart's blood, placing in her hands the fruits of his labor and the yield of his toil, and then learns, suddenly, that her heart, which he sought to buy with exertion by day and watchfulness by night, is given as a gift to another that he may take pleasure in its hidden things and rejoice in the secrets of its love.

Unhappy the woman who awakens from youth's ignorance to find herself in the house of a man who overwhelms her with his gifts and riches and clothes her with generosity and kindness, yet is not able to touch her heart with the living flame of love nor yet satisfy her spirit with the divine wine that God makes to flow from a man's eyes into a woman's heart.

From the days of my youth had I known
Rashid bey Nu'man. He was Lebanese by origin,

Beirut by birth and residence. He came of an old and wealthy family known for its attachment to the memory of ancient glories. He was fond of recounting tales of his ancestors' nobility. In his daily life he clung to their customs and traditions and took refuge therein amidst the Western ways and fashions that filled the atmosphere of the East like flights of birds.

Rashid bey was a man of good heart and generous instinct, but like many men of Syria he saw the surface of things alone and not that which lay concealed beneath. He did not hear the singing in his spirit, but used his feelings only to listen to the voices around him. He amused himself with things of no import, things that blind one to life's secrets and take the spirit from its understanding of creation's hidden things to pursue ephemeral pleasures. He was of those who quickly show their love or hatred of people and things only to repent of their haste after a while, by which time repentance has become a cause of mocking and scorn instead of pardon and forgiveness. It was these things in his nature that joined Rashid bey Nu'man with Wardé Al-Hani before her spirit could embrace his in the shade of a love that makes married life a bliss.

For a number of years I was away from Beirut, and on my return I went to see Rashid. I found him feeble in body and pale in color. On his drawn face played shadows of sadness, and from his sorrowful eyes grief spoke silently of a heart broken and a breast oppressed. I sought the cause of his sickness and distress from the things around him, but without finding it. So I asked of him and said: "What is the cause of your suffering, my friend, and where is the joy that once shone from your face like a light? Where is the happiness that was your youth? Has death parted you from a loved one? Or has the darkness of night robbed you of what you garnered by the light of day? Tell me, then, by the right of friendship, what this grief is that holds your spirit in embrace and this sickness that possesses your body."

He looked at me with the look of a grief-stricken person to whom remembrance first brings back the echoes of happier days and then silences them. In a voice whose very utterance was misery and despair he said:

"If a man loses a dear friend, he looks around him and finds many others and is comforted and solaced. When a person loses his wealth he thinks on the matter a little, knowing that the efforts that brought him riches before will again come to

his aid, and so he forgets. But if a man loses his peace of mind, where shall he find it and how shall he be requited? Death stretches forth its hand and strikes you with violence and you are hurt, but after the passing of a day and a night you feel the caress of Life's fingers and you laugh and rejoice. Destiny comes upon you unawares and looks at you with big frightening eyes, grips you by the throat and throws you to the ground, trampling upon you with feet of iron, and then departs laughing. But soon Destiny returns, seeking your forgiveness, raises you up with fingers of silken touch, and sings to you a song of hope. The shades of night bring with them all manner of affliction and vexation, which fade into nothingness with the coming of morning. And then you feel your resolve and hold fast to your hopes. But if your lot in life be a bird that you love and feed with grain from your heart, whose drink is the light of your glances, whose cage is your ribs, and whose nest your soul; and if, whilst you are looking at your bird caressing his feathers tenderly, he suddenly leaves your hand and flies away high in the sky only to alight in another's cage never to return, what shall you do then, my friend? How shall you find patience and consolation and how shall hope be revived?"

Rashid bey spoke these last words in a voice strangled by pain and stood shaking like a reed in the path of the wind. He stretched forth his hands as though he would seize on a thing with his distorted fingers and tear it piece by piece. The blood rose in his face and dyed his wrinkled flesh a dark color; his eyes grew big and his eyelids became rigid. He appeared as one seeing before him an evil spirit conjured out of nothingness come to take his life. Then he turned his gaze on me; his expression changed at once and the rage and anger in his enfeebled body gave place to agony and pain. Weeping, he said:

"She is the woman. She is the woman I delivered from penury and slavery and opened up to her my treasures and made her envied of all women for her fine clothes and priceless jewels and carriages and thoroughbred horses. The woman my heart loved, at whose feet it poured out its affection; toward whom my soul inclined and showered with gifts and offerings. The woman to whom I was a loving friend and a sincere companion and a faithful husband has betrayed me. She has left me and gone to another's house to live with him in the shadow of poverty and share with him bread kneaded with shame and drink with him of water mixed with dishonor

and disgrace. She is the woman whom I loved. The graceful bird whom I fed from my heart and gave to drink from the light of my eyes. The bird to whom my ribs were a cage and my soul a nest has fled from my hand and flown to another nest, a nest woven from thorns, to eat therein of worms and thistles and drink of poison and gall. The angel I put to dwell in the paradise of my love and affection is become a frightening demon descending into the blackness to torment itself with its sins and torment me with its crime."

The man became silent and covered his face with his hands as though he would protect his one self from the other. Then he sighed and said: "This is all that I can tell to you, do not ask more of me. Do not give utterance to my misfortune, but let it be voiceless, that perchance it may grow in quietude and grant me peace and the grave."

I rose from my place, and tears filled my eyes and compassion rent my heart. In silence I took leave of him, for I could find naught in speech as a balm to his wounded heart nor in wisdom a light to illumine the gloom of his spirit.

II

A few days later I met with Wardé Al-Hani, for the first time, in a poor house surrounded by trees and flowers. She had heard my name mentioned in the house of Rashid bey, the man whose heart she had trodden under foot and abandoned for dead beneath the hoofs of existence. And when I saw her shining eyes and heard the soft tones of her voice, I said to myself: "Can this woman be evil? Is it possible that this transparent face should conceal an ugly soul and an evil heart? Is this, then, the treacherous wife? Is this the woman whom I oftentimes accused and pictured in my mind as a serpent concealed in the body of some bird of rare beauty?" But I returned and murmured to myself: "What, then, has caused that man his misery if not this comely face? Have we not heard and known that seeming beauty is a cause of hidden and terrible calamity and deep and painful grief? Is not the moon that illumines the imagination of poets with light the same moon that disturbs the tranquillity of the waters with ebb and flow?"

I sat down near her. As though she had heard my thinking and did not wish to prolong the struggle between my perplexity and my thoughts,

she rested her beautiful head on her white hand, and in a voice in which were the clear notes of a flute she said: "I have not met with you before, my friend, but the echo of your thoughts and dreams has come to me by the mouths of people and I know you for one with pity for an oppressed woman, who has mercy on her weakness and is sensible of her feelings and emotions. Because of this I lay before you my heart and open to you my breast so that you may see what is hidden therein and, if you would, tell people that Wardé Al-Hani was never a woman evil and treacherous. I was eighteen years of age when destiny led me to Rashid Nu'man and he was near to forty years. He loved me with passion and, in the idiom of people, his intentions to me were honorable. Then he made me his wife and set me mistress over his fine house with many servants and clothed my body in silk and adorned my head and neck and wrists with jewels and precious stones. He showed me, as one exhibits a strange and rare object, in the homes of his friends and acquaintances. He smiled the smile of a conqueror whenever he saw their eyes resting on me with admiration and wonder. If he heard the wives of his friends speak of me with affection, he would lift high his head in pride. But when one asked: 'Is this the wife of

Rashid bey or a girl he has adopted?' he did not hear. Neither did he pay heed when another remarked: 'Had Rashid bey married in his youth, his first-born would now be older in years than Wardé Al-Hani!'

"All this happened before my life had awakened from the deep sleep of childhood and ere the gods had kindled in my heart love's flame; ere the seeds of affection and feeling had flowered in my breast. Yes, all this took place at a time when I thought that the greatest happiness was in fine garments to adorn my body, and an elegant carriage to draw me, and priceless rugs to surround me. But when I awoke and my eyes opened to the light and I felt tongues of sacred fire reaching out in me and burning, and a hunger of the spirit overcoming me and hurting; when I awoke to see my wings moving now right, now left to bear me aloft into the regions of love and then quiver and droop powerless by the side of the shackles of custom binding my body ere I knew the meaning of those bonds or the portent of that custom; when I awoke and felt all these things, I knew that a woman's happiness is not in the glory and lordship of a man. Neither is it in his generosity or clemency; it is in a love that binds her spirit to his spirit, pouring out her love into his heart and making

them a single member in the body of Life and one word on the lips of God. When this wounding truth revealed itself to my sight, I saw myself a thief in Rashid Nu'man's house who eats the owner's bread and then hides himself in the dark caves of night. I knew that each day passed near him was a lie that shame would brand on my forehead in letters of fire before heaven and earth. For I could not give him my heart's love against his generosity, neither could I grant him affection in exchange for his goodness and piety. I tried to love him, but in vain; for love is a force that makes our hearts; our hearts cannot create that force. I prayed and besought, but in vain. I prayed into the silences of the nights before Heaven, asking it to create in my depths a spiritual affinity that would draw near to me the man who had been chosen for my husband. But Heaven did not so, for love descends on our spirits on God's command and not on man's asking. And thus did I remain two full years in that man's house, where I envied the birds of the fields their liberty while the daughters of my kind envied me my captivity. Like a woman bereaved of her only-born I wept for my heart that was born of knowledge and sickened of custom and law and died each day of hunger and thirst. Then one black day I looked to

beyond the darkness and saw a soft light shining from the eyes of a youth who walked the highways of life alone and who dwelt alone among his books and papers in this poor house. I closed my eyes that I might not see those rays, and said within myself: 'Thy lot, O spirit, is the blackness of the tomb; covet not, therefore, the light!' Then I listened and heard a divine melody the sweetness of which made a trembling in my limbs, whose purity possessed my being. Thereupon I closed my ears and said: 'Thy lot, O spirit, is the howling of the pit; covet not, therefore, song.' I closed my eyelids that I might not see and my ears that I might not hear. But my eyes saw the light while they were yet closed and my ears heard the melody even though they were stopped. At first I was afraid, like a pauper who finds a jewel outside the King's palace and dares not pick it up out of fear and yet is not able to leave it because of his poverty. I wept the tears of a thirsty man who sees a well of sweet water surrounded by wild beasts of the forest and throws himself on the ground, watching fearfully."

Wardé grew silent for a while. She closed her big eyes as though the past was standing before her and she had not the courage to look on it face to face. Then she continued:

"Those who come forth from out of the infinite and return thereto and have tasted naught of life's truths know not the meaning of a woman's agony when her spirit stands between the man whom Heaven has willed to love and the man to whom the laws of his fellows have bound her. It is a tragedy writ in the blood and tears of womanhood, which a man reads and laughs at because he understands nothing of it. Does he understand, then his laughter becomes harshness and sneering, and in his wrath he heaps coals of fire on the woman's head and fills her ears with blasphemy and cursing. It is tragedy played out by the black nights in the heart of every woman who finds her body fettered to the bed of a man whom she knows as a husband ere she knows what is marriage. She sees her spirit fluttering around another whom she loves with all her soul, with all the beauty and purity of love. It is a harsh struggle that began with the birth of weakness in a woman and strength in a man, and it will not cease until the day wherein weakness ceases to be a slave to strength. It is a destructive war between the corrupt laws of men and the sacred emotions of the heart. Yesterday was I cast into the arena, and fear nigh destroyed me and weeping put an end to me. But I rose up and cast away from me the

cowardice of the daughters of my kind and set free my wings from the bonds of weakness and submission. I flew aloft into the spacious airs of love and freedom. And now I rejoice by the side of the man with whom I left the hand of God as a single burning flame before the beginning of time. There is no force in this world that can rob me of my happiness, for it springs from the embrace of two souls held together by understanding and sheltered by love."

Wardé looked at me with a look that held a meaning as though she would pierce my breast with her eyes to see the effect of her words in my heart and hear the echo of her voice in my bones. But I remained silent lest I stop her from speaking. Then she spoke in a voice in which was the bitterness of remembrance and sweetness of freedom and delivery, and said:

"People will say to you that Wardé Al-Hani is a treacherous and faithless woman who has followed her lusting heart and abandoned the man who raised her to him and put her mistress over his household. They will say to you that she is shameless, a whore who has defiled the holy crown of marriage with her unclean hands and taken in its stead a foul crown made from the thorns of hell. And cast from her body the gar-

ments of virtue to put on garments of shame and sin. They will tell to you all that and more, for the ghosts of their ancestors cease not living in their bodies. They are like the deserted caves of the valleys that throw back voices in echo without understanding of their meaning. They know naught of God's sacred law in His creatures; neither are they knowing of the true faith. They know not when a man is guilty and when he is innocent, but rather do they look only on outward things, their weak-sighted eyes not seeing what is concealed. They pass judgment in ignorance, and guilty and innocent and good and bad are as one to them. Woe to them who would judge and weigh! I was a harlot and a faithless woman in the house of Rashid Nu'man because he made me the sharer of his bed by virtue of tradition and custom rather than as a wife before Heaven, bound to him by the sacred law of love and the spirit. I was as one filthy and unclean in my own eyes and before God when I took of his property, that he might take of my body. But now I am pure and clean, for the law of love has set me free. I am become faithful and good because I have ceased to trade my body for bread and my days for clothes. Yes, I was a whore whilst people thought me a virtuous wife. Yet today, when I



am pure and honorable, they think me a whore and unclean, for they judge souls according to their bodies and measure the spirit with the measurements of matter."

Wardé ceased speaking and looked toward the window. With her right hand she pointed in the direction of the town. In a raised voice filled with loathing and contempt as though she saw in the streets and doorways and on the roofs shadows of corruption and baseness, she said: "Look toward those fine dwellings and noble mansions where dwell the rich and powerful of mankind. Between walls hung with woven silk lives treachery with hypocrisy, and beneath ceilings of beaten gold stay lies and falseness. Look well at those buildings that speak to you of glory and power and good fortune. They are naught save caverns concealing wretchedness and misery. They are plaster tombs where a weak woman's deceit takes refuge behind the mascara of her eyes and the reddening of her lips; in whose corners are hidden the selfishness and brutality of a man behind the glitter of gold and silver. These are the palaces that raise high their walls in pride and splendor; yet could they feel the breath of trickery and deceit breathing over them, they would crack and crumble and fall to the ground. These are the houses to which

the poor villager looks with tear-filled eyes, yet did he but know that in the hearts of their dwellers was not one grain of the love and sweetness that filled the heart of his companion he would smile in scorn and go back to his field with pity."

She took hold of my hand and led me to a corner of the window that looked out on those houses and mansions and said:

"Come and I shall show to you the secrets of these people whom I did not wish to be like. Look at that palace with the marble columns and the glass windowpanes. In it lives a rich man who inherited the wealth of his avaricious father and learned his way of life in corruption-infested streets. Two years ago he wed a woman of whom he knew little save that her father was of noble line and high standing among the aristocracy of the town. Their honeymoon was hardly ended before he tired of her and went back to the companionship of women of pleasure and left her in that palace as a drunkard leaves an empty wine jar. At first she wept in her agony; then she took patience and consoled herself as one who admits an error. She learned that her tears were too precious to shed upon a man such as her husband. Now she busies herself with the passion of a young man with a handsome face and a sweet tongue into

whose hands she pours her heart's love and whose pockets she fills with her husband's gold — the husband who will have no affair with her because she will have naught with him. Look at that house surrounded by a luxuriant garden. It is the residence of a man whose descent goes back to an illustrious family who once ruled his country over a long period of time. Today, through the dissipation of its wealth and the idleness and sloth of its sons, it has fallen in esteem. Many years ago this man wedded a girl of great wealth and ugliness, and after he had acquired her riches he forgot her existence and took to him a mistress of much beauty. The other he left to bite her nails in repentance and dissolve in yearning and longing. Now she spends the hours in curling her hair and blackening her eyes and coloring her face with powders and unguents. She adorns her body with satins and silks that she may find favor in the sight of one of those who visit her, but she finds nothing except the glances of her reflection in the mirror. That house of paintings and statues is the house of a woman comely of face and ugly of soul. When her first husband died, she got his wealth and property. Then she chose a man weak in will and body and made him her husband in order to shelter behind his name against people's tongues and

make his presence a defense for her wrongful actions. Now she is among those who desire her like a bee that sucks up from the flowers the sweet and the pleasant. Look you now at yonder house, the one with the spacious doorways and the cunningly built arches. In it lives a man, a lover of things material, busy and ambitious. He has a wife in whose body is beauty and delight and of sweet and tender spirit. In her the spirit and the body are harmonized as the fall of a metrical verse is companion to its delicacy of meaning. She was created to live by love and die for it. But like the daughters of her kind she was condemned by her father before her eighteenth year, and the yoke of a corrupt marriage was fastened upon her neck. Today she is sick in body and melting like a wax candle in the heat of her imprisoned affection. She is fading slowly as a perfumed breeze before a storm. She is being destroyed through love of a thing she feels but cannot see. She longs and yearns for the embrace of Death to deliver her from her sterile state and free her from the thrall of a man who passes his days in amassing wealth and his nights in counting money the while he curses the hour in which he took to himself a barren woman who bore him no son to inherit his riches and perpetuate his name. . . . Look again

to that house standing alone amidst gardens. It is the dwelling of a gifted poet of lofty thought and spiritual belief. He has a wife dull of intellect and coarse-minded. She mocks at his verse because she understands naught of it, and scorns his works because they are strange. But now he has gone from her to the love of another, a married woman sensitive and wise, who by her love creates light in his heart, and whose glance and smile inspire him to immortal utterance."

Wardé grew silent again for a while. She sat down by the window as though her spirit had tired of its wanderings in the hidden chambers of those dwellings. Then she spoke again and said quickly:

"Those are the places wherein I did not want to live. Those are the graves in which I did not want to be buried alive. Those people from whose ways I freed myself and whose yoke I cast away from me, they are those who mate and come together in their bodies, but in spirit contend one with the other. There is nothing to intercede for them before God save their ignorance of His laws. I judge them not, but pity them; neither do I hate them, but only their surrender to lies and hypocrisy. I have revealed to you their secrets and shown you what is in their hearts, not out of love

of slander and backbiting, but that you should know the truth about a people whose like I was yesterday and from whom I have escaped. And to reveal to you the way of a people who speak only evil of me because I forfeited their friendship to gain my soul and abandoned their deceitful ways to turn my eyes to the light where are sincerity and truth and justice. They have driven me away from them, but I am content, for it is those whose spirits rebel against falsehood and oppression whom the multitude drives from its midst. Who does not prefer exile to slavery is not free in that freedom which is truth and duty. Yesterday I was a richly laden table that Rashid bey approached when he felt the need of food. But our two spirits remained apart like humble servants standing at a distance. When knowledge came to me, I loathed this servitude and I tried to submit myself to my lot, but I was not able, for my spirit forbade me to pass my days in prostration before an idol raised by the dark eyes and called Law. I broke my chains asunder, yet did not know how to throw them from me until I heard Love summoning and saw the Spirit girded for departure. I went out from the house of Rashid Nu'man as a prisoner from his prison and left behind me the jewels and the servants and carriages and came to

the abode of my love, which is empty of fine furnishings but full with the things of the spirit. I know that I have done naught save what was right, for it was not the will of Heaven that I should cut off my wings and prostrate myself in the dust, hiding my head in my arms while I spilled my life blood from my eyes, saying: 'This is my lot in life.' Heaven did not decree that I pass my days crying out in agony in the night, saying: 'When will come the dawn?' and when the dawn came, asking: 'When will end this day?' It was not decreed that man should be unhappy and wretched, for in his depths is created the desire for happiness, because in a man's happiness God is glorified. This, then, is my story and this is my protest before heaven and earth. I shall sing it and tell it, but people will close their ears and hear not, for they fear the revolt of their spirits and they are afraid lest the foundations of their society be shaken and fall about their heads. This is the rough and uneven path I have trodden ere attaining the summit of my happiness. If Death should come now and bear me away, my spirit would stand before the throne on high without fear or trembling, but with hope and rejoicing; and the coverings of my secret thoughts would fall away before the great Judge and reveal them white as

snow. For I have done naught save the will of the spirit, which God did separate from Himself. I have followed the cry of the heart and the echo of celestial melodies. This, then, is my story, which the inhabitants of Beirut count as a curse on the lips of Life and a sore in the body of society. But they shall repent when the days awaken in their clouded hearts the love of Love as the sun brings forth flowers from the depths of the earth, which is full with remains of the dead. Then will the passer-by stand by my grave and greet it, saying: 'Here sleeps Wardé Al-Hani, who freed her love from the bondage of the corrupt laws of men that she might live by the laws of love; who lifted her face to the sun that she might not see the shadow of her body among skulls and thorns.' "

Hardly had Wardé ceased from speaking when the door opened and a young man entered. He was handsome and slim of build, from his eyes shone a light, and on his lips played a soft smile. Wardé stood up and took his arm with affection. She presented him to me, mentioning my name with a kind word. When she uttered his name she glanced at me with a glance that told that this was the youth for whom she had denied the world and set at naught its laws and customs.

We sat down. Each was silent, asking in his

mind the thought of the other toward him. A minute passed, a minute filled with a silence that inclined all spirits to the dwelling on high. I looked at them both sitting side by side and saw what I had not seen before. Then I knew at once the meaning of Wardé's story and understood the secret of her protest against a society that persecutes the rebel against its edicts before knowing the cause of his rebellion. I saw before me a single divine spirit in the two human bodies made beautiful by youth and clothed in unison. Between them stood the god of love, his wings spread to protect them from the anger and blame of people. I felt a complete and perfect understanding arising from the two transparent faces lighted by purity. For the first time in my life I saw the image of happiness standing between a man and a woman whom dogma had condemned and law rejected.

I rose after a while and bade them farewell, a silent witness to the moving of my spirit.

I went out from that humble dwelling which affection had made a sanctuary of love and harmony, and made my way among those houses and mansions whose secrets Wardé had laid bare to me. I thought on her words and their underlying truth, but I had hardly reached the outskirts of the quarter when I remembered Rashid bey Nu'-

man. I saw again his misery and anguish and I said to myself: "He is unhappy and oppressed, yet would Heaven hearken to him if he stood before it grieving and blaming Wardé Al-Hani? Did that woman wrong him when she left him to follow her free spirit, or was it he that wronged her when he forced her body to yield to marriage ere her spirit was inclined toward love? Which of them is the oppressor and which the oppressed? Indeed, who is the guilty and who the innocent?"

I continued to soliloquize, probing into the strange events of the times, and again said to myself: "Ofttimes has vanity led women to abandon their husbands who are poor to follow rich men, for a woman's passion for fine clothes and a life of ease blinds her and leads her into shame and downfall. Was Wardé Al-Hani ignorant and lusting after the body when she proclaimed her independence over the heads of people and embraced a young man spiritually inclined? Whilst yet she was in her husband's house it was within her power to satisfy her senses in secret with the passions of young men who would have died to become slaves of her beauty and martyrs for love of her. Wardé Al-Hani was an unhappy woman; she sought happiness and found it and embraced

it. And so this is a truth that human society despises and that the law exiles."

I murmured these words into the air and then said, whilst I groped for understanding: "But is a woman permitted to purchase her happiness with her man's misery?" And my innermost self answered: "Is then a husband free to make a slave of his wife's affections so that he may remain happy?"

I continued on my way, the while Wardé's voice filled my ears, until I reached the outskirts of the town. The sun was inclining toward the west, and the fields and gardens were putting on their veils of stillness and quiet and the birds were intoning the evening prayer. I stood in contemplation and, sighing, said:

"Before the throne of freedom do these trees rejoice in the breeze's caress and before its majesty do they glory in the rays of the sun and the moon. Into the ears of freedom do the birds speak and about her skirts flutter by the streams. Into the air of freedom do these flowers spill the fragrance of their breath and before her eyes smile at the coming of morning. All that is on earth lives by the law of its nature, and by the nature of

its law are spread the glories and joys of liberty. But man alone is forbidden this bliss, for he makes earthly laws binding to his mortal spirit, and on his body and soul passes harsh judgment, and raises up about his love and yearning dark prison walls, and for his heart and mind digs a deep grave. If one of his fellows rises and cuts himself off from society and law, the people say that such and such a one is a rebel and an evil one deserving of expulsion from their midst; one fallen and unclean and fit only for death. . . . Must man remain eternally a slave of his own corrupt laws or shall the days free him to live in the Spirit for the Spirit? Must he remain looking ever on the ground or shall he lift his eyes to the sun lest he see the shadow of his body among thorns and skulls?"

THE CRY OF THE GRAVES

I

The Ameer sat cross-legged upon the judgment seat, and on each side of him sat the wise ones of the country, in whose wrinkled faces were reflected the pages of tomes and books. About the Ameer stood soldiers grasping swords and holding aloft lances. The people stood before him. Some, sightseers come out of love of a spectacle; others, anxious watchers awaiting the passing of judgment on a kinsman. But they all stood with bowed heads and bated breath and humble eyes as though a glance from the Ameer were a force instilling fear and terror in their hearts and souls.

After the assembly had seated itself and judgment time was at hand the Ameer raised his hand and shouted: "Bring forth the criminals one by one and acquaint me with their misdeeds and crimes." So the prison door was opened and its dark walls were revealed like the throat of a wild beast when he opens his jaws to yawn. From all corners arose the sound of rattling chains and

shackles to the accompaniment of the sighing and moaning of the imprisoned. The crowd shifted its gaze and craned its neck as though it would gain over the law in the spectacle of death's prey rising from out of the depths of the tomb.

After a few moments two soldiers came out of the prison leading a young man whose arms were pinioned. His grim face and taut features told of a strong spirit and a stout heart. They stood him before the court, then withdrew to the rear. The Ameer looked at him for a minute and said: "What is the crime of this man who stands before us with raised head like one in a place of honor rather than one in the grip of justice?" A member of the court answered: "He is a murderer who yesterday attacked one of the Ameer's officers and struck him to the ground as he was passing through the villages on his lawful occasions. When this man was seized, the bloodstained sword was yet in his hand."

The Ameer moved angrily on his high seat, and from his eyes darted glances of rage. In a loud voice he cried: "Take him back to the darkness and weight his body with chains. When dawn comes on the morrow strike off his head with the edge of his own sword and cast his body to the wilderness so that the vultures and prowling beasts

may pick it clean and the winds carry the stench of its rottenness to the nostrils of his kith and kin."

They thereupon led the youth back to the prison house, and the multitude followed him with their pitying glances and deep sighs, for he was a young man in the spring of his life, handsome and strong of build.

The soldiers appeared a second time, leading from the dungeon a frail-looking girl of great beauty. The pallor of sorrow and misery was upon her face; tears filled her eyes, and her head was bowed in repentance and regret. The Ameer looked at her and said: "And what has she done, this sickly woman who stands before us like the shadow by the side of truth?" One of the soldiers answered him and said: "She is an adulteress. Her lord came upon her one night and found her in her lover's embrace, so he delivered her up to the police after her companion had fled."

The Ameer looked at her closely, the while she looked on the ground in her shame. Then he said harshly: "Return her to the darkness and stretch her out upon a bed of thorns; mayhap she will remember the bed she has fouled with her shame. Give her to drink vinegar with calocynth that she may taste again of the forbidden kiss. And when the dawn comes, drag her out in her nakedness

and take her outside the city and stone her with stones. Leave there her body so that the wolves may enjoy her flesh and worms and insects gnaw at her bones." The girl was returned to the blackness of her prison and the crowd stared at her with wonder at the Ameer's justice and with sorrow at her sad beauty and wistful glances.

A third time the soldiers appeared, leading a feeble man of middle age who dragged along his trembling legs as if they were but tatters hanging from his ragged garments. He looked this way and that in his fright, and from his agonized glances leaped specters of poverty and despair and wretchedness. The Ameer turned toward him and said in a scornful voice: "What is the crime of this foul creature who stands like the dead among the living?" One of his soldiers answered: "He is a thief, a robber, who entered the monastery one night. He was seized by the pious monks and they found in the folds of his garments a sacred vessel of the sanctuary."

The Ameer looked at him with the look of a hungry vulture about to seize a wounded sparrow and shouted: "Throw him into the dark depths and fetter him with iron. At the break of dawn take him out and hang him from a high tree with a rope of flax and leave his corpse suspended to

swing between heaven and earth. Let the elements make his thieving fingers drop off like leaves from a tree and the winds scatter as dust his members."

And so they took the thief back to his cell while the people murmured one to another: "How does this weakling heathen dare to rob the monastery of its sacred vessels?"

The Ameer got down from the judgment seat, and the wise men and the lawmakers followed after him. Before and behind him went the soldiers, and the watching people dispersed. Soon the place was empty of all save the mournful cries of the imprisoned and the sobbing and sighing of these miserable wretches flitting like shadows across the walls.

I was there during all that took place. I stood there like a mirror in front of moving forms, thinking on the laws that men make for their fellows; pondering on what passes for justice with the people; probing into life's secrets and the meaning of existence. So I did till my thoughts grew vague and faint like the light in the evening sky behind a mist. As I went out from that place I said to myself: "Plants suck up the elements of the soil; sheep feed off the plants, and the wolf preys upon the sheep. The unicorn slays the wolf,

the lion hunts the unicorn, and death in its turn destroys the lion. Is there a force mightier than death to forge this chain of cruelties with an enduring justice? Is there a power that will turn these hateful things to good ends? Is there a power that will gather up all life's elements in its hand and merge them smiling in itself as the ocean gathers back to its depths all the streams in song? Is there a power to make stand the slayer and the slain, the adulteress and her lover, the robber and the robbed, before a court higher than the court of the Ameer?"

II

And on the second day I went outside the city and walked in the fields, wherein quietude showed to the spirit what the spirit had concealed, and the air in its purity killed the seeds of misery and despair born of narrow streets and dark dwellings.

When I reached the edge of the valley, I beheld there bands of eagles and vultures and crows soaring upwards into space and descending low to earth. The air was filled with their shrieking and croaking and the fluttering of their wings. I went forward to discover the cause of all this. Before me I saw the corpse of a man hanging from a high tree. Then I beheld the naked body of a

woman lying on the ground amidst the stones that had stoned her. And the body of a youth caked with blood-soaked earth, his head severed from his body.

There I stood overpowered by the horror of the scene, blinded by a thick veil of blackness. I looked but saw naught save the terrifying specter of death standing above the bloody corpses. I listened but I heard naught except the wail of annihilation merging into the "caw-caw" of the crows hovering and wheeling about these victims of man's laws.

Three human creatures. Yesterday they were in Life's embrace; today they are in Death's grasp. Three creatures did wrong according to the customs of men. And the Law in its blindness stretched forth a hand and crushed them. Three creatures whom ignorance made wrongdoers because they were weak; whom Law destroyed because it was strong.

When a man destroys his fellow, people say that such a one is a murderer. When one set in authority destroys, it is said that this one is a faithful judge. And when a man would rob the monastery they call him a thief; but when the Ameer would rob him of his life, then they say that the Ameer is a virtuous prince.

A woman is unfaithful to her lord and master, so the people say that she is an adulteress and whore. But when the Ameer drives her out in her nakedness and has her stoned by the multitude, they say that this is a noble Ameer.

The shedding of blood is forbidden. Who, then, has sanctioned it to the ruler? To steal property is a crime. But who has made a virtue of the stealing of souls? The faithlessness of women is an abomination. But who has made the stoning of bodies a pleasantness?

Shall we meet evil with greater evil and say: this is the law; and fight corruption with more corruption and proclaim it moral? Shall we overcome a crime with one greater and call it justice?

Has the Ameer never struck down a foe in his life or robbed the weaker among his followers of lands and goods? Has he never beguiled a beautiful woman? Is he innocent of all wrongdoing that it is allowed him to condemn to death the murderer and hang the thief and stone the harlot?

Who are they that raised this thief upon a tree? Are they angels come down from heaven or men who violate and rape all that comes to their hand? Who cut off this man's head? Were they prophets descended from above or soldiers who kill and

spill blood wherever they be? Who were those that stoned the harlot? The pious and the godly come from their cells or men who commit crime and do all manner of evil things in the blackness of the night? And the law — what is law? Who has seen it descend with the sunlight from the heavens? What human being has seen the heart of God and known His will in mankind? In what age have angels walked among men, saying: "Deny to the weak the light of existence and destroy the fallen with the edge of the sword and trample upon the sinner with feet of iron"?

These thoughts were still troubling my mind and heart when I heard footfalls nearby. I looked around and beheld a girl, who had appeared from among the trees, approaching the three corpses. As she walked she was looking furtively in all directions as though afraid. As soon as her eyes fell upon the beheaded youth she gave a shriek of terror and fell on her knees by his side, embracing him with trembling arms. Tears filled her eyes; with her fingers she stroked his curling hair, moaning the while in a low deep voice that seemed to rise up from her depths. Then she set to work quickly, digging into the soil with her hands until she had made a wide grave. She dragged the murdered youth to it and laid him out slowly,

placing the blood-matted head between the shoulders. After covering him with earth she planted the sword that had beheaded him on his grave. As she made to go I approached her. She took fright and began to tremble in her fear; she looked on the ground, while the hot tears fell from her eyes like rain. Then sighing, she said: "Go then, if you wish, and tell the Ameer, for it were better that I die and follow him that delivered me from shame than that I abandon his body as food for the vultures and beasts of prey."

"Do not fear me," I answered, "for I mourned the fate of this young man before you. Tell me how he saved you from shame."

"An officer of the Ameer came to our field to assess the tax and collect the tribute. When he saw me he looked at me with favor and I was afraid, and he levied an extortionate tax on my father's field — a tax so great as to be beyond even a rich man's purse. Then he seized me and carried me off by force to the palace of the Ameer in place of gold. I begged him with weeping to have pity on me, but he heeded not. I adjured him by my father's years, but he showed no mercy. I cried out for help to the men of the village, and this youth, my betrothed, came to my aid and saved me. The officer in his anger was about to strike him down,

but the youth forestalled him and, seizing an old sword that hung from the wall of his house, slew the officer. This he did in defense of his own life and my honor. And because of his greatness of spirit he forbore to flee like a murderer but remained standing by the dead body until soldiers came and drove him in fetters to the prison house."

Having spoken, she looked up at me with a look that melted my heart and stirred me to grief. Then, suddenly, she turned and ran from me. The sad cadences of her voice still rippled and disturbed the surface of the air.

After a while I looked up and saw a young man approaching, his face partly concealed by his cloak. He went up to the corpse of the harlot and, standing there, took off his cloak and covered with it the woman's nakedness. Then he fell to digging the soil with a dagger, after which he moved the body gently and covered it with earth and with each clod was a tear. His task completed, he gathered up some flowers which grew in that place and put them on the grave. As he was about to go I stopped him and said: "What is this fallen woman to you that you would dare oppose the Ameer's will and put in danger your life to protect her broken body against the birds of the air?"

He looked at me through eyes red with weeping and sleeplessness, eyes that spoke deep grief and sorrow. In a voice broken by sobs he said:

"I am that wretched man for whom this woman was stoned. We had loved each other from the days of our childhood, when we played together among the houses. We grew and with us love grew and developed until it became a mighty master whom we served with our hearts. Our secret souls stood in awe before this love and it took us in its embrace. One day when I was far from the town the father of the girl joined her by force to a man she hated. I returned, and when I heard of this my day became a night without end and my life a long and bitter death. I wrestled with my love and fought my heart's desire until they, in the end, overcame me and led me as the seeing the sightless. One day I went in secret to my beloved. My greatest desire was not more than to behold the light of her eyes and hear the music of her voice. I found her alone, bewailing her lot and mourning her days. We sat together and our speech was silence and our companion chasteness. An hour had not passed when her husband entered. When he saw me his baseness got the better of him and he gripped her slender neck in his rough hands and cried in a loud voice: 'Come you

all and see the harlot with her lover!' The neighbors came running, and then soldiers, inquiring of the matter. The man gave her into their hands and they led her away with her hair loose and her clothes torn. As for me, nobody did me harm or hurt, for blind law and corrupt tradition punish the fallen woman but look tolerantly upon the man."

Having thus spoken, the youth walked back toward the town, his features once more concealed in his cloak.

I remained behind in reflection and thought, sorrowing. The hanging corpse of the thief swung a little when the wind blew through the branches of the tree as though, by its movement, to entreat the spirits of the air to cut it down and lay it out upon the earth with the martyr to courage and the sacrifice to love.

An hour passed and then there came a sickly-looking woman clothed in rags. She stood by the swinging corpse beating her breast and weeping. She climbed the tree and gnawed at the rope with her teeth until the body fell, striking the ground like a bundle of wet clothes. She thereupon descended and, digging a grave by the side of the other two, buried in it the body. After covering it with earth, she took two pieces of wood and fash-

ioned a cross out of them and planted it over the grave. As she was about to return whence she had come I stopped her and said: "How come you to bury a thief?"

She looked at me through eyes made dark with the shadows of sorrow and misery and said: "He is my faithful husband and kindly companion and father of my children. I have five children crying out in their hunger. The eldest of them is eight years and the youngest is yet suckling. My man was not a thief; he was a peasant who farmed the monastery's land. But he received naught from the monks save a loaf of bread, which we divided up when evening came, leaving nothing for the morning. Since the days of his youth has he watered the fields of the monastery with the sweat of his brow, and with the strength of his arms made its gardens grow. When he grew feeble and his strength diminished through years of toil, he fell sick and the monks sent him away, saying that the monastery had no longer need of him. They told him to go and send his children to take his place in the fields as soon as they were of age. He wept and I wept and he implored them to have pity on him for Jesus' sake and entreated them by the angels and saints. But they had neither compassion nor pity for him or for our children, naked

and hungry. So he went to the city and sought work there, only to return empty-handed, for the dwellers in those mansions would not employ save strong young men. In the end he sat by the wayside and begged. But people would not give him alms; they said: 'Charity is not for those given to sloth and idleness,' and passed him by. One night need so possessed us that our children lay prostrate with hunger and the suckling sucked at my breasts and found there no milk. A change grew over my husband and he went out hidden by the darkness of the night and entered a vault of the monastery. There the monks stored the crops from the fields and the yield of the vineyards. As he was about to return to us carrying with him a basket of flour, the monks awoke from their sleep and seized hold of him ere he had taken a few steps. They struck at him and reviled him. When morning came they delivered him up to the soldiers, saying: 'Behold a thief come to plunder the monastery of its gold vessels.' Then they led him away to the prison and thence to the scaffold, to fill the bellies of the vultures because he had tried to fill the bellies of starving children with grain his own sweat had garnered when he served the monastery."

Having also spoken, the wretched woman went her way, and from out of her broken words shad-

owy forms of grief rose up and swirled about like columns of smoke in a wind.

I stood in the midst of the three graves like a mourner who is dazed and tongue-tied by grief, whose tears alone speak of his innermost feelings. I tried to think and reflect, but my spirit rebelled, for the spirit is a flower that folds its petals against darkness and gives not of its fragrance to the shades of night.

I stood, what time from each particle of earth covering the graves arose the cry of oppression like a mist rising from the emptiness of the valley, and it lapped like waves about my ears that it might inspire in me words.

I stood there silent. Did people understand the language of silence, then they were nearer to the gods than to wild beasts of the forest.

I stood there and sighed. And could the fires of my sighing touch the trees of that field, they would bestir themselves and leave their places and march in their battalions to wage war with their branches against the Ameer and his soldiers and bring down with their trunks the walls of the monastery upon the heads of those within it.

I stood and looked, and out of my looking

flowed pity's sweetness and sorrow's bitterness over those fresh graves. The grave of a youth who defended a girl's innocence with his life and saved her from the grasp of a wolf; him they beheaded in reward for his courage. And the girl came and sheathed his sword in the earth as a sign and symbol before the sun of the way of men in the kingdom of shame and ignorance. And there another grave. The grave of a girl whose being love had touched ere lust ravished her body. They stoned her because her heart was faithful even unto death. Her lover placed over her still body a garland of flowers of the field, which told, as they withered and decayed, of the lot of those souls whom love sanctified among a people rendered blind by dross and muted by ignorance. Yonder the grave of a poor wretch whose arms were broken by the fields of the monastery. Him the monks cast out and put others in his stead. He sought bread for his young through labor but found not; he asked for it as alms but no person gave him. When despair drove him to seek a return for his sweat and toil, they seized him and destroyed him. His widow came and set over him a cross to call in the stillness of night on the stars of heaven to bear witness to the tyranny of the

monks who turn the teachings of the Nazarene into swords that behead and cut with sharp edges the bodies of the weak and lowly.

Soon the sun sank low and disappeared beyond the twilight as though weary of men's strivings and hating their tyranny. The evening came on, weaving from the threads of darkness and stillness a fine veil to draw across the body of nature.

I lifted up my eyes to the heights and spread out my hands toward the graves with their signs and symbols and cried out: "This, then, is thy sword, O Courage, and it is sheathed in the earth. And those are thy flowers, O Love, they are scorched by fires. That is Thy cross, Jesus of Nazareth, and the blackness of night submerges it."

THE BRIDAL COUCH¹

The bride and the bridegroom came out of the church preceded by lamps and torches and followed by rejoicing guests. Around them and about them moved the young men and maidens, trilling and singing songs of joy.

The procession reached the house of the bridegroom, which was adorned with costly carpets and gleaming vessels and sweet-smelling myrtle plants. The groom and his bride mounted a dais and the guests seated themselves on silken rugs and velvet-covered chairs. Soon the spacious room overflowed with the bodies of men and women. The servants moved hither and thither, serving out wine, and the tinkle of glass against glass rose up and became one with the sound of general rejoicing and merrymaking. Then the musicians

¹ This happening took place in North Lebanon in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was related to the author by a woman from those parts who was a kinswoman of one of the people in this story.

came and took their places. They played airs that rendered drunk the listeners with their haunting refrains and filled their breasts with melodies woven with the whisper of a lute string and the sighing of men and the throbbing of drums.

Then the maidens rose to their feet and danced. They swayed gently back and forth to each rhythmic beat of the music as slender boughs sway to the movement of the gentle breeze. The folds of their soft garments rippled and shimmered like white clouds when the moonlight plays on them. All eyes were turned as one toward them and heads were bowed, and the spirits of the young men embraced them and those of the old wavered before their beauty. All gave themselves up to drinking and drowned their desires in wine. Movement grew lively and voices shouted and freedom reigned supreme. Sobriety took flight and minds became confused; spirits grew inflamed and hearts excited until that house and all in it became as a harp with broken strings in the hands of a daughter of the jinn, who plucked at it roughly, drawing from it sounds in which were both discord and harmony.

Here was a youth revealing his hidden love for a girl whom beauty had made to fascinate and excite. There a young man made to speak to a



beautiful woman, hunting his memory for sweet words and subtle phrases. Yonder was a man in middle age drinking cup after cup, demanding with insistence that the musicians play old tunes to bring back to him his youth. In a corner a woman sat making eyes at a man who looked with love upon another. In that corner sat a woman white with age, looking and smiling at the maidens, picking out from among them a bride for her only son. By a window sat a wife who made her husband's drunkenness the opportunity to draw near to her lover. And so all submerged themselves in a sea of wine and dalliance, surrendering to the swift current of joy and gladness, forgetful of yesterday and fleeing from the morrow, intent only on the harvesting of the minutes of the present.

Through all these happenings the comely bride gazed upon the scene with sad eyes in the manner of a hopeless prisoner gazing on the somber walls of his cell. Now and then she looked toward a corner of the room where a boy of twenty years sat alone, apart from the merry-makers, like an injured bird separated from his fellows. His arms were locked upon his breast as though standing between his heart and its flight, and his eyes were fixed upon some invisible thing in that room. It

was as though his spiritual self had separated from his earthly being to cleave the air in pursuit of the phantoms of darkness.

Midnight struck and the merriment of the wedding guests grew apace until it became a rioting. Then senses grew hazy with wine fumes and they stammered and stuttered in speech. Soon the bridegroom rose from his place. He was a man in middle age and coarse in appearance. Drunkenness had taken possession of his senses and he moved among his guests dispensing good humor and kindly feeling.

At that very moment the bride made a sign to a girl among the crowd to come up to her. The girl came and sat beside her. The bride, after glancing about like one anxious and impatient to divulge a fearful secret, leaned toward the girl and in a tremulous voice whispered into her ear these words:

"I entreat you, my dearest friend, by the affection that has bound us together since our childhood, by all that is dear to you in life, and by all that lies hidden in your heart. I entreat you by the love that caresses our spirits and illumines them, by the gladness in your heart and the agony in mine. I entreat you to go now to Selim and ask him to go down into the garden in secret and there

await me beneath the willow trees. Plead for me, plead for me, Susan, until he does so. Call to his memory days gone by; implore him in love's name; say to him that his beloved is a foolish and unhappy woman, tell him that she is near to dying and would open to him her heart ere darkness comes; that she is already lost and despairing and would see the light of his eyes before the fires of hell consume her. Tell him that she has sinned and would confess her guilt and implore his forgiveness. Hurry now to him. Speak for me before him and heed not the glances of these swine, for the wine has stopped their ears and blinded their eyes."

Susan rose from her place by the bride and sat beside Selim, sad in his aloneness. She whispered in his ears the words of her companion, seeking his pity. Love and sincerity lighted up her features. He inclined his head, listening, but answered no word. When she had ceased from talking, he looked at her like a thirsty man seeing a cup high up in the sky. Then, in a voice so low that it might have risen from the bowels of the earth, he said: "I will await her in the garden among the willow trees." So saying, he rose from his seat and went out into the garden.

After the passing of a few minutes the bride

likewise rose and followed him. She picked her way among men long ago seduced by the daughter of the vine and women whose hearts were given to lovemaking with the young men there. On gaining the garden, now cloaked by night, she quickened her pace. She ran like a frightened gazelle fleeing for cover from prowling wolves until she reached the willow trees where the youth awaited her. She threw herself upon him and encircled his neck with her arms. She looked into his eyes and spoke, the words pouring out from her lips with the falling of tears from her eyes, and said:

"Listen to me, my beloved; listen to me. I have repented of my folly and haste. I have repented, Selim, until repentance has crushed my very heart. I love you as I love no other and I shall love you to the end of my days. They told me that you had forgotten me and abandoned me out of love for another. They poisoned my heart with their tongues and rent my breast with their claws and filled my soul with their lying. Najibé said that you had forgotten me, that you hated me and were enslaved by her passion. She persecuted me, that evil woman, and played upon my feelings so that I might be satisfied with her kinsman as a husband; and it was so. But for me there is no

bridegroom save you, Selim. And now, now the scales have fallen from my eyes and I have come to you. I have gone out from that house and I shall not return to it. I have come to take you in my arms, for there is no power in this world that can send me back to the embrace of a man whom I wedded in despair. I have left the bridegroom whom lies and deceit chose for me as a husband and the father whom fate made a guardian. I have left behind me the flowers that the priest plaited into a crown for the bride and the laws that tradition made as fetters. I have left all in a house full with drunkenness and vice and am come to follow you to a far-off land; to the very ends of the earth; to the hiding-places of the jinn — yea, into the clutches of Death itself. Come you, Selim, let us hasten from this place under cover of the night. Let us go down to the shore and take a ship that will bear us to a distant and unknown land. Come, let us go; let not the dawn come except we be in safety from the hands of the foe. Look, do you see these gold adornments and these precious rings and necklaces and jewels? They will be a security for us against the future and we will live by them like princes. . . . Why do you speak not, Selim? Why do you not look on me? Why do you not kiss me? Do you not hear

my heart's cry and my spirit's travail? Do you no more believe that I have abandoned my husband and father and mother and come in my bridal gown to flee with you? Speak you, Selim, or let us hasten now, for these minutes are more precious than diamonds and their value is above the crowns of kings."

So spoke the bride, and in her voice was a music sweeter than the murmur of life and bitterer than the howl of death; lighter than the flutter of wings and deeper than the sigh of the waves. A melody whose beats hovered between hope and despair, and pleasure and pain, and joy and sorrow. In it were all the desires and longings in a woman's breast.

The youth stood and listened, the while love and honor struggled for mastery within him. The love that makes the jungle a plain and darkness light. The honor that stands before the spirit, turning it from its longing and desire. The love that God reveals to the heart and the honor with which the traditions of man flood the mind.

After an age silent and terrifying like the ages of obscurity and darkness in which nations totter between birth and decay, the youth raised his head. Honor had put his spirit victor over its desires. He turned his eyes from the frightened

watching girl and said in a quiet voice: "Return, woman, to your husband, for all is over and awakening has erased that which dreams imagined. Go, go quickly back to the merrymaking lest prying eyes see you and people say that she has betrayed her husband on her wedding night as she betrayed her lover in days gone by."

The bride trembled at these words and shook like a withered flower in the path of the wind. In agony she cried: "I shall not return to this house even though I be at my last breath of life. I have left it forever; I have left it and all in it as a captive leaves the land of his exile. You shall not cast me from you, neither shall you say that I am faithless, for the hand of love that has made one our souls is more powerful than the hand of the priest that has delivered my body to the bridegroom's will. Behold my arms around your neck: no force shall lift them. My spirit has drawn near to your spirit, and death shall not them part."

The youth tried to set himself free of her arms. Aversion and abhorrence showed on his face, and he said: "Go from me, woman, for I have already forgotten you, for I love another. People have spoken naught but the truth. Do you hear what I say? I have banished you from my mind and existence. My hatred of you turns you from my

very sight. Go then and leave me to tread my path. Return now to your husband and to him be faithful."

Overcome with grief, she said: "No, no; I do not believe that, for you love me. I have read the meaning of love in your eyes and felt its touch as I caressed your body. You love me, yea, even as I love you. Never will I leave this place except you be with me; neither will I enter this house while there is yet strength within me. Whither you go I will go; I shall follow you to the very end of the earth. Go you then before me, lift then your hand to spill my blood."

The youth raised his voice again and said: "Leave me, woman, lest I call out at the top of my voice and cause the guests at this feast to gather around us in the garden. Leave me, lest I show them your shame and make you a bitter taste in their mouths and a loathing on their tongues; lest I bring Najibé, my beloved, before you to scoff at you, rejoicing in her victory and mocking at your defeat."

As he spoke thus, he seized her arms to thrust her from him. Her expression changed and a light came into her eyes, and her bearing turned from that of pleading and pain to that of anger and harshness. She became like a lioness bereaved of

her cubs, like a sea, its depths disturbed and angered by the storm. She cried out: "Who shall delight in your love after me? What heart will drink of the kisses of your life except my heart?"

Having uttered these words, she drew from out of her clothes a dagger and buried it in his heart with the speed of lightning. He stumbled, then fell to the earth like a branch cut down by the tempest. She dropped to her knees and leaned over him while the knife in her hand yet dripped blood. He opened his eyes, over which death was drawing a shadow; his lips trembled and with his failing breath came forth these words: "Draw near to me, my beloved, draw near to me, O Laila, and do not leave me. Death is stronger than life, but love is stronger than death. Hearken, hearken to the laughing and the merrymaking of the guests at your marriage feast. Hearken, my love, to the sound of cup against cup. You have delivered me, Laila, from the harshness of that discord and the bitterness of those cups. Let me kiss the hand that has broken my bonds. Kiss my lips; the lips that did take upon them lies and conceal the secrets of my heart. Close these withering eyelids with your fingers, on which is my blood. After my spirit has taken flight into space, put the knife in my right hand and say to them that he

killed himself out of envy and despair. I have loved you, Laila, above all others, but I saw in the sacrifice of my heart and my happiness and life a thing worthier than my fleeing with you on your wedding night. Kiss me, beloved of my spirit, ere people look on my dead body. Kiss me, O Laila." And the stricken youth placed his hand over his pierced heart, his head fell to one side, and his spirit departed.

The bride raised her head and looked toward the house, crying in a terrible voice: "Come nigh, O people, and behold here the wedding and the bridegroom. Come that we may show to you the nuptial couch. Awaken, all you sleeping; arise, all you drunken, and hasten, for we shall reveal to you the secrets of love and death and life."

The cry of the bride found every corner of that house and carried its words to the ears of the rejoicing guests and filled their souls with trembling. They remained listening for a few seconds as though clarity had penetrated their intoxicated state. Then they ran hurrying out from the house and stumbled on, looking to the right and left of them until they came upon the dead body and the bride kneeling beside it. They drew back in terror, and no one of them dared to investigate the matter, for it was as though the sight of the blood

flowing from the slain man's breast and the flash of the blade in the bride's hand had locked their tongues and frozen the life in their bodies.

The bride turned and looked up at them, her face sad and awe-inspiring. She cried out to them:

"Draw near, all you cowardly ones. Fear not the specter of death, for death is a great thing and has naught of your littleness. Draw near and tremble not because of this knife, for it is a sacred instrument that will not touch your unclean bodies and your black hearts. Gaze awhile on this comely youth adorned with the adornments of marriage. He is my beloved and I have slain him because he is my beloved. He is my groom and I am his bride. We sought a couch fitting to our embrace, but found it not in this world which you have made straitened with your traditions and dark with your ignorance and corrupt with your lusting. It were better that we go to another land beyond the clouds. Come near, you who are afraid, and look; perchance you see God's face reflected in our faces and hear His sweet voice rising up from our hearts. . . . Where is that evil and envious woman who slandered me to my beloved and said that he was enamored of her and had abandoned me and clove to her love that he might forget me? When the priest raised his hand above my head

and the head of her kinsman, that wicked one be-
thought herself victor. Where is Najibé the trai-
tress, that viper from hell? Call her, let her now
come near and see how she has gathered you to-
gether to rejoice in the marriage of my loved one
and not that of the man whom she chose for me.
You understand naught of my words, for the
depths are not able to hear the song of the stars,
but you shall tell to your children of the woman
who slew her lover on her wedding night. You
shall remember me and curse me with foul lips.
But your children's children will bless me, for
truth and the spirit will abide with the morrow.
And you, O foolish man, who used wiles and
riches and treachery to make of me a wife, you are
a symbol of a despairing people seeking light in
darkness and awaiting the coming of water from
out of a rock and looking for the rose from out of
stony ground. You are a symbol of this land which
is delivered up to its own folly like a blind man
in the hands of a blind leader. You are a symbol
of the false manhood that would sever a wrist and
a neck to reach their adornments. I forgive you in
your smallness, for the spirit rejoicing in its de-
parture from the world pardons the sins of the
world."

In that instant the bride lifted up the dagger

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heavenward, and with the look of one athirst lift-
ing the cup to his lips she plunged the knife into
her breast and fell by the side of her lover like a
lily whose head is severed by the scythe. The
women cried out in fear and pain and fainted and
fell one upon another. The shouts and confusion
of the men rose from all sides as they gathered
about the two victims in fear and awe.

The departing bride looked up at them, the
while the blood flowed freely from her breast, and
said: "You shall not come near us, reproachful
ones, neither shall you separate us lest the spirit
hovering above your heads seize you by the throat
and put an end to you. Let this hungry earth con-
sume our bodies in one mouthful. Let it conceal
and protect us within its heart even as seeds are
protected from winter snows against the coming
of spring."

The bride pressed herself against her lover and
touched his cold lips with her lips, and with her
last breath came forth these broken words:

"Look, my beloved — look, bridegroom of my
soul, see in what manner the envious stand about
our bed. See their eyes upon us and hearken to the
grinding of their teeth and the crunching of their
bones. You have waited for me long, Selim. Be-
hold me here. I have broken the bonds and loosed

the chains. Let us not tarry, but hasten toward the sun, for our sojourn in the shadows has been long. All things have become blotted out and concealed and never again will I look upon anything save you, my beloved. Behold my lips, my last breath approaches. Come, Selim, let us go, for Love has lifted his wings and soars before us to the circle of light."

The bride then fell upon her lover's breast and her blood mingled with his and she laid her head upon his neck the while her eyes remained looking into his eyes.

The people stood silent awhile. Their faces were pale and their knees weak as though the majesty of death had robbed them of strength and movement.

At that moment there came forward the priest, the same who had joined the two in marriage. He waved his right hand toward the slain couple and, looking at the frightened people, spoke to them harshly, saying:

"Accursed the hands that stretch out to those two bodies defiled by the blood of shame and guilt. Accursed the eyes that would shed tears of grief over two damned ones whose souls are borne to hell by the Devil. Let the bodies of this son of Sodom and that daughter of Gomorrah remain

abandoned on this soil polluted by their blood until the dogs have divided among themselves their flesh and the winds scattered their bones. Return now to your dwellings and flee from the stench of hearts created out of sin and destroyed by corruption. Go your ways, all you who stand by these two stinking corpses. Make haste ere the tongues of hell-fire begin to lick you. He that remains here shall be rejected and cast out and shall not enter into the church wherein the faithful kneel, neither shall he have part in the prayers and offerings of Christians."

Susan then came forward, the girl whom the bride had sent as emissary to her lover. She stood before the priest and looked at him with tear-filled eyes and spoke with courage and said:

"I will remain here, blind heathen, and watch over them till the coming of dawn and dig for them a grave under these hanging boughs. If you deny me that, I will tear the earth apart with my fingers. If you bind my hands I will dig with my teeth. Get you away from this place which is filled with the smoke of frankincense, for swine turn away from the fragrance of fine perfumes, and thieves fear the master of the house and are afraid at the coming of morning. Make haste to your beds of darkness, for the heavenly melodies

that float in the air above the martyrs of love cannot enter ears closed with earth."

And the people dispersed and went away from the frowning face of the priest. But the girl remained by the still bodies like a mother watching over her children in the silence of the night. When the people had gone from that place, she gave herself to weeping and lament.

KHALIL THE HERETIC

I

Among the dwellers of that village hidden away in the northern Lebanon the Shaikh Abbas was as a prince among his subjects. And his house, standing in the midst of their poor dwellings, was like a giant standing among dwarfs. His way of life was as far removed from theirs as is sufficiency from dearth, and his habits differed from their habits as strength and weakness differ.

Did the Shaikh Abbas utter a word among those peasants, they bowed their heads in affirmation as though a higher intelligence had put him its agent and made him its spokesman. Was he angry, then they trembled in terror and scattered before him like autumn leaves before the winds. If he slapped one of them on the cheek, that one became tongue-tied as though the blow had descended from heaven. It was a sacrilege to dare raise the eyes to see the one who had granted it. If he smiled at another, the multitude declared him

a fortunate fellow indeed to merit thus the Shaikh's pleasure.

The submission of these unfortunates to the Shaikh Abbas and their fear of his harshness did not come only from his strength and their weakness, but it came from their poverty and reliance upon him. The fields they tilled and the hovels in which they dwelt belonged to him; they were a heritage from his father and grandfather as the people's heritage from their forefathers was poverty and wretchedness. They farmed the land and sowed and reaped under his ever watchful eye, but their toil brought no reward save a portion of the yield so small as would hardly deliver them from the pangs of hunger. Most of them were in need of bread before the long winter was out and so, one by one, each would go to the Shaikh and stand before him and entreat him with weeping for a loan of a dinar piece or a measure of wheat. Shaikh Abbas answered their needs gladly, for he knew that for each dinar he would receive in return two dinars and for each measure of wheat two measures when the days of the threshing came. And so lived those unfortunate people, burdened with debt to Shaikh Abbas and shackled by their reliance on him, fearing his anger and seeking his pleasure.

II

Winter came with its snows and storms, and the fields and valleys were empty save for the croaking ravens and the naked trees. The villagers took to their dwellings after they had filled the bins of the Shaikh Abbas with the yield and his vessels with produce of the vineyards. They were without work and passed their time by the hearth reciting tales of bygone ages and retailing to one another stories of the days and nights.

December drew to a close. The old year sighed and breathed its last minutes into the gray skies; then came night, wherein the new year was a child crowned by destiny and placed on the throne of existence.

The feeble light waned and darkness descended on the valleys and torrents. Snow began to fall heavily and the wind whistled and raced down from the mountain heights into the abyss, carrying with it the snow to store up in the valley. The trees trembled in terror and the earth shook before it. The wind gathered together the snowfall of that day and the snow that fell during the night until the fields and knolls and passes were like a white page on which death wrote obscure lines and then erased them. The mist separated the vil-

lages scattered over the edge of the valley, and the feeble lights that glimmered in the windows of the houses and poor huts were blotted out. Terror took hold of the peasants, the beasts crouched by their fodder, and the dogs hid themselves in corners. No thing remained save the wind, which spoke and shouted into the grottos and caves. Now its terrible voice rose from out of the depths of the valley; now it swooped down from the mountain heights. It was as though Nature waxed wrathful at the death of the old year and was avenging herself on the hidden life in those huts and fighting it with cold and bleakness.

On that terrible night beneath wild skies a youth of twenty and two years made his way along the road that rose gradually from the monastery of Kizhaya ¹ to the village of the Shaikh Abbas. The cold had dried up his very bones, and hunger and fear had sucked away his strength. Snow covered his black cloak as though wishing to make for him a shroud ere killing him. He took a step forward, but the wind pushed him back as if it objected to seeing him in the houses of the living.

¹ This is the richest and most famous of the monasteries in Lebanon. Its income from its produce is reckoned in thousands of dinars and it houses scores of monks well known in the two villages. — Author's note.

The rugged path seized hold of his feet and he fell. He called out for help, then was silenced by the cold. He rose to his feet and stood still, silent and shivering. It was as though, standing amidst the battling elements, he was faint hope standing between violent despair and deep sorrow. Or like a bird with broken wings that falls into the river and is carried along with current to the deep sea.

The youth resumed his way with death at his heels until in the end his strength and will failed him; the blood froze in his veins and he fell down in the snow. With the remnant of life in his body he cried out in a terrible voice — the voice of one afraid who sees the specter of death face to face. The voice of one struggling and in despair whom the darkness is destroying, whom the tempest seizes that it may hurl him into the abyss. The voice of the love of life in the formless void.

III

To the north of that village was a small hut standing alone among the fields. In it lived a woman whose name was Rahel and her daughter Maryam, a girl of under eighteen years. This woman was the widow of Sam'an Al-Rami, who had been found murdered in the wilderness five years before. His murderer no one knew.

Rahel, like all poor widows of her kind, lived by her labor and toil, ever fearful of death and ruin. During the days of the harvest she went out into the field and gleaned the ears of corn after the reapers. In the autumn she gathered rejected scraps of fruit in the orchards and in winter busied herself with the spinning of wool and the sewing of garments for a few coins or a measure of maize. She did all with care and patience and skill. Her daughter Maryam was a comely girl, quiet and placid, who shared with her mother the toil and housework.

On that wild night already described, Rahel and her daughter were sitting by a fire whose heat was lost in the cold and whose embers were gray. Above their heads hung a lamp, which sent forth its feeble yellow rays into the gloom like a prayer that sends forth consolation into the hearts of the bereaved.

Midnight came and the two women still sat listening to the howling of the wind without. From time to time the girl rose, opened the little window and gazed into the darkness, and then returned to her seat shaken and frightened by the fury of the elements.

At that moment the girl suddenly stirred as though awakened from a deep sleep. She looked

at her mother in fear and said quickly: "Did you hear it, Mother? Did you hear a voice calling out?"

The mother lifted up her head and listened. "No," she replied, "I hear nothing but the howling of the wind."

"I heard something," the girl rejoined. "I heard a voice deeper than the noise of the wind and bitterer than the cry of the storm."

As she gave mouth to these words she stood up and opened the window. She listened for a minute and then said: "Mother, I heard the cry again."

Her mother hurried over to the window.

"I also heard something. Come, let us open the door and look. Close the window before the wind puts out the lamp."

While speaking, she wrapped a long cloak around her. She opened the door and went out with firm steps. Maryam stood by the door, the wind playing through her hair.

Rahel walked a few steps, digging up the snow with her feet as she went. She stopped and called out: "Who is there? Who cries out for help?" But no voice answered her. She repeated her cry two and three times. Hearing nothing but the shrieking of the storm, she went forward with courage, peering in every direction and covering her face

against the gusts of harsh wind. She had not gone an arrow's distance before she saw footprints in the snow, now nearly obliterated by the wind. She followed them quickly, watching and fearful, until she beheld before her a body prostrate on the ground like a black patch on a fleecy white garment. She knelt down, brushed the snow from it, and cradled the head in her lap. She placed her hand on the youth's breast, and as she felt the feeble beatings of his heart she cried out in the direction of the hut: "Come you, Maryam, and help me, for I have found him."

Maryam came out of the hut. She followed her mother's footprints, trembling and shivering with fear and cold. When she reached that spot and saw the youth laid out on the snow and without movement, she moaned and cried out in pain at what she beheld. The mother put her hands beneath his armpits and said to the daughter: "Have no fear, for he lives. Take hold of the ends of his garments and let us carry him to the house."

The two women bore him away the while the wind in its violence pushed and buffeted them and the thick snow on the ground caught at their feet. When they reached the hut, they laid him down by the fire. The mother began to rub his frozen limbs and the daughter to dry his wet hair

and cold hands with her skirt. Many minutes had not passed before life returned to him. He stirred a little, his eyelids quivered, and he drew a deep sigh, which planted hope in the breasts of the two compassionate women. Said Maryam as she loosed the thongs of his broken shoes and stripped him of his wet cloak: "Look, Mother, look at his clothes; they look like a monk's habit." Rahel, who had made up the fire with dried twigs, looked at her and said in wonderment: "The monks do not leave the monastery on a night such as this night. What, then, has made this poor youth place his life in hazard?"

"But he is beardless, Mother, and monks grow thick beards," remarked the girl wonderingly. Her mother looked down at him and in her eyes was a mother's compassion. She sighed and said: "Dry his feet well, daughter, monk or criminal be he."

Then Rahel opened a wooden chest and drew from it a small wine jar and poured a quantity of the liquid into a vessel.

"Lift up his head, Maryam, and let him swallow the wine so that it may refresh him and bring back warmth to his body."

Rahel put the edge of the cup to the boy's lips and let him swallow a drop of the wine. He

opened his big eyes and looked on his deliverers for the first time, a soft sad look, a look that sprang forth with tears of gratitude; the look of one who feels the caress of life after the grasp of death. The look of hope after despair. Then he turned his head and from between trembling lips came the words: "May God bless you both."

Rahel put her hand on his shoulder and said: "Do not burden yourself with speech, my brother; rather remain in silence until strength returns to you." And Maryam said: "Recline on this cushion and draw near the fire."

The youth leaned against the cushion with a sigh and Rahel filled the cup with wine a second time and to her daughter said: "Put his cloak by the fire to dry." Maryam did as she was bade and then sat back and looked at him with tenderness and compassion as if she would by her very look instill warmth and strength into his wasted body.

Rahel set before him two loaves of bread and a bowl of honey with a platter of dried fruit. She sat down by him and fed him out of her hand morsel by morsel, as a mother feeds her child, until he was satisfied. He felt stronger, so he sat up on the rug, and the ruddy glow from the fire lighted up his pale drawn features and gave to his

sad eyes a brilliance. Then he shook his head gently and said: "Mercy and cruelty forever wage war in the hearts of men like the battle of the elements in this black night. But mercy shall vanquish cruelty, for mercy is a divine thing, while the terror of this night will pass with the coming of morning." He fell silent for a while, then continued in a low voice that was hardly heard: "Human hands they were that forced me into degradation and human hands they were that delivered me. How strong is man's cruelty, yet how abundant is his pity!" And Rahel said in a voice in which were a mother's sweet tenderness and serenity: "How then, my brother, did you dare to leave the monastery on a night such as even the wolves fear and from which they hide in caves; from which the eagles in their awe conceal themselves among the rocks?"

The youth closed his eyes as though with the lids he would return his tears to the depths of his heart. He answered: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." And Rahel said: "So spoke Jesus the Nazarene of Himself when one of the scribes asked that he might follow Him whither He did go." And the youth

added: "And so say all who would follow the spirit and the truth in this age of lying and corruption and deceit."

Rahel fell silent, thinking on the meaning of his words, and then said, hesitant: "But in the monastery are many spacious rooms and chests of gold and silver and vaults filled with wheat and wine, and enclosures housing fatted calves and sheep. How come you, then, to leave all these things and go out into the night?"

"I left all these things because I was driven by force from the monastery," he replied, sighing.

Said Rahel: "A monk in a monastery is like a soldier on the field of battle. His commander rebukes him and he bears in silence; he gives him an order and the soldier obeys immediately. I have heard tell that a man cannot become a monk except that he banish from him all resolve and desire and thought and all that has to do with self. But a good master does not seek of his servants things beyond their power. How then does the head of Deir Kizhaya demand of you that you deliver up your life to the tempest and snows?" And the youth answered: "A man cannot become a monk in the eyes of the Superior unless he be as an instrument blind and dumb and bereft of strength and feeling. I left the monastery because

I was not a blind and dumb being, but a man hearing and seeing."

Rahel and Maryam looked at him as though they had just seen in his face a secret that he would conceal. After a little while the mother spoke in a wondering voice and asked: "Does a man who hears and sees go forth into a night that blinds the eyes and deafens the ears?"

The youth, with a sigh, let his head droop on his breast and said in a deep voice: "I was driven out from the monastery."

"Driven out?" exclaimed Rahel in astonishment. Maryam repeated the words softly.

The youth raised his head, already repenting of his having told the truth to the two women. For he feared that their compassion for him would turn into contumely and scorn. But when he looked up he saw in their eyes only the light of tenderness and a seeking to understand. Then he spoke, and in a choking voice, said: "Yes, I was driven from the monastery because I could not dig my grave with my hands; because my heart was sick within me of the existence of lying and deceit. Because my spirit refused to live in comfort on the poor and the wretched. And my soul turned away from joys bought with the chattels of a people sunk in ignorance. I was driven forth be-

cause my body no longer found rest in the spacious rooms built by those who dwelt in hovels. Because my stomach no more accepted bread kneaded with the tears of the widow and orphan. Because my tongue ceased to move in prayer, prayer that the Superior sold for the money of the simple and the faithful. I was cast forth like a leper because I recited to the monks and priests those passages from the Book that had put them as monks and priests."

He fell silent again, the while Rahel and Maryam looked at him wondering at his words. They gazed on the sad beauty of his face and looked at each other as though asking silently what strange thing had led him to them. The mother was filled with a desire to know. She looked toward him with kindness and asked: "Where are your father and mother? Are they living?" "No," returned the youth in a broken voice; "I have neither father nor mother nor home."

Rahel drew a deep sigh and Maryam turned her face to the wall to hide the hot tears that pity wrung from her eyes. He looked at the two women the look of the conquered to their liberator, and his spirit was refreshed by their kindness as a

flower among the rocks is refreshed by the morning dew.

He raised his head and continued: "My father and mother died before I was seven years, so the priest in the village where I was born took me to the Deir Kizhaya. The monks were pleased with me, and they made me a cowherd. When I became fifteen years of age they clothed me in these ugly black garments and, making me stand before the altar, said to me: 'Swear before God and His saints that you now take the vow of poverty, obedience, and continence.' I repeated these words even before I understood their burden or knew the meaning of poverty, obedience, and continence; before I could see the narrow way on which they set me. My name was Khalil, but from that day the monks called me Brother Mubarak; ¹ but never did they treat me as a brother. While they enjoyed rich food and meats they gave me to eat of dry bread and beans. They drank good wines but made me to drink of water mixed with tears. They laid them down on soft beds but me they put to sleep on a stone bench in a cold dark room with the swine. 'When I am a monk,' I would say to myself, 'I will also join them in their merrymaking and have

¹ An Arabic word meaning "blessed."

title to their pleasures. No more will my stomach be tormented by the abundance of wines or my heart rent by the goodly smell of food; neither will my spirit tremble at the Superior's voice.' But in vain did I hope and dream, for I remained a cowherd and ceased not carrying heavy stones on my back and digging the earth with my arms. So I did in exchange for a piece of crust and a roof, for I knew not that there were places other than the monastery wherein I might live. The monks taught me to have no belief except in their way of life. They poisoned my soul with submission and despair until I reckoned the world an ocean of sorrow and misfortune and the monastery a port of salvation."

Khalil sat up and his haggard features expanded and he looked as though he saw something beautiful standing before him in that hut. Rahel and Maryam watched him in silence. After a little while he took up his tale. "Heaven, whose will it was to take away my father and banish me as an orphan to the monastery, did not will that I should pass my days as a blind man on perilous paths; neither did it will that I should remain an abject slave to the end of my life. So my eyes and ears were opened and I saw the light shining and I heard truth speaking." Whereupon Rahel



shook her head, saying: "Is there, then, light other than the light of the sun given to all men? Is it in the power of men to know the truth?" Answered Khalil: "True light is that which radiates from within a man. It reveals the secrets of the soul to the soul and lets it rejoice in life, singing in the name of the Spirit. Truth is like the stars, which cannot be seen except beyond the darkness of night. Truth is like all beautiful things in existence: it does not reveal its beauties save to those who have felt the weight of falsehood. Truth is a hidden feeling which teaches us to rejoice in our days and wish to all mankind that rejoicing." Then said Rahel: "Many are they that live according to this feeling in their hearts, and many are those who believe it to be the law that God has given to mankind. But they rejoice not in their days; rather do they remain in misery until death."

Khalil answered her and said: "Without worth are the teachings and beliefs that make man wretched in his existence. And false are the feelings that lead him only to sorrow and despair. For it is a duty that man has to be happy in the world and know the roads to happiness and preach in its name wheresoever he be. Who sees not the kingdom of heaven in this world will not see it in the

hereafter. We come not to this world as outcasts, but as ignorant children, that we may learn from life's beauties and secrets the worship of the everlasting and universal spirit and the search after the hidden things of the soul. This is the truth as I knew it when I read the teachings of Jesus the Nazarene, and this the light that emanated from within me and showed me the monastery and all in it as a black pit from whose depths rose frightening phantoms and images to destroy me. This is the hidden secret the wild places in their beauty showed to me as I sat hungry and weeping in the shade of the trees. And on the day when my spirit became drunk of the divine wine I grew bold and stood before the monks as they sat in the monastery garden like cows chewing the cud. I took upon me to reveal my thoughts and recite to them passages from the Book to show them their backsliding and sinfulness. I said: 'Why pass we our days in this separateness in the enjoyment of the charity of the poor, eating of bread kneaded with their sweat and tears, rejoicing in the bounty of land stolen from them? Why do we live in sloth and idleness far away from those in need of knowledge, denying the land our spiritual and bodily strength? Jesus of Nazareth sent you as sheep among wolves, but what teaching has made you as wolves

among sheep? Why do you put yourselves apart from men since God has created you men? If you are the most virtuous of those who walk in life's procession, then go you and teach them. How do you pledge yourselves to poverty and yet live as princes, and take the vow of obedience yet rebel against the gospel, and swear chastity, yet fill your hearts with lust? You make to scourge your bodies, but you achieve naught save the destruction of your souls. You make pretense that you are above all worldly things, but of all people you are the most covetous. You hold yourselves up as ascetic and celibate, but you are as cattle, whose care is only with the best of the pasture. Come then, let us give back to the needy dwellers of this village the monastery's spacious lands and return to their pockets the wealth we have taken. Let us disperse like birds over the land and serve this enfeebled people who is the source of our power and put to rights the country on whose bounty we live. Let us teach his despairing nation to smile in the sunlight and rejoice in heaven's gifts and life's freedom and glory. For the toiling of the people is finer and nobler than the ease to which we are given in this place. And pity in the heart of a neighbor is a finer thing than virtue concealed in a corner of the monastery. A word of comfort in

the ears of the feeble and the criminal and the harlot is worthier than prayers recited in the temple.' ”

Khalil paused to regain his breath; then he raised his eyes to Rahel and Maryam and resumed his words in a low voice:

“As I was speaking in this wise before the monks, astonishment and surprise spread over their faces as though they were loath to believe that a youth of my kind stood boldly addressing them in such words. When I had finished, one of them approached me and, baring his teeth, said: ‘Do you thus dare, miserable wretch, to stand before us and speak these words?’ And another laughed scornfully and said: ‘Have you learned this wisdom from the cows and pigs with which you have consorted all your life?’ Still another came forward and threatened me, saying: ‘You will surely see what is to befall you, heretic.’ Then they all rose and withdrew from me like the healthy shunning the leper. Some of them went before the Superior and complained against me, and he had me brought before him at sunset. After rebuking me severely in the presence of the rejoicing monks, he ordered me to be flogged. Having had me flogged with rope ends he pronounced a month’s imprisonment on me. Where-

upon, amidst much laughing and shouting, the monks led me to a dank and gloomy cell. And so I passed one month in that dungeon; no light did I see, neither was I conscious of anything save the creeping and crawling of insects. I felt no touch except that of the earthen floor, neither did I know the night’s ending from the day’s beginning. I heard naught but the footsteps of him who came and placed before me a morsel of dry bread and a cup of water and vinegar. When I came out from the prison and the monks beheld my wasted body and yellow face, they imagined that my spirit’s yearning had died within me and that hunger and thirst and torture had destroyed the feeling that God had awakened in my heart. Night followed day and in my solitude I fell to thinking in what manner could those monks be brought to see the light and hearken to life’s song. But in vain was my thinking, for the thick veil that the long ages had woven across their eyes was not to be torn apart by a few days. And the clay with which ignorance had stopped their ears could not be moved by the soft touch of fingers.”

After a silence full with sighing Maryam turned to her mother as though seeking leave to speak and, looking sadly at Khalil, said: “Did you speak these words a second time before the

monks so that they drove you out into this night of terror that should teach men to be merciful even unto their enemies?"

The youth answered: "During the evening, as the tempest increased in violence and the elements joined in battle, I sat apart from the monks. They were then gathered around the fire warming themselves and telling stories and humorous tales. I opened the Gospel, contemplating those words wherein the spirit finds comfort, forgetful of the wrath of nature and the anger of the elements. When the monks saw that I sat alone apart from them, they made it an occasion to jest and mock at me. Some of them came over to me laughing and winking their eyes and making scornful gestures. I paid them no heed but closed the Book and remained gazing out of the window. This action stirred them to anger and they looked at me with hostility because my silence had put them in ill humor. Then one of them said: 'What are you reading, mighty reformer?' I did not look at the speaker, but I opened again the Gospel and read in a loud voice this passage: 'And he said unto the multitude that had come to his baptism; O children of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits for repentance; and think not to say within

yourselves: We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is raised unto the roots of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. And the multitude asked of him saying: What then shall we do? And he answered them saying: He that hath two garments let him give to him that hath none; and let him that hath food give likewise.' When I read these words spoken by John the Baptist, the monks withdrew into silence for a while as if a hidden hand had laid hold of their spirits. But soon they returned to their laughing and chattering and one among them said: 'We have oft-times heard these words and we are in no need of cowherds to recite them.' Whereupon I said: 'Did you but read and understand these words, then in truth the people of these snow covered villages were not now shivering from cold and crying in hunger the while you enjoy their bounty and drink the wine of their vineyards and eat the flesh of their cattle.' Hardly had the words left my lips ere a monk struck me across the face as if I were speaking naught but the words of an idiot. Another kicked me, while yet a third one snatched the Book from my hand. One called for the Su-

perior and he came in haste. When they apprised him of what had taken place, he rose to his full height, his brows contracted, and trembling with rage, he shouted: 'Seize hold of this rebellious sinner; drag him out from the monastery and leave the wrathful elements to teach him obedience. Cast him forth into the cold and darkness and let nature do with him as God wills her. Then cleanse your hands of the poison of heresy that is on his garments. And if he return beseeching you and feigning repentance, open not the door to him, for the viper imprisoned in a cage does not become a dove, neither does the thicket planted in a vineyard bring forth fruit.' Thereupon the monks seized me and dragged me outside the monastery. They went back laughing. Before they closed the doors upon me I heard one of them say with scorn: 'Yesterday were you king over the cows and pigs; and today have we dethroned you, O reforming one, for you have managed your affairs ill. Go you now and be king over the ravening wolves and carrion birds and teach them how to live in their caves and lairs!'

He ceased from speaking and sighed deeply. He turned his face to the fire and watched the flickering flames. When he spoke again, his voice

had in it a wounding sweetness. "And so was I driven from the monastery. So did the monks deliver me into the hands of death. I took to the road, which was already hidden by mist. The violent wind tore at my clothes, and the snow piled up about my knees. Soon my strength gave out and I fell down crying out for help the cry of one in despair who feels that no one will hear him save terrifying death and the dark valleys. But from beyond the winds and the snows and the darkness and the clouds, from beyond the ether and the stars a Power, all-knowing and all-merciful, heard my cry. It was not its will that I should die ere I had learned what remained of life's secrets, and thus did it send you both to bring me back from the depths of the abyss and annihilation."

The two women continued to look at him with wonder and affection as though they within their hearts understood the hidden things in his heart and were at one with it in its knowing and feeling. Then Rahel stretched forth her hand, unprompted by her will, and touched his hand softly and, with tears glistening in her eyes, said to him: "Whom Heaven has chosen to defend right no oppression can destroy nor snows and tempests

kill." And Maryam added, murmuring: "The snow and the storm destroy the flower, but its seed they cannot kill."

The drawn face of Khalil was illumined by these words of comfort as the horizon is lighted by the first rays of dawn. Said he: "If you reckon me not a rebel and a heretic as do those monks, then the persecution I have borne in the monastery is naught but a symbol of the harshness a people suffers ere attaining to knowledge. This night, which came near to destroying me, is as the revolt that precedes freedom and equality. For out of the sensitive heart of a woman comes forth the happiness of mankind, and in the sentiments of her noble spirit are born the sentiments of their spirits."

Having thus spoken, he laid his head on the pillow. The women were loath to continue the conversation, for they saw in his eyes that sleep, brought on by warmth and rest after his perilous wanderings, was already overtaking him. And soon Khalil closed his eyes and slept the sleep of a child safe in its mother's arms. Rahel rose quietly and Maryam followed her. They sat on their bed looking at him as though in his lean face was a power that inclined their spirits and drew them near. Then the mother whispered, like one

talking to himself, and said: "In his closed eyes is a strange force that speaks with silence, awakening the longings of the spirit." And the daughter added: "His hands, Mother, are like the hands of Jesus in the picture in the church." And the mother murmured: "In his sad face is seen a woman's tenderness and a man's strength."

After a while the two women were borne on the wings of sleep away to the land of dreams. The fire on the hearth grew cold and became ashes, and the oil in the lamp dried up and the light grew weaker and faint till it was no more. The howling storm without abated nothing of its anger, and the black skies sent forth their snow, which the wind in its violence took and scattered in all directions.

IV

Two weeks had passed since that night. The cloud-filled sky was now tranquil, now turbulent, veiling the valleys in mist and burying the hills beneath snow. Three times did Khalil decide upon following his way to the coast, and each time did Rahel with gentleness prevent him, saying: "Put not your life a second time at the mercy of the blind elements, but remain here with us. For the bread that satisfies two will suffice for a

third, and the fire on this hearth will remain alight after your going as it was before your coming. We are poor, my brother, but we exist under the sun as do all, for God gives to us our daily bread."

Maryam besought him with tender glances and gentle murmurs to wait upon his going, for since his coming to them between life and death she felt the existence of a divine force within him that sent life and light into her being, awakening in the holy of holies of her spirit feelings sweet and unwonted. For the first time in her life she felt an awareness of that strange sense which makes the pure heart of a maiden as a white rose drinking of dew drops and exhaling a delicate fragrance. There is no emotion in a human creature purer or sweeter than the hidden feeling that awakens to life unawares in the heart of a maiden to fill the emptinesses of her breast with enchanting melodies and make her days like the poet's dream and her nights like the prophet's vision. There is no mystery among nature's mysteries stronger or more beautiful than the desire that turns the stillness of the virgin's spirit into a continual awakening, obliterating with its force the memory of days gone by and breathing life, with its sweetness, into the hopes of days to come.

The Lebanese woman is distinguished from the woman of other nations in the strength of her affections and simplicity of feeling. For her simple upbringing and education, which is a hindrance to the development of her mind and an obstacle in the way of her advancement, leads her to explore the things of her spirit and her heart in quest of their mysteries. The Lebanese girl is as a spring issuing from the heart of the earth in low ground and, finding no path through which to go down as a river to the sea, becomes a placid lake reflecting on its surface the light of the moon and stars.

Khalil felt the waves of Maryam's being lapping the shores of his being, and he knew that the sacred flame enveloping his heart had touched her heart. And he rejoiced, for the first time — the rejoicing of a lost child who finds its mother. Yet he chided his spirit for its haste and its passion, thinking therefrom that this spiritual understanding would fade like the mist when the days should separate him from that village. He said within himself: "What things are these mysterious forces that make playthings of us in our ignorance? What are these laws that lead us now by rough paths and now stand us up before the sun rejoicing; now raising us to the summit of a mountain when we are glad and exult, now casting us down

to the depths of the valley so that we cry out in our agony? What thing is this life that embraces us as a friend today and shuns us as a foe on the morrow? Was I not but yesterday hated and despised among the monks of the monastery? Did I not accept mocking and torment for the sake of that truth which Heaven awoke in my heart? And did I not tell the monks that happiness is the will of God in man? Then what is this fear, and why close I my eyes and turn my head away from the light that shines in the eyes of this maiden? I am an outcast and she is poor, but does man live by bread alone? Is not life a debt and a fulfillment, and stand we not between want and plenty as stands the tree between winter and summer? And what would Rahel say did she know that the spirit of an outcast youth and the spirit of her daughter had attained understanding in silence and drawn near to the circle of light on high? And that the youth she had delivered from out of the jaws of death wished to take her daughter to wife? How would speak the simple people of the village when they learned that a boy reared in a monastery and driven away from it was come to their village to live side by side with a comely woman? Would they close not their ears if I said to them that the one who had left the monastery

to live in their midst was like a bird leaving the darkness of its cage for light and liberty? And what, then, should the Shaikh Abbas, dwelling among the poor peasants as a prince among slaves, hear my story? What will the village priest do when he hears of those things which were the cause of my expulsion from the monastery?"

And as Khalil sat by the hearth in communion with his self, looking into the tongues of flame so kin to his own feelings, now and then Maryam stole glances at him, reading in his features dreams, listening to the echoes of thoughts leaving his breast, feeling in her awareness the presence of his innermost secrets.

One evening when Khalil was standing by the window that overlooked the valley, where the trees and rocks were still covered with snow like corpses in burial shrouds, Maryam appeared and stood by his side and looked through the window at the sky. He turned to her, and when his eyes met her eyes he sighed deeply and averted his face and closed his eyes as though his spirit had taken leave of him to soar upwards into the infinite in search of a word to utter. After a little while Maryam took courage and said: "Where are you going when the snow is melted and the roads are free?" He opened his big eyes and looked to-

ward the distant horizon before replying. "I shall follow the road to where I know not." And the spirit of Maryam trembled within her and she said: "Why do you not dwell in this village and remain near to us? Is not life here better than a far-off exile?"

Her softly spoken words and her melodious voice caused a tumult to rise within him. He answered: "The people of the village will not accept as their neighbor an outcast from the monastery. Neither will they permit him to breathe the air that sustains them, for they hold that an enemy of the monks is a blasphemer before God and His saints."

Maryam gave a little moan and was silent, for the cutting truth had silenced her. Khalil leaned his head on his hand and continued: "The people of these villages, Maryam, have learned from the monks and priests to hate those who think for themselves. They are taught to remain apart from all those who pass their lives in seeking and not following. If I remained in this village and said to the people: 'Come, brethren, and let us worship God according to the dictates of our spirits and not as the priests will it, for God wants not the adoration of the ignorant in their imitation of others,' they would say that this one is a heretic

who rebels against the authority placed by God in the hands of His priests. And if I said to them: 'Hearken, my brethren, to the voice of your hearts, and do the will of the spirit deep within you,' they would say that this one is evil and wishes us to be unfaithful to whom God has put between heaven and earth to intercede."

He looked into the eyes of Maryam, and when he again spoke, there was in his voice the dulcet note of silver strings: "Yet in the village, Maryam, is an unearthly force possessing me and laying hold on my soul; a higher power making me forgetful of my persecution by the monks and causing me to love their harshness. In this village I met death face to face, and in it the spirit of God embraced my spirit. In this village is a flower growing among thorns, for whose beauty my soul longs and whose fragrance fills my heart. Shall I then leave this flower to go forth proclaiming those principles for which I was cast out from the monastery, or shall I remain by the side of this flower to dig for my thoughts and dreams a grave among the thorns that surround it?"

When Maryam heard this, her body trembled like the trembling of a lily before the breeze of daybreak. The light in her heart overflowed from her eyes, and shyness fought with her tongue for

mastery, and she said: "We are both of us between the hands of a hidden force, a just and merciful force; let it do with us as it will."

V

From distant times down to our own days the privileged of society have ever allied themselves with the clergy and leaders of religion against the body of society. It will not be cured save by the banishment of ignorance from the world when the mind of every man shall become a sovereign and the heart of every woman a priestess.

The son of the privileged builds his mansion with the bodies of the weak and the underprivileged, and the priest sets up his sanctuary on the graves of the faithful and the humble. The ruler lays hold of the arms of the wretched peasant, and the priest stretches forth his hand to his pocket. The governor looks at these children of the fields with a frown, and the priest moves among them smiling. Between the tiger's frown and the wolf's smile the flock perishes. The governor embodies law, and the priest religion, and betwixt the twain bodies are destroyed and spirits die.

Now in Lebanon, that mountain rich in sunlight but poor in the light of knowledge, the nobleman and the clergyman have united against

the weak and indigent peasant who tills the soil and gets from it what he can to protect his body against the sword of the one and the curses of the other. The child of privilege stands by his palace in Lebanon calling out to his fellow countrymen: "The Sultan has put me as guardian over your bodies."¹ And the priest stands before the pulpit shouting: "And God has appointed me keeper of your souls." But the people of Lebanon stay silent, for hearts deep in earth do not break and the dead do not weep.

The Shaikh Abbas, who was governor prince and sovereign in that village, had a great love for the monks in the monastery. He followed faithfully their teachings and traditions, for they shared with him the killing of knowledge and the keeping alive of obedience among the laborers in his fields and vineyards. And on that very evening, the while Khalil and Maryam stood before the throne of love with Rahel watching them, seeking to know the secret within them, Father Ilyas, the village priest, betook himself to the Shaikh Abbas and related to him how the pious monks had driven out from their midst a rebellious and wicked youth. He told him, moreover,

¹ This was written in the days when Syria and Lebanon were under Ottoman Turkish domination. — Translator.

that this heretic and blasphemer was come to the village these two weeks past and was living in the house of Rahel, widow of Sam'an Al-Rami. Father Ilyas was not content with retailing to the Shaikh these simple tidings but must needs add: "The Devil who is driven out from the monastery does not become an angel in the village; and the sod that the keeper of the field cuts and throws on the flames does not yield fruit in the fire. If we would that this village remain whole and clean from the germs of a foul disease, then let us cast out this youth from our dwellings and fields as the good monks did drive him forth from the monastery."

"And what has told you that this youth will be as a foul disease in the village?" asked the Shaikh Abbas. "Were it not better to make him a cowherd or keeper of the vineyards? We are in sore need of laborers. The road did not bring us a strong-armed youth for naught."

The priest smiled a subtle smile, caressed his thick beard with his fingers, and said: "Were this young man a good worker, the monks had not expelled him, for the monastery's lands are spacious and its herds without number. A muleteer from the monastery who sojourned the night with me recounted to me how this youth had uttered blas-

phemous passages and spoke words of rebellion in the hearing of the monks — words that revealed the evil in him. In his boldness he said: 'Give back to the poor of this village the fields of the monastery and its vineyards and properties and disperse their ownership over all parts, for that is better than prayer and worship.' And the muleteer told likewise that chastisement and flogging and the darkness of the prison cell availed naught to restore reason to this heretic: rather was the Devil within him nourished as are flies multiplying around a dunghill."

At these words the Shaikh Abbas stood upright, then retreated a little in the manner of a panther about to spring. For a second he was silent, grinding his teeth and trembling in his anger. He walked to the door of the hall and called for his servants. Three came and stood before him awaiting his commands. He addressed them thus: "In the house of Rahel the widow is a criminal youth clad in a monk's habit. Go you now and bring him before me bound. If the woman opposes you, seize her likewise and drag her by the hair across the snow, for he that assists evildoers is himself evil."

The servants inclined their heads and hurried out to do their master's bidding. The priest and the Shaikh Abbas remained in conversation, dis-

cussing the manner in which they would deal with the youth and the widow Rahel.

VI

The day waned and night came on, sending forth its phantoms among the snow-shrouded huts. The stars shone in the cold dark sky like symbols of immortal hope beyond the agonies of separation and death. The peasants closed tight doors and windows and lighted the lamps and sat by their fires for warmth, unmindful of the shades of night around their dwellings.

It was in that very hour, as Rahel and Maryam and Khalil were seated at the wooden table at their evening meal, that a knock came at the door and the three servants of the Shaikh Abbas entered. Rahel stared at them in terror and Maryam shouted out in fright. But Khalil stayed silent and unmoved. It was as though his great spirit had been forewarned and was apprised of the men's coming even before their coming. Then one of the men advanced and laid his hand roughly on Khalil's shoulder, saying in a harsh voice: "Are you not the youth whom they drove from the monastery?" Khalil replied, speaking slowly: "I am he. What do you want of me?" Said the man: "We are to take you bound to the house of the Shaikh

Abbas. If you resist, then we will drag you through the snow like a lamb to the slaughter."

Rahel stood the while, her face white and her brow wrinkled. Then she said in a trembling voice: "What crime brings him before the Shaikh Abbas, and why do you drag him away bound?" and Maryam added: "He is one and you are three. It is a coward's doing so to abase and punish him." She spoke with hope, beseeching them. But the servant was angry and in his rage shouted: "Do you find in this village, then, a woman who would rebel against the will of the Shaikh Abbas?" Having delivered himself of these words, he took from around his waist a stout rope and fell to binding Khalil's arms. The boy said naught and his demeanor did not change; his head was raised high like a tower in the face of a storm. On his lips was a sad smile. Then he spoke: "I have only pity for you, brothers, for you are the instruments of a blind force in the hands of a person sighted yet feeble who oppresses you and with your strength grinds the weak. You are the bondsmen of ignorance, and ignorance is blacker than the Negro's skin and more submissive to cruelty and shame. Yesterday I was as you are this day; on the morrow will you be as I am now. But today there stretches between you and me a vast dark gulf

sucking up my cry and concealing my truth from you. You hear not, neither do you see. Here am I. Bind my arms and do what you will."

When the men heard these words, their eyes stared and their bodies shook. They were bereft of strength by the youth the space of a minute, as though the sweetness in his voice prevented them from movement and brought to awakening nobler desires slumbering in their depths. But they returned to their senses as though the Shaikh's voice still echoed in their ears, reminding them of the task for which he had sent them. They bound the boy's arms and led him out in silence, and they felt within their innermost selves the stirring of an agony. Rahel and Maryam followed in their steps like the daughters of Jerusalem when they followed Jesus to Mount Calvary. So did the two women walk in the wake of Khalil to the house of the Shaikh Abbas.

VII

In the small villages news, be it of great import or little, travels among the peasants with the quickness of thought, for their remoteness from the general activities of society gives them opportunity to investigate in detail all that goes on in their limited environment. During the winter

days when the fields and orchards are covered with their blankets of snow and when all life huddles fearfully round the fires for warmth, the villagers are eager for news of events so that they may fill their empty days with discussion and pass the cold nights with the how and wherefore of things and people.

And so the serving men of the Shaikh Abbas had hardly laid hands on Khalil that night before the news spread like a contagious disease among the inhabitants of that village. The desire to satisfy their curiosity seized hold of them, and they came tumbling out of their huts in all directions like a company of troops deploying over a field. No sooner had the pinioned youth reached the house of the Shaikh than the spacious hall was filled with a multitude of men and women, young and old. They stretched their necks in their anxiety to have one glimpse of the blasphemer driven from the monastery, and the widow Rahel and her daughter Maryam, who were partners with the evil spirits in their spreading of fiendish poisons and diseases into the air of the village.

The Shaikh Abbas sat on a raised seat, and by his side sat Father Ilyas. The peasants and servants stood and gazed on the bound youth, who stood among them with head raised high like a lofty

mountain among plains. Behind him stood Rahel and Maryam with hearts held in the grip of fear and spirits tortured by the hard glances of the multitude. But what can fear do with the spirit of a woman who has seen the truth and follows it, and what can hard looks do to the heart of a maiden who has heard love's summoning and is awakened?

The Shaikh Abbas then looked at the youth and in a voice of thunder asked:

"What is your name?"

"Khalil."

"What are your people and your kin, and where is your birthplace?"

Khalil turned his face to the peasants, who looked at him with eyes of hate and scorn, and replied: "The poor and downtrodden are my people and my tribe, and this vast land is my birthplace."

The Shaikh smiled a mocking smile. "Those whom you claim as kin seek your punishment, and the land that you call a home rejects you as of its people," said he.

Khalil felt within himself a disturbance as he said: "Nations in their ignorance seize their noblest sons and deliver them up to the tyrant's cruelty; and countries prey to disgrace and dishonor

persecute those who would love them and deliver them. Yet does the good son abandon his mother in the time of her illness? Does the compassionate brother deny the brother who is in despair? These poor wretches who delivered me to you bound to-day are the selfsame that did deliver their necks to you yesterday. And those who brought me dishonoured before you are those very ones who sow the seeds of their hearts in your fields and pour out their life blood at your feet. And this land which rejects me is that same country which will not open its mouth to swallow the tyrant and the covetous."

The Shaikh Abbas laughed loudly as though he would submerge with his coarse laughter the youth's spirit and prevent its way to the simple souls of his listeners. Said he: "Were you not, young man, a shepherd in the service of the monastery? Why, then, did you leave your charge and have yourself expelled? Think you, perchance, that the people will be more merciful toward a heretic and a madman than the pious monks?" And Khalil said: "I was a shepherd and not a butcher. I used to lead my beasts to green meadows and fresh pastures, and never did I lead them to bare and stony ground. I took them down to the springs of sweet water and not to the swamps. At

eventide I returned with them to the enclosures and did not leave them in the valley as a prey to wolves and wild beasts. Thus did I with those animals. Did you do so with this emaciated flock now gathered about us, then you were not at this moment inhabiting a palace while these people perish through hunger in dark and gloomy hovels. Did you take pity on these simple children of God as I had pity on the beasts of the monastery, you were not now sitting on this silken seat while they stand before you like naked branches before the north wind."

The Shaikh Abbas moved on his seat in disquiet. On his forehead stood out beads of cold sweat, and his merriment turned to anger. But he controlled himself again lest he appear anxious and concerned before his men and followers. He made a motion with his hand and said: "We have not brought you here bound, unbeliever, to hearken to your raving talk. You are here before us that we may pass judgment on you as an evil-doer. Know, then, that you stand before the lord of this village and doer of the will of the Ameer Ameen Al-Shehabi¹ — may God strengthen him! And before Father Ilyas, embodiment of

¹ Son of the great Ameer Basheer. He ruled Mount Lebanon after his father's death.

the holy Church, against which you have transgressed. Defend yourself, then, against your accusers or bend your knee in repentance before us and before this mocking crowd, and we shall pardon you and make you cowherd as you were in the monastery."

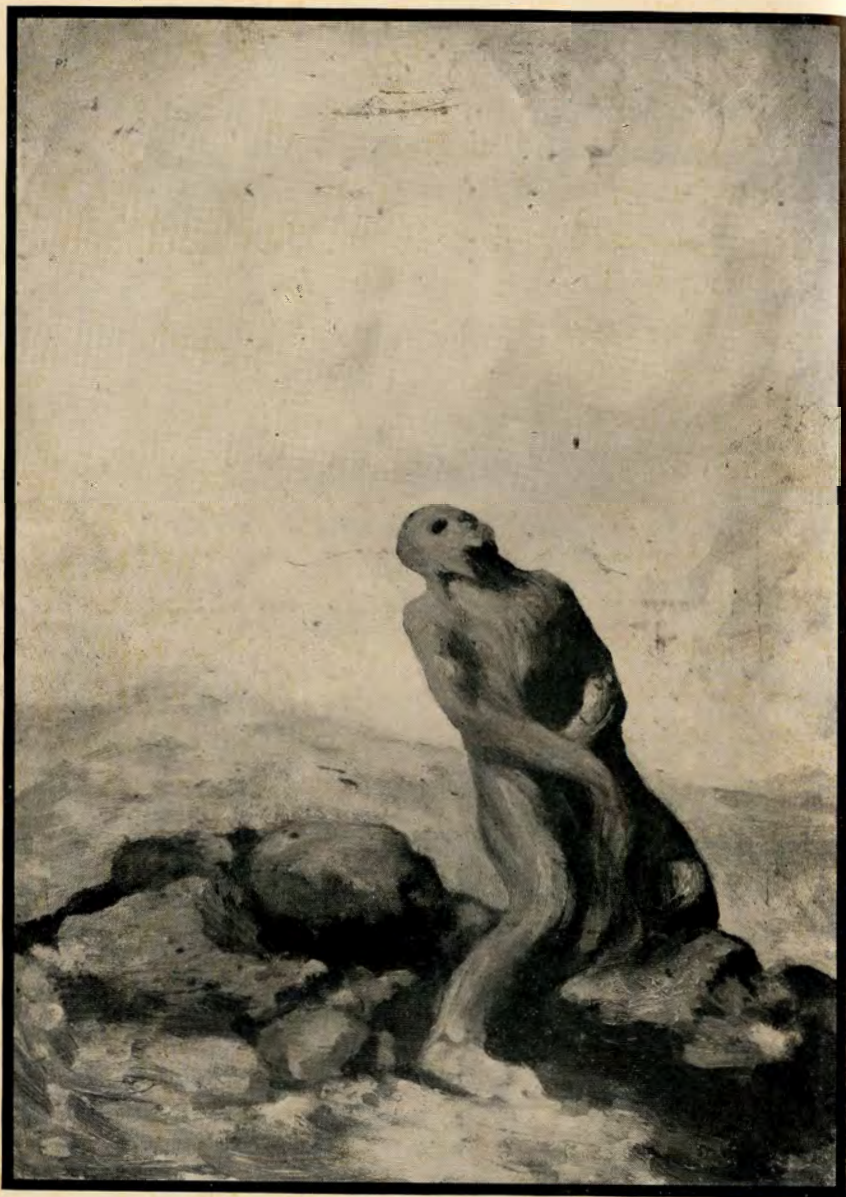
In a quiet voice the youth said: "The criminal is not judged by criminals, neither does the backslider defend himself before sinners."

Having thus spoken these words, he turned to the crowd in that hall, and in a voice ringing and clear like a silver bell he continued: "O brethren, the man whom your submission and obedience made lord over your fields has brought me bound to try me before you in this palace builded on the remains of your fathers and forefathers. And the man whom your faith made priest in your church is come to judge me and assist at my degradation and abasement. And you, you have come running from all parts to look upon my agony and listen to my pleading and beseeching. You have left your warm hearths to see your brother and son bound and reviled. You have made haste to behold the writhing prey in the hold of the wild beast. You are come to look on the criminal and blasphemer standing before his judges. I am the criminal. It is I who am the heretic, cast forth from the monas-

tery and carried by the tempest to your village. I am that wrongdoer. Then hear you my case and show not pity, but be just, for pity is only for the guilty; the innocent seek only justice. I have chosen you my judges, for the will of the people is God's will. Let your hearts be awakened and hear me well, then judge me according to your conscience. It is said that I am an evil person and an unbeliever, but you know not what my crime is. You have beheld me bound like a thief and murderer, but you have not heard of my wrongdoing because crimes and transgressions in this land remain hidden in the mist, but their punishment is manifest to all, like flashes of lightning on a dark night. My crime, O men, is in my knowledge of your despair and my feeling for the weight of your fetters. And my sin, O women, is in my compassion for you and your children, who suck in life from your breasts with the sting of death. I am your kin, for my forefathers lived in these valleys that exhaust your strength and died under this yoke which bends your necks. I believe in God, who hears the cry of your tormented spirits and sees into your broken hearts. I believe in the Book that makes us all brothers equal before the sun. I believe in the teachings that free you and me from bondage and place us unfettered

upon the earth, the stepping-place of the feet of God. I was a cowherd in the monastery, but my solitude with the dumb beasts in quiet places did not blind me to the tragedy that you play out against your will in the fields. And my ear was not deaf to the cry of despair rising up from the huts. I looked and beheld me in the monastery and you in the fields as a flock of sheep following a wolf to his lair. I stood in the middle of the way crying out for help, whereupon the wolf fell on me and bore me away so that my cry might not move the spirit of the flock to rebel and scatter in fright in all directions, leaving him alone and hungry in the dark night. I have borne imprisonment and hunger and thirst for the sake of the truth that I see writ in blood in your faces; and torture and flogging and mockery because to your sighing I put voice, which filled the monastery from end to end. But I feared not and my heart weakened not, for your cry and your agony followed me and renewed my strength, and persecution and despising and death became dear to me. And now you ask yourselves saying: 'When did we cry out for help and who among us makes bold to open his lips?' I say unto you that every day your spirits cry out and in the night do your hearts in their anguish call for succor. But you do not

hearken to your spirits and your hearts, for a dying man cannot hear the rattle of death within him, but those who sit by his bed hear. The slaughtered bird dances his fantastic dance without direction of will and knows not; but the beholders know. At what hour of the day sigh not your spirits in agony? Is it in the morning hour, when the love of existence calls you and tears from off your eyes the veil of sleep and leads you to the fields as slaves? Is it at noon, when you would sit in the shade of a tree to protect yourselves against the burning sun, yet cannot? Or at eventide, when you return hungry to your dwellings and find naught save dry bread and clouded water? Or at nightfall, when weariness throws you upon your stone couch and gives you fretful slumber; when you close your eyes in sleep only to awake in fright imagining the voice of the Shaikh still ringing in your ears? In what season of the year do your hearts not weep in sorrow? Is it in spring, when nature puts on her new garments and you go out to meet her in your tattered raggedness? Or is it in the summer, when you reap the harvest and gather in the yield to the threshing-floor and fill the bins of your lord and master with plenty and receive as your reward only straw and tares? Or in the autumn, when you



gather the fruit and press the grapes in the wine-press and receive naught of it except vinegar and acorns? Or yet in winter, when the elements oppress you and the cold drives you into your snow-covered huts, while you sit within on the hearth crouching and fearful of the raging storms? This is then your life, my poor brethren. This is the night drawing over your souls, unfortunate ones. These are the shadows of your wretchedness and misery. This the cry of anguish which I heard arising out of your depths so that I awoke and rebelled against the monks and their way of life, and stood alone, complaining in your name and in the name of justice, which suffers your sufferings. And they reckoned me an unbeliever and drove me forth from the monastery. So did I come to share your wretchedness and dwell in your midst and mix my blood with your blood. But you delivered me in bonds up to your powerful foe, to one who has plundered your bounty, who lives in ease on your wealth and fills his capacious belly with the fruits of your toil. Are there not among you elders who know well that the soil you till and whose yield is denied you is yours and that the father of Shaikh Abbas took it by force from your father when law was writ on the edge of the sword? Have you not heard that the monks dis-

possessed your forebears of their lands and vineyards when the sacred verses were recorded on the lips of the priest? Know you not that the clergy and the privileged conspire together in your submission and abasement and the shedding of your heart's blood? Is there a man among you whom the priest has not made to bend his neck before the master of the field? Or a woman whom the master of the field has not rebuked and obliged to follow the will of the priest?

"You have heard how the Lord said to the first man: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.' Then how does eat the Shaikh Abbas his bread kneaded with the sweat of your face and drink wine watered with your tears? Did God set aside this man and make him master whilst yet he was in his mother's womb? Did He visit His anger upon you for sins unknown, and send you as slaves into this life to gather the fruits of the field, yet eat not save of the thorns and thistles of the valleys? Or raise up fine palaces, yet have not where to live except in ruined hovels? You have heard Jesus the Nazarene when He spake to His disciples saying: 'Freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purse.' Then what teaching allows to the monks and priests the selling of their prayers for

gold and silver? You pray in the silences of the night, saying: 'Give us this day our daily bread, O Lord.' So the Lord gave unto you this land to sustain you with bread and sufficiency. But gave He to the heads of the monasteries the power to steal from between your hands this bread? You do curse Judas because he sold his Master for silver, but what makes you to bless those that sell Him every day of their lives? Judas in his wickedness repented of his sin and hanged himself; but those walk before you with heads held high in fine raiment and costly rings and gold adornments. You teach your children to love the Nazarene; then how do you teach them obeisance before those who hate Him and transgress against His laws and teachings? You have known that the apostles of Christ were stoned to death that the Holy Spirit might live within you; but know you that the priests and the monks are killing your spirits that they may live in enjoyment of your bounty. What thing tempts you in an existence full of lowliness and abjection and holds you prostrate before a terrifying image reared by lying and falsehood upon the graves of your fathers? And what priceless treasure do you guard by your submission to leave as a heritage to your sons?

"Your souls are in the grasp of the priest, and

your bodies in the hold of the governor, and your hearts in the darkness of sorrow and despair. What thing can you point to in life and say: 'This is to us'? Know you, O feeble captives, who is the priest whom you fear and set up as a guardian over the holy secrets of your souls? Harken unto me and I shall reveal to you that which you feel but are afeared to lay bare. He is a betrayer to whom the followers of Christ gave a holy Book that he made a net to catch that which belongs to them; a hypocrite whom the faithful girded with a fine crucifix, which he held aloft above their heads as a sharp sword; an oppressor to whom the weak delivered up their necks, which he bound with a halter and held with an iron hand and gave not up till they were broken like earthen pots and scattered as dust. He is a ravening wolf who enters the enclosure, and the shepherd thinks him a sheep and sleeps in peace. And when darkness descends, he falls upon the flock one by one. He is a glutton who reveres the well-laden table more than the altar; and a covetous one who pursues a farthing piece even to the caves of the jinn. He sucks the blood of his congregants as the desert sands suck up drops of rain. He is avaricious and watches after his own needs and stores up wealth. He is a trickster who enters through the cracks

in the wall and goes out only when the house falls. A thief hard of heart who steals the widow's mite and the orphan's piece. He is a creature strange in his creation, with a vulture's beak and a panther's claws and a hyena's fangs and a viper's touch. Take you his book, rend his garments, pluck his beard. Do with him as you will, then return and place in his palm a coin and he will pardon you and smile on you with love. Smite him on the cheek, spit in his face, trample him underfoot, then seat him at your table and he will forget and be happy and loose his belt, the better to fill his belly of your food and drink. Blaspheme against the name of his Lord, defame his religion, mock at his faith, then send to him a jar of wine or a basket of fruit and he will forgive you and justify you before God and man. Does he see a woman but he averts his face, crying: 'Get thee hence, daughter of Babylon,' the while saying within himself: 'Marriage is better than burning'? Does he behold youths and maidens marching in love's procession without lifting up his eyes to heaven, crying out: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'? But when he is alone he sighs, saying: 'Let be as naught the customs and traditions that have exiled me from the joys of life and denied me the delights of existence.' He counsels people that

they judge not lest they be judged, but he judges harshly those who laugh at his loathsomeness and condemns their souls to hell before death and lifts his eyes heavenward, but his thoughts coil like vipers about your pockets. He calls you 'my children,' but he feels not fatherly love, neither do his lips smile at a suckling infant nor does he carry a child on his shoulders. He says to you, inclining his head reverently: 'Let us lift ourselves above worldly affairs, for our lives fade away as the mist, and our days, like a shadow, are not.' But did you look well, then you saw him grasping the tale of existence and holding fast to the garments of life; grieving at yesterday's going; fearful of today's quickness; ever watching for the morrow's coming. He demands of you charity, but he is richer than you in wealth. And if you bring him he will bless you before people; if you deny him he will curse you in secret. In the temple he commends to you the poor and the needy, but around his house the hungry cry and before his face is stretched forth the hand of the helpless, but he sees not, neither does he hear. He sells for gain his prayers, and he who does not buy is an enemy of God and His prophets, denied heavenly bliss. This, then, followers of the Anointed, is the creature who frightens you. This is the good monk

who sucks your blood. This is the priest who makes the Sign with his right hand and clutches at your heart with his left. This is the man of the Church whom you make servant and he becomes master; you beatify him as a saint and he turns into devil. You raise him up as guardian and he becomes a heavy yoke. This is the shadow ever following your spirit from the time of its entry into the world till its return to the infinite. This is the man who has come this night to pass judgment on me and revile me because my soul rebelled against the enemies of Jesus the Nazarene, who loved you and called you His brothers and sisters and was crucified for your sake."

The face of the youth was illumined and he felt a spiritual awakening in the breasts of his listeners and he saw on their faces the impression of his words. He lifted up his voice and continued: "You have heard, O brothers and sisters, that the Ameer Ameen Al-Shehabi did put the Shaikh Abbas lord over this village, and the sovereign did appoint the Ameer ruler over this mountain. But have you beheld the Power that did make the sovereign ruler over this land? You see not that Power as a body, neither do you hear it speak; but you feel its existence deep down in your souls, and you bow down before it in prayer and you call on

it when you say: 'Our Father which art in heaven.' Yea, your heavenly Father it is that sets up kings and princes, for He is able of all things. Believe you then that your Father, who loves you and who has taught you the ways of truth through His prophets, would that you were wronged and oppressed? Believe you that God, who causes the rain to descend and makes the seed to bring forth the crop, and the flowers to blossom, would that you were hungry and despised so that one among you may be satisfied and puffed up? Believe you that the eternal Spirit who inspires within you love for a wife, tenderness to children, compassion on a kinsman, does set over you a harsh master to oppress you and place in servitude your days? That the Eternal Law that makes you love the light of existence does send to you one who would make you love instead the darkness of death? Believe you that nature has given you strength of body to humble it before weakness? You believe not these things, for did you so, then indeed would you be denying God's justice and unbelieving of the light of truth that shines on every one of us. Then what stirs you to assist the thing hateful to your spirits? Why fear you God's will, which has sent you as free men to this world, and become slaves to those who rebel against His

law? Why do you lift up your eyes to the All-Powerful and call him 'Father' and then bend your necks before a weak man and call him 'Master'? How come God's children to be slaves of men? Did not Jesus call you brothers and sisters? Yet the Shaikh Abbas calls you servants. Did not Jesus make you free men in spirit and truth? Yet does the Ameer make you slaves to shame and corruption. Did not Jesus raise up your heads heavenward? Yet you lower them to the earth. Did He not pour the light into your hearts? Yet you submerge it in darkness. God has surely sent your souls into this life to be as a lighted torch growing in knowledge and increasing in beauty in their search after the secrets of the days and the nights. Yet you cover it with ashes and it is extinguished. God has given to your spirits wings to soar aloft into the realms of love and freedom. Then why do you cut them off with your own hands and crawl on the earth like insects? God has planted in your hearts the seeds of happiness, yet do you pull them out and throw them down on the shores for the ravens to pick and the winds to scatter. God has granted you sons and daughters so that you might show them the ways of truth and fill their hearts with the melody of life and leave to them the joy of living as an inheritance without

price. Yet do you slumber and leave them for dead in the hands of fortune; strangers in the land that bore them; creatures of despair in the face of the sun. Is not the father who abandons his free-born son as a slave that same one who gives his son a stone when he asks for bread? Have you not seen the birds of the field teach their young to fly? Yet why do you teach your young ones to drag shackles and chains? Have you not seen how the flowers of the valley store their seeds in the sun-warmed earth? Yet do you deliver up your children to the darkness and cold."

Khalil became silent as though his thoughts and his feelings had expanded and grown and his words no longer wore garments. Then he resumed in a low voice:

"The words to which you have hearkened this night are those for which I was driven from the monastery. And the spirit whose stirrings you have felt in your hearts is that spirit which has delivered me bound before you. Should the lord of your fields and the preacher of your Church strike me down, then will I die rejoicing. For in my revealing to you of the truth, which is judged a crime by these tyrants, is the will of the Creator fulfilled."

In Khalil's clear voice was a mystic quality that excited the hearts of the men to wonder and amazement as though they were blind men who saw suddenly. The spirits of the watching women trembled to its sweetness, and their eyes filled with tears. But the Shaikh Abbas and Father Ilyas shook with anger. They tried to prevent the youth from speech, but they were not able, for he addressed that multitude with a divine force like to the tempest in its strength and to the breeze in its softness.

When Khalil had ceased from speaking he drew back a little and stood by the side of Rahel and Maryam. A deep silence descended, for it was as if his spirit, hovering above that spacious hall, were turning the eyes of the villagers toward a far-off place and drawing all power of thought and will from the spirits of the Shaikh and the priest, to make each stand trembling before his own troubled conscience.

Then the Shaikh Abbas stood up, his face drawn and yellow, and berated soundly the men standing about him. In a hoarse voice he shouted: "What ails you, dogs? Are your hearts poisoned and the life in your bodies stopped that you are no longer able to rend this mocking infidel? Has the

spirit of this evil one bound your souls and his sorcery shackled your arms that you cannot destroy him?"

Having spoken these words, he seized hold of a sword by his side and advanced upon the pinioned youth to strike him with it. Upon this, one of the crowd, a man of strong build, came between them and said quietly:

"Sheath your sword, master, for he that draws the sword shall by the sword perish."

The Shaikh Abbas trembled and dropped the sword, shouting: "Does a servant oppose his master and benefactor?" And the man answered: "A faithful servant does not join with his master in evil deeds. This youth said only the truth before the people." Another came forward saying: "This youth has spoken naught to merit judgment and persecution." And a woman lifted up her voice and said: "He has not forsworn his faith, neither has he blasphemed the name of God. Why, then, do you call him a heretic?" Then Rahel took courage and came to the front and said: "In truth does this youth speak with our tongues and complain in our name. He is our enemy who wishes the boy evil." The Shaikh Abbas ground his teeth and shouted: "And you, fallen widow, do you likewise rebel? Have you forgotten, then, what

thing befell your husband when he rebelled against me five years ago?"

When Rahel heard these words she cried out in pain, trembling like one who happens upon an awful secret. She turned her face to the people and cried out: "Do you hear now the murderer confessing his crime in his anger? Do you remember that my husband was found murdered in the field and you sought his murderer but found him not because he was in hiding behind these walls? My husband was a courageous man. Did you not hear him speak of the Shaikh's evil ways, condemning his actions, rebelling against his cruelty? Now has Heaven revealed to you the slayer of your neighbor and brother and brought him before you. Look you well at him and read the crime writ in his yellowed face. See how he is frightened and uneasy. Observe you all how he hides his face between his hands lest he see your eyes looking on him. Behold the powerful master shaking like a broken reed. The mighty man afraid in your presence like an erring slave. At this moment has God laid bare this killer whom you fear, and rendered naked the evil spirit that has made me a widow among your women and left my daughter an orphan among your children."

Whilst Rahel was thus uttering words that broke over the head of the Shaikh Abbas like a thunderbolt, and the shouting of the men and the screaming of the women descended like firebrands around him, the priest stood up and, taking him by the arm, sat him down on his seat. Then in a voice that trembled he shouted out to the servants: "Seize you this woman who would thus falsely accuse your master and drag her out with this heretic to a dark cell. Who stands in your way is their partner in evil and shall be excommunicated as he is from the holy Church."

But the servants did not move from their places, neither did they heed the command of the priest. They stood still, looking at the pinioned Khalil and Rahel and Maryam. The women stood, the one at his right hand, the other at his left, like two wings spread to fly aloft and cleave the air.

The beard of the priest quivered in his anger and he said: "Do you deny your master's generosity and his beneficence, shameless ones, for the sake of this infidel youth and this lying adulterous woman?" And the oldest among the servants answered him, saying: "We have served the Shaikh Abbas for the sake of food and shelter, but never shall we be his slaves." So saying, he took off his headdress and cloak and threw them at the

feet of the Shaikh. "I no longer wish the favor of these garments lest my spirit remain forever in torment in this place of bloodshed." The other servants did likewise and joined the throng, and on their faces was the light of liberty and freedom.

When Father Ilyas saw what they had done he knew that his authority was no more, and he went out from that house cursing the hour that had brought Khalil to the village.

One of the men in the crowd then came forward and loosed Khalil's bonds. He looked at the Shaikh Abbas, who had fallen across his seat like a corpse, and in a strong and purposeful voice addressed him, saying: "This youth whom you had brought bound before us to be tried as a criminal has lighted the darkness of our hearts and turned our eyes in the way of truth and knowledge. And this wretched widow woman whom you called shameless and lying has revealed to us the awful secret that lay hidden these six years. We came hither in our haste to see the trial of the innocent and the persecution of the just, but our eyes have been opened and Heaven has laid bare your guilt and your injustice. We will abandon you to your loneliness, and no person shall come near you. We will turn aside from you and ask Heaven to do its will with you."

From all parts of the spacious hall rose the voices of men and women. Said one person: "Come, let us leave this place of sin and crime." Another cried: "Let us follow the youth to the house of Rahel and hear his consoling wisdom and sweet sayings." Yet another shouted: "Let us do Khalil's will, for more than we he knows our needs." This one said: "If we want justice, let us go this morrow to the Ameer Ameen and acquaint him with the misdeeds of the Shaikh Abbas and demand his punishment." And that one called: "We must beg the Ameer to appoint Khalil as our master in this village." Yet another said: "We must complain to the Bishop that Father Ilyas joined with the Shaikh in all he did."

As these voices rose from all sides and fell like sharp arrows on the fluttering breast of the Shaikh, Khalil raised his hand, bidding the crowd to be silent, and exhorted them, saying: "Seek not haste, my brothers and sisters, but rather see and hear. In the name of my love for you I beseech you to go not to the Ameer; he will not give you justice against the Shaikh, for the wild beast does not bite his like. Lay not any complaint against the priest with his superior, for he knows that a house divided against itself falls. Neither seek the Ameer to appoint me as

lord of the village, for the faithful servant wants not to be an aid to an evil master. If I be worthy of your love and affection, then let me live among you and let your joys be my joys and your sorrows my sorrows. Let me share your work in the fields and your rest in your dwellings, for if I be not like one of you I shall be naught save as one that preaches virtue but practices evil. And now I have laid the axe to the root of the tree. Therefore let us depart and leave the Shaikh Abbas standing in the courtroom of his conscience before the throne of God, whose sun sets on good and bad alike." Thus having spoken, he left that place, and the multitude followed him, for it was as if there were in him a force that directed their vision.

The Shaikh remained in his place alone like a tower in ruins, as a sorrowing commander in defeat. And when the multitude reached the churchyard, what time the moon was risen and pouring its silvery rays over the heavens, Khalil turned and beheld the faces of men and women looking towards him like a flock that looks up at its shepherd. And his spirit was moved within him and it was as though he found in those poor villagers a symbol of oppressed peoples and saw in those poor huts buried under the snow the symbol of a land submerged in misery and abjection. He

stood like a prophet listening to the cry of the ages, and his expression changed and his eyes opened wide as though through his spirit he looked upon all the peoples of the East marching and dragging behind them their chains of servitude across those valleys. He raised his hands heavenward and in a voice in which was the roar of ocean waves cried: "From the depths of these depths do we call thee, O Liberty! Give ear to us. From out of this darkness we lift up our hands to thee. Then look upon us. Upon these snows do we prostrate ourselves before thee. Have mercy upon us. Before thine awful throne we stand and on our bodies the garments of our forefathers stained with their blood; covering our heads with the dust of graves mixed with their remains; bearing the swords that were plunged into their hearts; holding aloft the lances that pierced their breasts; dragging along the chains that slowed their steps; crying the cry that wounded their throats; lamenting their laments, which filled the darkness of their prison; uttering the prayers that rose out of hearts in torment. Give ear, O Liberty, and hear us! From the source of the Nile to the mouth of the Euphrates arises the wailing of souls in unison with the cry of the abyss. From the farthest ends of Arabia to the mountains of Lebanon hands

trembling in the agony of death reach out to thee. From the shores of the gulf to the fringe of the desert, eyes brimming with the heart's tears are lifted up to thee. Turn, O Liberty, and behold us.

"In those huts standing in the shadow of poverty and degradation they bare their breasts before thee. In the emptinesses of houses sunk in the darkness of ignorance hearts are laid before thee. In the corners of dwellings obscured by the mist of falsehood and tyranny souls incline toward thee. Look thou upon us, O Liberty, and have mercy. In the schools and places of learning despairing youth speaks to thee, and in the churches and mosques the Book cast aside turns to thee. In the courthouses the law, long neglected, calls upon thee. Have pity, O Liberty, and deliver us. In our narrow streets the merchant barter his days, and their price he gives to thieves of the West, and none gives him counsel. In our barren fields the peasant digs the soil with his fingernails and sows it with seeds of his heart and waters it with his tears, but reaps naught of it save thorns, and none teaches him. In our arid plains the Bedouin walks barefoot and naked and hungry, and none takes pity on him. Speak thou, O Liberty, and teach us.

"Our lambs graze off thorns and thistles in-

stead of grass and herbs, and our calves gnaw at tree roots instead of grain, and our horses feed off dried plants for lack of barley. Come thou, O Liberty, and save us. Since the beginning has the darkness of night lain over our souls. When will come the dawn? From prison cell to prison cell are our bodies moved while the ages pass us by and mock. Until when must we endure the mocking of the ages? From one heavy yoke to another yet heavier move our necks while the peoples of the earth look from afar and laugh. For how long must we suffer the laughing of the peoples? From shackle to shackle do our legs drag. Our shackles are not destroyed, nor yet do we perish. For how long yet must we live?

“From the bondage of Egypt to the Babylonian exile; to the cruelty of Persia and the servitude of Greece; to the tyranny of Rome and Mongol oppression and the greed of Europe. Whither do we go now? When shall we reach the end of this mountain road? Yea, from the grip of the Pharaoh into the clutch of Nebuchadnezzar; to the hands of Alexander and Herod’s swords and the talons of Nero and the teeth of the Devil. Into whose hands must we fall, and when will Death take us so that we may find rest in annihilation?

“By the strength of our arms were raised the columns of temples and places of worship to the glory of their gods; and on our backs were carried the mortar and stones to build walls and towers to make strong their defense; and by the strength of our bodies were the pyramids set up to make their names everlasting. Until when shall we build palaces and mansions and yet dwell in huts and caves? And fill the bins and storehouses while yet we eat of garlic and leeks? Until when shall we weave cloths of silk and wool and yet clothe ourselves in rags and tatters? Because of their wickedness and guile family was set against family; community against community; tribe against tribe. For how long shall we be scattered like dust before this cruel storm and quarrel like hungry whelps around this stinking corpse? The better to keep their thrones and ease of mind did they arm the Druse against the Arab and stir up the Shiite against the Sunnite and encourage the Kurd to slaughter the Bedouin and put Moslem to dispute with Christian. Until when will brother continue to slay brother on his mother’s bosom? Until when will neighbor threaten neighbor by the grave of the beloved? Until when will the Cross be separated from the Crescent before the face of God?

“Give ear, O Liberty. Hear us, O mother of all

people, and look to us. Speak now in the tongue of but one person, for one spark suffices to kindle dry straw. Awaken with the rustle of thy wings the spirit of one man among us, for from one cloud alone comes the lightning, which lights up with a single flash the spaces of the valleys and the mountaintops. Scatter with thy power these black clouds and descend like the thunderstorm and bring down as with a catapult those thrones raised upon bones and skulls, gilded with the gold of tribute and bribery, covered over with blood and tears. Hear us, O Liberty. Have mercy, O daughter of Athens. Save us, O sister of Rome; deliver us, O companion of Moses. Succor us, O beloved of Muhammad; teach us, O bride of Jesus. Strengthen our hearts that we may live or harden the arms of our enemies that we may perish and rest eternally in peace."

As Khalil was thus exhorting the heavens, the eyes of the peasants were upon him, and their love burst forth with the melody of his voice; their spirits soared with his spirit and their hearts beat in rhythm with his heart. And it was as though he were to them as is the soul to the body in that hour. After he had ceased from speaking he looked toward the multitude and in a quiet voice said: "Night has gathered us together in the house

of the Shaikh Abbas that we might see the light of day; and oppression has brought us before this cold clearness that we might understand one another and gather as young fowl beneath the wings of the eternal Spirit. Let us go now, each to his bed, and each one ready to meet with his brother on the morrow."

Having spoken, he walked away, following the steps of Rahel and Maryam to their hut. The people dispersed, every one going his way, pondering on what he had heard and seen and feeling the caress of a new life within him.

An hour had not passed before the lights in those huts were extinguished. Silence drew its veil over the village, and dreams carried away the spirits of the peasants. Only the spirit of Shaikh Abbas remained awake with the phantoms of the night, trembling before his crimes, tormented by his thoughts.

VIII

Two months had passed and Khalil continued to pour out the secrets of his spirit into the hearts of the villagers; speaking to them every day of the usurping of their rights and showing to them the life of the ambitious monks, relating to them stories of their harsh rulers, forging between him

and them a strong link like to those eternal laws which bind together many bodies. They listened to him with joy as the parched land rejoices in the rainfall. They repeated his words in solitude, clothing the souls of their meaning with a body of love. They paid no heed to Father Ilyas, who took to fawning upon them since the uncovering of the crimes of his companion the Shaikh. Now he approached them pliable as a candle where once he was as hard as granite.

As for the Shaikh Abbas, he had become afflicted by an ill of the spirit, like a madness. He walked back and forth through the halls of his dwelling like an imprisoned tiger. He called on his servants in a loud voice, but none answered him save the walls. He shouted for his men to assist him, but none came except his wretched wife, who had borne his cruelty as had the peasants his tyranny. And when Lent came, and with it Heaven's heralding the coming of spring, the days of the Shaikh were ended with the passing of winter. He died in agony and terror, and his soul went its way, borne off upon the carpet of his deeds to stand in its nakedness before that throne whose existence we feel but see not.

Many and differing were the opinions of the

peasants on the manner of his death. Some said that he lost his reason and died insane. Others that despair poisoned his life when his authority fell and drove him to die at his own hand. But the women who went to console his wife told their men that he died from fear and terror because the ghost of Sam'an Al-Rami used to appear before him in garments covered in blood and lead him by force at the midnight hour to the place where he had been found slain five years before.

And the month of Nisan came and announced to the people of the village the hidden love between Khalil and Maryam, daughter of Rahel. Their faces were lighted with joy and their hearts danced with happiness, for they no more feared that the youth who had awakened their hearts to a higher and wider realm would go from them. They went round, each one rejoicing with the other in his becoming a beloved neighbor to each one of them.

And when the days of the harvest came, the peasants went out to the fields and gathered in the yield to the threshing-floors. The Shaikh Abbas was not there to seize the crop and have it carried away to his bins and store-houses. Each peasant

reaped what he had sown, and those huts were full with corn and maize and wine and oil. And Khalil was their partner in their toil and joy. He helped them gather in the crops and press the grapes and pick the fruits. He did not set apart himself from them save in his love and endeavor. From that year to our days each peasant in that village has reaped in joy that which he sowed in tears; and gathered up with rejoicing the fruits of the orchard which he planted with toil and labor. And the land became the land of him that tilled it and the vineyards the portion of him that cultivated them.

Half a century has now passed since these happenings, and an awakening has come to the people of Lebanon. As the wayfarer goes his way toward the forest of the Cedars he stops and contemplates the beauty of that village sitting like a bride on the side of the valley. He sees the huts that were, as fine houses deep in the fertile fields and blossoming orchards. And should that wayfarer ask a villager concerning the Shaikh Abbas, he would answer, pointing to a heap of stones and ruined walls, saying: "This is his palace and this is the history of his life." And should he be asked about Khalil, he would raise his hand toward

heaven, saying: "Yonder dwells our good friend Khalil; the history of his life have our fathers inscribed in shining letters upon the leaves of our hearts, and the days and nights shall not efface them."

A NOTE ON THE TYPE USED

This book has been set in a modern Linotype adaptation of a type designed by William Caslon, the first (1692-1766), greatest of English letter founders. The Caslon face, an artistic, easily read type, has had two centuries of ever increasing popularity in our own country — it is of interest to note that the first copies of the Declaration of Independence and the first paper currency distributed to the citizens of the new-born nation were printed in this type face.

The book was composed, printed, and bound by The Plimpton Press, Norwood, Massachusetts.