

The Tracer of Egos

Chronicles of Dr. Phileas Immanuel, Soul Specialist
By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

MR. AXEL'S SHADY PAST

LADY Sibyl Smith was one of England's typical new women. Seven and twenty years of age, rich, handsome, gifted, the niece of a duke and sister of a viscount, she played innumerable roles with distinction, and the craze of one week became the aversion of the next. She had been suffragette, teetotalist, Socialist, anti-vaccinationist and anti-vivisectionist, vegetarian and sandal wearer; but now she was bent upon becoming a Mormon. It was the first time that her whim had taken a religious turn, and her uncle, the duke of Surrey, was greatly distressed.

"If only it were anything else," he said to Doctor Immanuel, "I wouldn't care. I know it would wear off in the course of time, but when the poor child wakes up in Utah, to find herself one of a happy family of fifty wives, what are we going to do for her?"

The old duke, who was a staunch adherent of the Low Church party, held rigid and perhaps exaggerated views about many subjects. Mormonism was one of them, and he was leading the agitation for the expulsion of the Mormon missionaries from England. Doctor Immanuel and I had met him at the annual garden party given by Nourreddin Bey, the Turkish ambassador, with whom the Greek physician had been intimately acquainted in his earlier days at Athens.

"The trouble with the modern woman is that there are not enough husbands to go round," said Immanuel thoughtfully. "England has, I believe, a million and a half more women than men. In consequence, instead of finding her activities in her home, the Englishwoman is forced into men's sphere of action."

"O, come, doctor, you aren't going to propound those old-fashioned ideas in the twentieth century, are you?" asked the Turkish ambassador jokingly. Nevertheless he secretly agreed with him. Educated at Oxford and Heidelberg, and the husband of one of the most popular society matrons in London, he nevertheless felt in his heart that the old customs of his race were best.

"If we don't take care," said the old duke, "we shall evolve a race in which the female will be predominant everywhere, as with the bees."

"And, like the bees, they will massacre all the males every autumn," answered Doctor Immanuel, "but about Lady Sibyl—" he continued, drawing the duke aside. "I am sorry to hear that her mind is made up."

"Unfortunately it is," answered the old gentleman. "She has fallen under the influence of Axel, the Mormon missionary, and sails with a party of converts for Utah on Saturday week. Nothing that we can say has the least influence over her. I even went so far as to attend one of Axel's Sunday assemblies at the Kensington Tabernacle. The man is a magnetic personality, a wonderful speaker. The plain truth is that he has hypnotized her. I wonder—" he hesitated—"I wonder if you could help us, doctor. Of course I don't pretend to believe in this reincarnation theory which you preach so relentlessly, but I do know that you have accomplished some wonderful things. You seem to have a kind of power over people. Damn you, sir, for all your crazy notions you have established your power over me. Can't you help the poor child, doctor?" the duke continued more seriously. "She must not sail with Axel. And she says she will sail. Hello, my dear!"

The last words were addressed to no other than the Lady Sibyl herself, who suddenly appeared, radiant under a large picture hat, immaculately gowned and shod.

"Why, Sibyl—you have met Doctor Immanuel, I believe, my dear—as I was saying, Sibyl, how about the sandals? I thought you were never going to wear shoes again."

"My dear uncle," said the young lady, patting the old man condescendingly upon the arm. "I still believe that shoes are contrary to the laws of nature. But there are too many more important things in life for me to spend my energies in a crusade against them. No! So long as war continues and nations massacre each other in the name of justice—"

"Hello, Sibyl! Are you anti-militarist now?"

"Yes, uncle, I am. Mr. Axel has shown me the horrors of war. He has convinced me that only the spread of the faith can bring peace among men. When all nations are of one belief—"

"The Mormons, Sibyl?"

"The Saints," answered the girl with a look of mild reproach. "But I see we are drifting round to the old topic and that, uncle, is naturally a painful one, so I will not detain you. With that she was gone, and presently we saw her engaged in earnest conversation with the Turkish ambassador's wife, who was always sympathetically inclined toward any new propaganda."

"This Axel seems to have stirred

London," said the Turkish ambassador a little later. We had foregathered again; somehow each one of us felt an interest in kindly, erratic, impulsive Lady Sibyl.

"Yes," answered the duke in tones of deep disgust. "But I never before heard that universal peace was what his people sought. I should say their aim is to stir up strife."

"He has evidently played upon her anti-militarist convictions to secure a 'wealthy convert,' put in the ambassador.

"No, I wouldn't say that," said the old duke, with a reluctant fairness. "I think the man is sincere. But he's one of those men who can persuade themselves that anything they want is true—a most dangerous condition of mind. Some of our Radical statesmen have it," he continued. The duke was violently Conservative.

"Then," I suggested, "if Lady Sibyl is drawn toward the Mormons because she thinks they will establish peace, why not provoke Axel into combativeness in her presence?"

The duke stared at me but did not answer. He was deeply distressed, and my words had passed him by idly.

"It is curious," said Doctor Immanuel, "that the true meaning of Mormonism is not apparent. May I say without offense to you, Nourreddin Bey, that the Mormons are simply the ancient Mohammedans come back to earth?"

"O, you won't hurt my feelings," answered Nourreddin Bey, laughing. "But I confess that I don't see the parallel."

"You mean that Mohammed was reincarnated as Joseph Smith?" asked the duke. "It is fascinatingly preposterous."

"On the contrary, the parallel is so close that I cannot see how any reasonable man can doubt it," Immanuel answered. "It holds in every instance. Mohammed came, as Smith came, at a time when the old beliefs were breaking down. Each taught a creed composed of a hodge-podge of Judaism and Christianity. Each had a special revelation from an angel, who gave him the text for his sacred book. Each was said to be epileptic. Each was driven out of his home town into a desert country and established a militant nation there. And mark my words, gentlemen, in Mormonism America and the world have to face the greatest peril that the next century will bring."

"And each taught polygamy," said the duke thoughtfully. "But I understand that the Saints have ceased to advocate that doctrine. Confound it—my poor Sibyl! Once they get her to Utah God knows what they'll do with her. The fanatic who masquerades as a reasonable man of the world is the hardest type to deal with."

"Your theory is very interesting, doctor," said Nourreddin Bey. "Can't you come to the rescue then? Can't you hypnotize this Axel and show him up as a desert savage reborn? I confess that in a loose white robe and a turban he would present a picture not calculated to inspire his latest convert."

Immanuel did not answer, but presently he managed adroitly to bring me into conversation with the object of our solicitude.

"I hear you sail for America shortly," I said to her.

"Yes," she answered. "For Salt Lake City, the headquarters of the propaganda."

"Lady Sibyl," said Immanuel very earnestly, "do you understand the real meaning of Mormonism? My dear girl, you are dreadfully deceived. The Mormons are nothing but the early Mohammedans reborn on earth. There was some use for them in the seventh century, but there is no earthly use now. They are essentially a throw-back, an anachronism—"

"O, I've heard of your doctrines," laughed Lady Sibyl, "and you can't hurt my feelings. Mr. Axel is a peace lover. He is sadly misrepresented. He wants to bring all the world under his faith, to establish peace, liberty and justice—"

"Your Mr. Axel," answered the doctor brusquely, "is, I have every reason to believe, a certain Hajid, who, in the year 689, was sent to make converts of a Christian tribe living in the Lebanon, and, failing to win them, ruthlessly massacred seven hundred men, women and children, in cold blood. He was a smooth, plausible—"

"That's quite enough, Doctor Immanuel," answered Lady Sibyl angrily. "If you had ever come to our meetings—"

"Well, I'll make a bargain with you. I'll come to your meeting next Sunday if you'll allow me to offer you evidence as to the truth of what I have said. Are you open to conviction?"

"I am always open to conviction," answered Lady Sibyl. "And I hope you are. Do come, doctor, and join our party for Utah on Saturday week."

No more was said, but that evening, as we sat in our rooms, Doctor Immanuel outlined to me his plan.

"It is a desperate chance," he said. "And I confess I am not altogether sanguine of success. But it is worth trying. I fancy that the main trouble with Lady Sibyl is that she is an idealist; she knows nothing of life, with its crudeness, its cruelties, its passions. She has always lived in the exalted region of the intellect. If she could see this Axel as an infuriated savage I think the shock would produce an intense reaction. Now I have been to his meetings, for the psychology of conversion has a great attraction for me. He is a magnetic speaker, one who is what we call 'carried away.' When he preaches he is actually self-hypnotized. He says that he speaks as the spirit directs him, and I have not the slightest doubt that he is, at such moments, largely dominated by his former self—or role, rather, for the self does not change. Do you know the Kensington Tabernacle?"

"No," I answered. "It is a large room, fitted up for meetings of a religious or secular character. It occupies the central portion of the building, and radiating out of it are numerous smaller rooms, which are also rented for the night to scientific and learned societies which hold their regular meetings there. Now here is my plan: if we can rent one of these rooms and make it the setting for our drama, and bring Axel in there while he is still under the emotional influence of his sermon, self-hypnotized, that is to say, it is possible that we may capture the elusive Hajid, bring him to the surface, and so display the real man to Lady Sibyl."

"There wasn't much peacefulness in Hajid," I said.

"No, and there isn't in Axel. But there's more to come. I have been talking with Nourreddin. I recollect that, when we were in Athens together,

hypnotized man, who is ready to swear that a chair is a steamship if he is told so."

"And who will be present? The duke?"

"No. He says he has had enough of Axel and has done all he could, and feels no further responsibility if his niece chooses to make a fool of herself. You and I and the ambassador and Lady Sibyl, who, by the way, is as ignorant as Axel of the trick we propose to play."

"And the plan is—"

"To bring them into the room immediately Axel has finished his sermon. It is to be his farewell address, you know, for he sails for America today week, and he will be wrought up, no doubt, and in prime condition for the experiment. By the way, Lady Sibyl will be waiting for us to call at her rooms on Sunday evening and escort her to the meeting."

"Rooms? She doesn't live with her folks then?"

"O dear, no. She is a member of some sisterhood now, pledged to improve the world. Poor child; she is thoroughly impractical in everything."

At seven o'clock on the Sunday night we called for Lady Sibyl. We found her housed in a large building, the headquarters of the humanitarian association with which she was connected, and about ten minutes' walk from the Tabernacle. She was not alone, however, for there was a young man present, and I had an unmistakable impression, when I entered, that there had been something of a scene between the two.

"Allow me to introduce Mr. Carruthers," said Lady Sibyl to us. "Another of my well-wishers," she added acidly, and I perceived that the acidity of her tones was meant to conceal some strong emotional stress.

"Mr. Carruthers, like my uncle, wishes to dissuade me from going to America."

"I would to heaven I could," burst out the young man in passionate

heaven on earth in the alkali wastes of Utah.

Lady Sibyl was the only person there who was even moderately well gowned. I began to understand now how much her belief meant to Axel, not necessarily from a worldly point of view, for, to do the man justice, he was quite sincere, but as a bell wether for his precious flock.

Then Axel came in from a private room, and when I set eyes on the man I knew that I was in the presence of one of those who are the mainstay of every cause; the men of intense will, purpose, and conviction who make martyrs and prophets. He might have stepped out of the desert and put on modern clothes, for he was brown and muscular as an Arab, his closely cropped hair was of a deep, lustrous black, and his black beard, ragged and uncombed, swept down over his breast. He moved as though he were "strung"; it was evident that he was prepared to make a thrilling appeal and challenge to his auditors; and as he entered and stepped lightly on the platform, acknowledging the greeting of those present by a curt, absent-minded nod, I heard murmurs of worship from the sordid figures upon the benches and saw the sunken eyes grow bright and the bent figures straighten. Then he was upon the platform and the services had begun.

It is no part of my task to deride the Mormon service. Except for the shocking incongruity, as it seemed to me, of introducing the name of Joseph Smith into the hymns, it might have been any religious service and was conducted with perfect decorum. But, the prayers ended, Axel began to speak, and though I have heard many speakers I have never heard one who impressed me so forcibly. It was not elegance of diction, for his grammar was as free as his eloquent gestures; it was not that he had the gift of the great orator; rather it seemed to be some magnetic force proceeding from the man. It almost carried me away. I closed my eyes and listened with rapture. I could well understand how he could bend Lady Sibyl to his way, to say nothing of those others. He announced the end of his missionary campaign and pleaded, pleaded with his auditors to renounce the world and follow him and his band to far off Utah, to build up the nation of peace and righteousness.

Immanuel said something which sounded like Amen. But it was not Amen.

The sound seemed to sting the speaker as a whip stings a nervous, high-spirited horse. He started, cast a glance at the doctor, and then proceeded with more abandon than before. His words poured like a lava torrent from his mouth. In the next interval Immanuel spoke again. This time there was no mistaking his word. They were "Allah il-Allah."

And Axel seemed to lean toward him; he swung round, facing him, and thumped his fist upon the desk and flung his arms aloft, as an ancient prophet might have done, denouncing Baal. I understood the doctor's purpose. He was beginning to recall to him the scene which was afterward to be burned into his brain, for the purpose of awakening his forgotten self.

Axel ended in a thunder of applause. His auditors sprang from their seats and cheered, ran forward, surrounded him. Lady Sibyl looked at me with brimming eyes.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she said. "O, doctor, can't you believe now? Who else is he but a prophet of God?"

Then I saw that Immanuel had arisen and was standing immediately in front of Axel, staring into his eyes. It was a strange contrast; the preacher, built in the mold of a hero, and the little Greek doctor, with his face upturned, and his mild brown eyes, just now fixed sternly upon those of the other.

"Come!" said the doctor, and he placed his arm within the preacher's. He said something more, but it was too low for me to catch the words. Whether it was English or Arabic I do not know, but I felt that their two wills had met in combat and that the doctor had conquered. It seemed as though Axel were actually in a hypnotic condition, for he followed Immanuel without seeing any of his admirers, brushing them away, and went like a lamb in the direction of Room 17, and we all followed. Then Immanuel threw open the door and we trooped in, and somebody—Carruthers, I think—closed it, and we were inside a Syrian house.

It was like one of those little reproductions of foreign scenery that one encounters at expositions; it was at once genuine and yet unreal. The couches, with their Oriental coverings, were such as might have been seen in any home; the rugs were from the ambassador's own reception rooms, where I myself had seen them; the leopard skins, too, that strewed the floor, were such as one sees in furriers' shops. It did not impress me as spectacular—it was merely grotesque and ornate.

Above our heads the sword, the yataghan of the prophet, swung with a slight oscillating movement from its support of woven camel hair.

I saw Lady Sibyl look at the room in surprise; Carruthers glanced at each of us, not understanding; the Turkish ambassador, whom I had recognized on the platform, attired in rather rough clothes, and evidently desirous of concealing his identity, smiled slightly at me, as though in deprecation of the stage setting. But the next moment we were all looking at Axel.

Doctor Immanuel, standing on tip-toe, had placed his hands upon the great fellow's shoulders, and the mis-

er, he used to own a famous old sword, said to have belonged to the prophet Mohammed himself, and an heirloom in his family. I asked him where it was and he tells me that it is in Paris, with some of his stored property. Now if we can get that weapon in time to make it the piece de resistance for our little drama—think of it, a sword which Hajid himself had doubtless often seen, which must have impressed itself indelibly upon his memory!—he may remember it. Are there not old Greek stories of heroes who recognized swords hanging in temples which they had wielded in former lives? One doesn't forget a sword when one has been a soldier. Anyway, Nourreddin is sending one of his secretaries to Paris with an order for it this evening, and there is every hope that by next Sunday we will be able to have it in place. And now, excuse me, for I must write to the Tabernacle to hire a room."

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"Well," he began, removing his pipe from his mouth, "the sword has arrived and is now safely housed, or rather suspended from the wall in Room 17 of the Tabernacle."

"Good," I answered. "You have the stage setting completed?"

"Everything. It is the exact reproduction of the interior of a Syrian house in the time of Mohammed, with divans, skins—loaned for the occasion by our friend Nourreddin—pillows, antique vessels from the ambassador's house, and, last but not most important, the sacred sword, which hangs suspended by a skein of camel's hair over the couch of honor. It is crude, but it is good enough for a



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"Good," I answered. "You have the stage setting completed?"

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er, he used to own a famous old sword, said to have belonged to the prophet Mohammed himself, and an heirloom in his family. I asked him where it was and he tells me that it is in Paris, with some of his stored property. Now if we can get that weapon in time to make it the piece de resistance for our little drama—think of it, a sword which Hajid himself had doubtless often seen, which must have impressed itself indelibly upon his memory!—he may remember it. Are there not old Greek stories of heroes who recognized swords hanging in temples which they had wielded in former lives? One doesn't forget a sword when one has been a soldier. Anyway, Nourreddin is sending one of his secretaries to Paris with an order for it this evening, and there is every hope that by next Sunday we will be able to have it in place. And now, excuse me, for I must write to the Tabernacle to hire a room."

It was not Doctor Immanuel's habit to talk much while his plans were maturing, and from the absence of any further discussion of the subject I drew favorable conclusions. It was not until the evening of the following Saturday that he alluded to the matter again.