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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
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# **Travel Tales in the Promised Land (Palestine)**

Karl Friedrich May

# Imprint

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German Novelist Karl May's 1907/1908, Schamah  
[Wisdom's ForgivingLight]

Travel Tales in the Promised Land (Palestine)

Translator: James D. Schoonover, MA, M.Ed., c.  
2008, USA

Schamah, Reiseerzaehlung aus dem Gelobten Lande,  
von Karl May (c.1907/1908)



As soon as they step into my house and see my strange collection of travel keepsakes, all visitors' eyes are drawn to the Arabian saddle, which actually deserves credit as the inspiration and author of this story. It has Oriental-red velvet, richly decorated with gold embroidery. This Pasha saddle was fit for a tribal Turkish chieftain, having comfortable stirrups and an accompanying dreadful bit that could conquer the stubborn resistance of even the mightiest horse.

My magnificent saddle was a present from Mustafa [Mohammed] Bustani, a wealthy merchant and friend who worked equally well with Arabs and Jews. His shop is on the right hand side of the Marketplace El Bizar, along the way to the third most sacred Islamic mosque, Harem Esh Sheriff, where the Israelite King Solomon's Temple earlier stood. Try to understand the nature of Judaraber, these Arabs of the Holy Land who now live side-by-side with Jews. Little by little, they have given up their handed down-hatred against Hebrews, for they share the strict Old Testament views of "God's Chosen People." In this way, Judaraber are more inclined to think like Semites and less like those in Christendom.

With these Muslims, it is no more of a disgrace to become a Christian as to convert to Judaism. Anyway, this unique perspective only concerns inner opinions; especially regarding personal matters or simple business transactions, this peculiar outlook has hardly any influence. So, I was Mustafa Bustanis' friend, in spite of religious differences, just because we liked each other. When I bought things in Jerusalem, I purchased solely from him whenever possible. I preferred to deal with him, not only as a merchant, but much more as a good human being. He too knew this truth, and he repaid me through our friendship's deep affection. I felt that I possessed his complete trust and confidence.

I often stopped by his store, even if I had no particular reason to buy something. For

many hours, we sat beside each other, reclining against a broad, Persian carpet-covered crate as we endlessly drank coffee that his African servant Bem prepared for us. We considered ourselves to be like brothers; thereto, we felt no need to keep secrets from each other. Every now and then, there were distinguished customers that he permitted to interrupt us. His assistant attended to them, even though he himself could have waited on them. Habakek was the name of Mustafa's helper, an exceptionally good-natured fellow—a delightful combination of magician, jack-of-all-trades, and Renaissance man who could accomplish anything that your eyes could imagine.

Mustafa Bustani was a big fan of fairy tales. He loved to hear or tell every kind of fairy tale—most of all, one which involved a belief in miracles or a situation wherein the dead and the living played a dynamic role. Yet in no way was he superstitious in the general sense. On the contrary, he was an educated man who spoke Arabic, Turkish, and Persian; with Westerners, he could reasonably communicate in French and in English.

Concerning religious faith, he showed commendable tolerance; however, earlier in life it was the opposite case. He had a brother who was banished from the family, due to the fact that he had been baptized as a Christian. Mustafa did not conceal this fact; at the time, he had totally agreed with his exile.

In contrast to the past, he now seemed to think otherwise about that banishment. In truth, I learned nothing more than that his brother had moved to East Jordan; there he had married a Christian woman. For that reason, all of the banned brother's attempts at reconciliation had been rejected. Thereafter, he vanished—yet, one knows all too well that family ties can never be completely ripped apart.

When my friend spoke of his "harem," he was using the Semitic culture's exclusive, figurative reference to the soul's most private and sacred sanctum. Therein, he seemed to be inspired by more compassionate convictions which he had not yet succeeded in shutting out. Harem? Yes, be certain that our mutually respectful confidence in each other had risen so high that we quite often did not avoid speaking of his or my "harem." Among Muslims, this open interchange is actually forbidden. Namely, only my wife was permitted to understand my most private sphere of thoughts, to know my "harem."

I have no children. As for Mustafa's spiritually-reserved harem, he confided in his wife, his eleven year old son, and in the family's black female cook. The other household servants were not included in this private circle of confidants. His son had the short, yet very meaningful name of Thar, which Bavarians would interpret as a "dashing fellow." Unlike the stereotypical, mistaken picture of Middle Eastern children, he was not a somber, moody, overly serious, nor slow-moving child. From the family's home which lay outside the inner city, this delightfully mischievous boy often came to his father's store. Whenever he met me, it seemed that he never tired of tossing me the most unbelievable heaps of questions about all kinds of matters concerning my homeland. From him, I learned the latest news about his father's harem—every broken pot and every captured mouse. In return for his youthful openness and his high regard for me, he expected me to report all of my secrets to him. Woe unto me if he ever believed that I failed to trust him in this relationship.

In the course of this friendly bond among father, son, and myself, I was invited as a guest and had the opportunity to meet the mother. I remember this well. I often spent entire evenings in the home of Mustafa Bustani. When I last said good-bye, I promised to bring along my wife on my next visit.

Nomen et [est] omen— a name may predict one's destiny. Within living memory of the Family Mustafa Bustanis, it had always been a custom to have a family member by the name of Thar. This stemmed from the family's bygone days as nomads. Presently, Mustafa's boy was the bearer of this namesake, as well as its legacy. Night and day, he tried as hard as he could to be a credit to his name. The name "Thar" means vengeance, retaliation, retribution, and a blood feud. This is the old, dreadful law which calls for the following: "Blood for blood! An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth!" In ancient times, among certain primitive folk and also nowadays, some have felt that there are reasons to retaliate. Under civilized conditions, it's not only reprehensible and criminal—it's just ridiculously laughable.

Ever since Thar became aware of his name's notoriety, he thoroughly came under the influence of his own imagination. Therein, he always contemplated some kind of recompense—and if none existed, he thought one up. In everything that he heard or saw, these events had to serve as a design for payback that stemmed from some past injury. Unfortunately, he didn't always find the heroic acclaim that he anticipated. His destiny misunderstood him. Instead of the planned retribution that was meant to achieve its intended, costly purpose, there was always a dumb turn of events in the end, which placed the boy himself in an unfavorable position. At this point, he inevitably found himself on the receiving end of retribution; thereto, he himself would be harmed by his own campaign. Even so, this reversal of roles did not hold him back; he remained true to his name and to his calling. Always and again, Thar was ready to make a fresh start.

To these preliminary notes, I add the fact that I had traveled from Sumatra to Egypt; I was supposed to meet my wife in Jerusalem. I had guided her through the Land of the Pharaohs and through the Arabian Desert; now, we found ourselves in the Promised Land. Yesterday, we arrived in Jerusalem by way of the Jaffa Gate. We wanted

to stay a few weeks in order to take some regional side trips that included a visit to the Dead Sea. Next, we wanted to head towards Damascus. For travel purposes, we needed two saddles, one for a man and one for a woman. Automatically and without question, I contacted my friend Mustafa, for no one else could get everything that we needed. My wife accompanied me. Given my previous accounts concerning my spouse, Mustafa and his household seemed to know her almost as well as they knew me.

Even though he was a noble, Middle Eastern educated man, Mustafa erred at times in the upbringing of his young son. By way of comparison, his wife's disposition was exceptionally lively, loving, and kind. Seeing both parents' character traits come together in their child, the boy took on his mother's cheerful, joking nature and his father's very deadpan humor; thus, Thar almost always had the disposition to tease his dad, his mom, and the whole world.

We went through the Jaffa Gate, towards the Marketplace El Bizar, and there we found Mustafa. He didn't notice us right away, because he was involved in playing a trick on a customer who wanted to buy a new turban. In the middle of the shop, there stood a camel—which actually was his helper, Habakek. He had positioned himself on all fours and had adorned his disguise exactly like a camel that you see in a parade, having head bands jingling with ornaments and feathered plumes. The forelegs had a string of bells; draped over the costumed camel's sides was a gaudy, glass-beaded wool netting. To the rear, there was a kid-leather water bottle which one would need in the desert. Nearby stood Thar, dressed only in an over-sized, common blue shirt that sagged loosely from his elbows to his knees. The boy's face, arms, and legs were painted palm bark-brown.

Just as we entered the shop, the boy called out to their African servant Bem, who was squatting near the room's coffee-corner: "I'm the Bedouin Sheik, and I'm feeding my camel!" At that

moment, he scooped up a handful of lettuce leaves which the next door shopkeeper had previously thrown into the street. He shoved the soiled greens into the submissively open mouth of the make-believe camel. Habakek loudly, deliberately, and delightedly chewed the fodder. You would have thought that this creature was just an ordinary dromedary— a downright authentic camel. Just by the way he behaved, one could not tell that this was Habakek. Due to the fact that his face was so completely painted with colorful crosses and dashes, he seemed to disappear beneath all that makeup. For that reason, Bem questioned Thar:

"Why then have you painted him up?"

Thar readily resounded: "Don't you know? This is the hide that I've painted. As you know, a camel has hairs on its face!"

In addition to this scene, we took note of the richly decorated donkey that stood in front of the neighboring store. In no way was this animal's owner a commoner. The donkey's important master had dismounted and stepped inside to buy something.

For the first time, the African saw me. At the moment, he was busy grinding coffee beans with a mortar and pestle. He was so overwhelmingly surprised that he tossed aside the coffee and the mortar and let out a piercing whoop of joy. Consequently, all of the others now drew their attention to me. Mustafa Bustani was so surprised to see me suddenly in front of him, that he stood completely still and said nothing. So much more in tune to the situation, Thar happily leaped in the air, let out a triumphant cheer, pointed to my wife, and asked: "Is this she, the woman whom you promised to bring to us?"

"Yes, it is she," I answered.

He bowed three times before her and beckoned towards the camel: "Please sit upon this; it's bejeweled for you!"

All at once, the camel stood up on its hind legs and used its hands to wipe the fur from

its face: "I have no more time for this! I need to attend to the store's business!"

As he happily greeted my wife and me, he tossed off the camel-costume jewelry and devoted his attention to the customer whom Mustafa had left to his own devices. Mustafa's joy was as great as it was genuine. He greeted me with the customary bows and pulled me close to his heart: "What a comfort to see you today! Give thanks to Allah. Dearest friend, sit down with me; you know that you're always welcome here!"

Mustafa then bowed three times to my wife; but as he tried to speak to her, his voice broke down, and tears burst from his eyes. He placed both hands to his face and softly sobbed. Thar cried too, gripping the pleat of my wife's white traveling dress. He then wiped away his tears and rubbed off the Bedouin-brown paint from his face and arms as he offered her the following explanation: "He weeps today, because you're here now--yet, she can't see you."

"Why is she unable to see me?" my wife asked, although she intuitively guessed that he meant his mother.

"She is dead. Didn't you know this?" he answered. We were both startled. There simply were no adequate words; yet the boy continued on: "She so much looked forward to seeing you, because your Effendi [Turkish title for a noble man] whom we all love, had sung your praises. Unlike other men who talk about their harems and always complain about the wife, in truth, he never said a mean word about you. He and my father consistently refrain from that. The sickness came and closed her eyes. I personally witnessed this. They carried her away. Whenever he thinks about her, my father continually cries. As for me, almost all of my days must be filled with devising a new avenging-quest--which makes my father laugh again. However, he no longer laughs, nor does he have the will to fight. All of this is so wrong!"

At the close of his words, he let his eyes wander throughout the shop. There he focused on the customer who had taken off his round turban-skullcap, placing it aside as he tried on a tasseled fez. In the Middle East, such a flat-crowned hat has long been associated with many speeches and counter arguments. His head was completely bald, glistening a slippery-bright, as if it were waxed and shined. It was just forty-five minutes ago that Thar had happily worn his theatrical makeup. Across his newly-wiped face, there now streaked a prankish thought which he put into action: "Hold on; another avenging plot is coming to me. Please don't disrupt me; simply look over there—where presently I'm not!"

He wriggled towards the store's back corner, where they kept all kinds of gadgets, including the stove for cooking coffee. Back there was also the African's space which he had left in order to fetch a couple of fluffy bales of material, a piece of carpet, and a divan for my wife. To overcome his grieving, Mustafa Bustani helped Bem with these tasks; he was not aware that his son had told us about his difficult mourning. When the divan was ready, we sat down. Accustomed to our earlier times together, I took my place on the crate with the Turkish water-pipe nearby. If we hadn't learned earlier about the death of his wife, our conversation normally would have begun. The words simply did not want to come forth. Blessedly, the shop gave rise to somewhat of a stopgap. Unfortunately, Mustafa Bustani's inventory did not include saddles, so he invited us to return tomorrow. In the meantime, he planned to fulfill all of our requests.

At this point, the shopper interrupted us; he was a country gentleman from Ain Kahrin, the birthplace of John the Baptist. He had put on his old cap again, along with his headscarf. Then, he pointed to the new items that he had selected, wanting to know the price of the fez and a colorful turban-cloth. In the Middle East, such a minor transaction normally doesn't proceed quickly. However, in order to send the customer on his way,

Mustafa gave him the price so fast that the buyer paid his money without reservation and hastily exited.

This disruption now had the effect of reclaiming more life in our conversation. Among ourselves, we sensed that something on both sides had transpired in that time—something which we had not seen. In the process, Mustafa had seized every opportunity to bring Thar back, all in order to praise him. We had not been speaking softly, so the boy must have been able to hear us. Thar was crouched down in the corner by Bem, and it seemed that they were undertaking a change of scenes, which for now was concealed from us. In the way of materials for transforming a setting, Mustafa's shop lacked nothing; for almost everything imaginable was available for purchase, old as well as new. After the boy and Bem had completed their grand scheme, Thar slowly came striding out of the corner, proudly presenting himself to us.

He was now dressed as a famous hero, most likely ready to perform some kind of vendetta gain. Half of a clay water-crock served as his helmet, one that probably had been dug up and broken in the process. His breastplate consisted of a tin lamp shade, the kind that one places upright in front of the light. Onto his bare calves, he had fastened two gigantic knight's spurs, which possibly dated back to the medieval days of the Crusades. Into his rope-belt, he stuck the most outrageous weapons that one can imagine: three knives, two pairs of scissors, two corkscrews, and four candle-snuffers—all of which were arranged around his waist. Besides these, he added a mousetrap, a bow with quiver and arrows, and some leftover items which he carried in his hand: a corn-cutting sickle, a saber's sheath, and a shotgun barrel. His war paint consisted of two colors, precisely creating the exact impression that he intended. The right arm and the left leg were painted green; the left arm and the right leg were blue. On both cheeks and for a moustache, this skin too was blue. His chin had a grass-green hue. We laughed, as did Mustafa Bustani.

"Well then, who are you?" Mustafa asked the armed figure.

As he rattled all of his weapons, Thar answered in a battlefield tone: "I'm Gideon, the hero."

"Ever and always, he only takes his heroes from the Old Testament," his father explained. Turning to his son, he continued: "What is Gideon planning to do?"

"I have slain Baal's priests in order to destroy the Midianites!"

Newer and more intense saber rattling! Unfortunately, it was impossible to learn anything more about his valiant purpose, because the scene was interrupted by the man from Ain Kahrim. At this moment, he came running back to the shop. Clearly in an urgent tizzy, this episode seemed to raise the man's agitation to its highest level. At first, he spoke so rapidly and indignantly that he could hardly be understood. We could only discern the words "fez - turban - barber - head - blue - soap - water - shame and disgrace!"

After we persuaded him to explain everything calmly and slowly, he did so; thus, we learned that he had been to the barber, just as he's accustomed whenever he comes to the city. For him, it was normal to see to the grooming of his beard and head, for this cleanliness of the head is prescribed by the Prophet Mohammed. This rite should only be performed by a licensed barber, not by any other man.

When he bared his head, all those present in the barber shop roared with laughter; for the hair of this old-timer was no longer white as usual. Instead, it had turned blue as the sky. As it turned out, the blue stain came from his headgear, which he had taken off at the barber's. Secretly, someone had poured blue dye into the hat. The barber had done his best to wash away the

coloring, yet this had only made matters worse. The addition of water simply dispersed the heavens-blue pigment, which now more permanently corroded still deeper into his scalp. As he removed his skullcap and head scarf, he called out: "Allah have mercy! Here, look at me! Let the culprit step forward so that I can punish him!"

An entirely hairless skull of glistening heavens-blue hue? Include the fact that the man was not wearing the new fezi; instead, he had again plopped the soiled cap on his head. One could hardly resist the giggles that came with the sight of this angry man. My wife was the first to burst out laughing. She found it impossible to restrain herself. The African Bem followed, then Habakek, and finally Mustafa and I. The hearty peal of laughter had a strange effect; instead of increasing the anger of this man from Ain Kahrim, it seemed to subdue him, probably through his own perception of his ridiculous appearance. Only the boy was not laughing. No train of thought stirred across his face. He stepped up to the man, loudly and seriously confessing: "I'm the one!"

"You?" the astonished man asked. "How can a child dare to do this, to insult the bare head of a Moslem!"

"I didn't uncover it! I did it as a justified payback, all in order for you to know that my name is Thar."

"Thar?" responded the bewildered man.

"Yes, Thar! Didn't you yourself say that a believer may only allow a barber to bare his head? Yet you have uncovered it here, and you even showed it to us! For this offense, I've punished you; I poured blue-retaliation upon your head's uncovered hull."

With the utmost astonishment, the blue-headed man asked us: "Is something like this possible? According to this boy, I'm the one who should be punished-not he! What does his father say about this?"

Mustafa would have answered the question, as best he could, but the boy spoke first: "If you require a father here, then fetch your own; for you may not borrow mine! I'm Gideon, the Hero of Manasseh. Good-bye!" In a dignified way, Thar nodded to the man, then proudly strode out of the shop. Still clad in his make-shift suit of armor, he climbed onto the stranger's donkey that was standing outside. From there, he trotted away on the animal. Everyone knows this: at a very young age, all Arabic boys regard the back of a donkey as the best of all playgrounds. It is rare to find a boy who lacks the courage to ride.

Now, the man from Ain Kahrim really didn't know what he was supposed to think. His mouth hung open. Without saying a word, he glanced towards the spot where he last saw the boy. Speaking in German and still laughing, my wife asked me: "Is this possible?" I had no time to answer her. The scene had changed.

The owner of the donkey was mostly concerned about the distance between him and his animal. He had figured out whom the strangely outfitted boy belonged to; from the neighboring shop, he now walked over to us. Whether by civil means or through a complaint to the police, he was determined to come closer to settling matters. "Who among you is Mustafa Bustani?" he inquired.

As my friend slid off the trunk and bowed low, he answered: "I."

"Do you know me?"

"Yes. Who wouldn't know you? You are Osman Achyr, the Ferik-Pasha of our Sovereign. May Allah bless him!"

"Your son has stolen my donkey!"

"He has not stolen the animal—just borrowed it. Thar will bring it back safe again!"

"Do I run a rent-a-donkey business? If I did, I would expect a person to ask me first!"

"I ask your pardon, sir!"

By official title, this man's ranking was that of a general. Even though he chose to wear unassuming, civilian clothes instead of a uniform, he carried himself like a nobleman. Now that he had to deal with yet one more infraction, he steadied his voice as he renewed his dogged determination to assert his authority: "No, I do not excuse him. The boy has stolen from me, and he has dishonored me. I demand that he be punished!" The Pasha now drew closer to Mustafa and asked: "Who are you? In your mind, what did he-?"

When the General saw the blue-skulled man, he halted in mid-sentence— the Pasha's eyes began to glisten and grow wider. Taking just the right amount of time to pause, the Blue-one began to narrate the boy's misdeeds—but he could go no further. Appealing to the stern General and to us, the heavens-blue man now cracked up, laughing like we had done earlier. His laughter was so contagious that we could not help but join him. In the middle of our merriment, the boy came riding back with a mass of children following him. The adults readily recognized him, but they were no longer concerned about Thar's outlandish pranks.

The boy brought the donkey back to the same spot where it formerly stood. In the same way he had left us, he returned to us with the same style of majestic dignity and seriousness. This made such an irresistible impression upon all of us, that our laughter momentarily turned to silence. Just as suddenly, it broke loose and doubled its intensity, as if it never wanted to end. Laughing with us too was the Blue-one. Once he began, he laughed the longest and was the last to stop.

Thar also recognized the General. Right away, he positioned himself directly in front of him, smartly stood at attention, then sharply saluted just like he had seen soldiers whenever they met an officer. The Pasha then asked him: "Do you know who I am"

"Yes," he answered.

"Then who am I?"

"You are Benaja, the Commander-in-chief of King Solomon's army!"

The General laughed: "Bravo! You're still playing your role. What are your weapons for?" The Pasha pointed to the scissors, corkscrew, and candle-snuffers. However, the boy was not ready to step out of character. His mouth still contained countless numbers of stories.

Better than any German boy's knowledge of his home city's chronicles, Thar knew all the legends and tall tales of Jerusalem's past. He was even consciously aware of his weapons' symbolism. He quickly answered, taking no time to reflect: "These are the 'Scorpions' wherewith the King of Judah pinched and pulled the ears of the people whenever they didn't want to obey him. I'm Gideon, the hero who hails from my ancestors of Manasseh. I borrowed your warhorse because I needed your steed to carry out my vendetta against the Midianites, the sons of Abraham. Your mount is too fat and has no endurance; so for this reason, I turned around and brought him back to you. I appreciate your loaning him to me, but he is really of no use."

Thar repeated his salute. The Pasha laughed so hard that tears streamed from his eyes. Without question, he seemed to be a very congenial gentleman. Mustafa hurriedly capitalized on the Pasha's good mood and seeming willingness to forego punishment of his son: "For what he has done, please forgive him! He's exceptionally bright and greatly gifted." Yet his words accomplished just the opposite of what he had intended. In a flash, the face of the Pasha became serious again, almost threatening: "No speech of yours can gain the boy's pardon. Your son has doubly transgressed—against me and against him over there." The Pasha pointed towards the man from Ain Kahrim: "For this, he deserves punishment instead of a reward; and by my own hand, I will personally administer