

Chapter VIII: State Of Persion And Restoration Of The Monarchy.--Part I.

Of The State Of Persia After The Restoration Of The Monarchy

By Artaxerxes.

Whenever Tacitus indulges himself in those beautiful episodes, in which he relates some domestic transaction of the Germans or of the Parthians, his principal object is to relieve the attention of the reader from a uniform scene of vice and misery. From the reign of Augustus to the time of Alexander Severus, the enemies of Rome were in her bosom--the tyrants and the soldiers; and her prosperity had a very distant and feeble interest in the revolutions that might happen beyond the Rhine and the Euphrates. But when the military order had levelled, in wild anarchy, the power of the prince, the laws of the senate, and even the discipline of the camp, the barbarians of the North and of the East, who had long hovered on the frontier, boldly attacked the provinces of a declining monarchy. Their vexatious inroads were changed into formidable irruptions, and, after a long vicissitude of mutual calamities, many tribes of the victorious invaders established themselves in the provinces of the Roman Empire. To obtain a clearer knowledge of these great events, we shall endeavor to form a previous idea of the character, forces, and designs of those nations who avenged the cause of Hannibal and Mithridates.

In the more early ages of the world, whilst the forest that covered Europe afforded a retreat to a few wandering savages, the inhabitants

of Asia were already collected into populous cities, and reduced under extensive empires, the seat of the arts, of luxury, and of despotism. The Assyrians reigned over the East, [1] till the sceptre of Ninus and Semiramis dropped from the hands of their enervated successors. The Medes and the Babylonians divided their power, and were themselves swallowed up in the monarchy of the Persians, whose arms could not be confined within the narrow limits of Asia. Followed, as it is said, by two millions of men, Xerxes, the descendant of Cyrus, invaded Greece.

Thirty thousand soldiers, under the command of Alexander, the son of Philip, who was intrusted by the Greeks with their glory and revenge, were sufficient to subdue Persia. The princes of the house of Seleucus usurped and lost the Macedonian command over the East. About the same time, that, by an ignominious treaty, they resigned to the Romans the country on this side Mount Taurus, they were driven by the Parthians, [1001] an obscure horde of Scythian origin, from all the provinces of Upper Asia. The formidable power of the Parthians, which spread from India to the frontiers of Syria, was in its turn subverted by Ardshir, or Artaxerxes; the founder of a new dynasty, which, under the name of Sassanides, governed Persia till the invasion of the Arabs. This great revolution, whose fatal influence was soon experienced by the Romans, happened in the fourth year of Alexander Severus, two hundred and twenty-six years after the Christian era. [2] [201]

[Footnote 1: An ancient chronologist, quoted by Valleius Paterculus, (l. i. c. 6,) observes, that the Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, and the

Macedonians, reigned over Asia one thousand nine hundred and ninety-five years, from the accession of Ninus to the defeat of Antiochus by the Romans. As the latter of these great events happened 289 years before Christ, the former may be placed 2184 years before the same aera. The Astronomical Observations, found at Babylon, by Alexander, went fifty years higher.]

[Footnote 1001: The Parthians were a tribe of the Indo-Germanic branch which dwelt on the south-east of the Caspian, and belonged to the same race as the Getae, the Massagetae, and other nations, confounded by the ancients under the vague denomination of Scythians. Klaproth, *Tableaux Hist. d l'Asie*, p. 40. Strabo (p. 747) calls the Parthians Carduchi, i.e., the inhabitants of Curdistan.--M.]

[Footnote 2: In the five hundred and thirty-eighth year of the aera of Seleucus. See Agathias, l. ii. p. 63. This great event (such is the carelessness of the Orientals) is placed by Euty chius as high as the tenth year of Commodus, and by Moses of Chorene as low as the reign of Philip. Ammianus Marcellinus has so servilely copied (xxiii. 6) his ancient materials, which are indeed very good, that he describes the family of the Arsacides as still seated on the Persian throne in the middle of the fourth century.]

[Footnote 201: The Persian History, if the poetry of the Shah Nameh, the Book of Kings, may deserve that name mentions four dynasties from the earliest ages to the invasion of the Saracens. The Shah Nameh was

composed with the view of perpetuating the remains of the original Persian records or traditions which had survived the Saracenic invasion. The task was undertaken by the poet Dukiki, and afterwards, under the patronage of Mahmood of Ghazni, completed by Ferdusi. The first of these dynasties is that of Kaiomors, as Sir W. Jones observes, the dark and fabulous period; the second, that of the Kaianian, the heroic and poetical, in which the earned have discovered some curious, and imagined some fanciful, analogies with the Jewish, the Greek, and the Roman accounts of the eastern world. See, on the Shah Nameh, Translation by Goerres, with Von Hammer's Review, Vienna Jahrbuch von Lit. 17, 75, 77. Malcolm's Persia, 8vo. ed. i. 503. Macan's Preface to his Critical Edition of the Shah Nameh. On the early Persian History, a very sensible abstract of various opinions in Malcolm's Hist. of Persian.--M.]

Artaxerxes had served with great reputation in the armies of Artaban, the last king of the Parthians, and it appears that he was driven into exile and rebellion by royal ingratitude, the customary reward for superior merit. His birth was obscure, and the obscurity equally gave room to the aspersions of his enemies, and the flattery of his adherents. If we credit the scandal of the former, Artaxerxes sprang from the illegitimate commerce of a tanner's wife with a common soldier. [3] The latter represent him as descended from a branch of the ancient kings of Persian, though time and misfortune had gradually reduced his ancestors to the humble station of private citizens. [4] As the lineal heir of the monarchy, he asserted his right to the throne, and challenged the noble task of delivering the Persians from the oppression

under which they groaned above five centuries since the death of Darius. The Parthians were defeated in three great battles. [401] In the last of these their king Artaban was slain, and the spirit of the nation was forever broken. [5] The authority of Artaxerxes was solemnly acknowledged in a great assembly held at Balch in Khorasan. [501] Two younger branches of the royal house of Arsaces were confounded among the prostrate satraps. A third, more mindful of ancient grandeur than of present necessity, attempted to retire, with a numerous train of vessels, towards their kinsman, the king of Armenia; but this little army of deserters was intercepted, and cut off, by the vigilance of the conqueror, [6] who boldly assumed the double diadem, and the title of King of Kings, which had been enjoyed by his predecessor. But these pompous titles, instead of gratifying the vanity of the Persian, served only to admonish him of his duty, and to inflame in his soul and should the ambition of restoring in their full splendor, the religion and empire of Cyrus.

[Footnote 3: The tanner's name was Babec; the soldier's, Sassan: from the former Artaxerxes obtained the surname of Babegan, from the latter all his descendants have been styled Sassanides.]

[Footnote 4: D'Herbelot, Bibliotheque Orientale, Ardshir.]

[Footnote 401: In the plain of Hoormuz, the son of Babek was hailed in the field with the proud title of Shahan Shah, king of kings--a name ever since assumed by the sovereigns of Persia. Malcolm, i. 71.--M.]

[Footnote 5: Dion Cassius, l. lxxx. Herodian, l. vi. p. 207.

Abulpharagins Dynast. p. 80.]

[Footnote 501: See the Persian account of the rise of Ardeschir Babegan in Malcolm l 69.--M.]

[Footnote 6: See Moses Chorenensis, l. ii. c. 65--71.]

I. During the long servitude of Persia under the Macedonian and the Parthian yoke, the nations of Europe and Asia had mutually adopted and corrupted each other's superstitions. The Arsacides, indeed, practised the worship of the Magi; but they disgraced and polluted it with a various mixture of foreign idolatry. [601] The memory of Zoroaster, the ancient prophet and philosopher of the Persians, [7] was still revered in the East; but the obsolete and mysterious language, in which the Zendavesta was composed, [8] opened a field of dispute to seventy sects, who variously explained the fundamental doctrines of their religion, and were all indifferently devided by a crowd of infidels, who rejected the divine mission and miracles of the prophet. To suppress the idolaters, reunite the schismatics, and confute the unbelievers, by the infallible decision of a general council, the pious Artaxerxes summoned the Magi from all parts of his dominions. These priests, who had so long sighed in contempt and obscurity obeyed the welcome summons; and, on the appointed day, appeared, to the number of about eighty thousand. But as

the debates of so tumultuous an assembly could not have been directed by the authority of reason, or influenced by the art of policy, the Persian synod was reduced, by successive operations, to forty thousand, to four thousand, to four hundred, to forty, and at last to seven Magi, the most respected for their learning and piety. One of these, Erdaviraph, a young but holy prelate, received from the hands of his brethren three cups of soporiferous wine. He drank them off, and instantly fell into a long and profound sleep. As soon as he waked, he related to the king and to the believing multitude, his journey to heaven, and his intimate conferences with the Deity. Every doubt was silenced by this supernatural evidence; and the articles of the faith of Zoroaster were fixed with equal authority and precision. [9] A short delineation of that celebrated system will be found useful, not only to display the character of the Persian nation, but to illustrate many of their most important transactions, both in peace and war, with the Roman empire. [10]

[Footnote 601: Silvestre de Sacy (*Antiquites de la Perse*) had proved the neglect of the Zoroastrian religion under the Parthian kings.--M.]

[Footnote 7: Hyde and Prideaux, working up the Persian legends and their own conjectures into a very agreeable story, represent Zoroaster as a contemporary of Darius Hystaspes. But it is sufficient to observe, that the Greek writers, who lived almost in the age of Darius, agree in placing the aera of Zoroaster many hundred, or even thousand, years before their own time. The judicious criticisms of Mr. Moyle perceived,

and maintained against his uncle, Dr. Prideaux, the antiquity of the Persian prophet. See his work, vol. ii. * Note: There are three leading theories concerning the age of Zoroaster: 1. That which assigns him to an age of great and almost indefinite antiquity--it is that of Moyle, adopted by Gibbon, Volney, *Recherches sur l'Histoire*, ii. 2. Rhode, also, (*die Heilige Sage*, &c.,) in a very ingenious and ably-developed theory, throws the Bactrian prophet far back into antiquity 2. Foucher, (*Mem. de l'Acad.* xxvii. 253,) Tychsen, (*in Com. Soc. Gott.* ii. 112), Heeren, (*Ideen.* i. 459,) and recently Holty, identify the Gushtasp of the Persian mythological history with Cyaxares the First, the king of the Medes, and consider the religion to be Median in its origin. M. Guizot considers this opinion most probable, note in loc. 3. Hyde, Prideaux, Anquetil du Perron, Kleuker, Herder, Goerres, (*Mythen-Geschichte*,) Von Hammer. (*Wien. Jahrbuch*, vol. ix.,) Malcolm, (i. 528,) De Guigniaut, (*Relig. de l'Antiq.* 2d part, vol. iii.,) Klaproth, (*Tableaux de l'Asie*, p. 21,) make Gushtasp Darius Hystaspes, and Zoroaster his contemporary. The silence of Herodotus appears the great objection to this theory. Some writers, as M. Foucher (resting, as M. Guizot observes, on the doubtful authority of Pliny,) make more than one Zoroaster, and so attempt to reconcile the conflicting theories.-- M.]

[Footnote 8: That ancient idiom was called the Zend. The language of the commentary, the Pehlvi, though much more modern, has ceased many ages ago to be a living tongue. This fact alone (if it is allowed as authentic) sufficiently warrants the antiquity of those writings which M

d'Anquetil has brought into Europe, and translated into French. * Note: Zend signifies life, living. The word means, either the collection of the canonical books of the followers of Zoroaster, or the language itself in which they are written. They are the books that contain the word of life whether the language was originally called Zend, or whether it was so called from the contents of the books. Avesta means word, oracle, revelation: this term is not the title of a particular work, but of the collection of the books of Zoroaster, as the revelation of Ormuzd. This collection is sometimes called Zendavesta, sometimes briefly Zend. The Zend was the ancient language of Media, as is proved by its affinity with the dialects of Armenia and Georgia; it was already a dead language under the Arsacides in the country which was the scene of the events recorded in the Zendavesta. Some critics, among others Richardson and Sir W. Jones, have called in question the antiquity of these books. The former pretended that Zend had never been a written or spoken language, but had been invented in the later times by the Magi, for the purposes of their art; but Kleuker, in the dissertations which he added to those of Anquetil and the Abbe Foucher, has proved that the Zend was a living and spoken language.--G. Sir W. Jones appears to have abandoned his doubts, on discovering the affinity between the Zend and the Sanskrit. Since the time of Kleuker, this question has been investigated by many learned scholars. Sir W. Jones, Leyden, (*Asiat. Research.* x. 283,) and Mr. Erskine, (*Bombay Trans.* ii. 299,) consider it a derivative from the Sanskrit. The antiquity of the Zendavesta has likewise been asserted by Rask, the great Danish linguist, who, according to Malcolm, brought back from the East fresh transcripts and

additions to those published by Anquetil. According to Rask, the Zend and Sanskrit are sister dialects; the one the parent of the Persian, the other of the Indian family of languages.--G. and M.----But the subject is more satisfactorily illustrated in Bopp's comparative Grammar of the Sanscrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, Gothic, and German languages. Berlin. 1833-5. According to Bopp, the Zend is, in some respects, of a more remarkable structure than the Sanskrit. Parts of the Zendavesta have been published in the original, by M. Bournouf, at Paris, and M. Ol. shausen, in Hamburg.--M.----The Pehlvi was the language of the countries bordering on Assyria, and probably of Assyria itself. Pehlvi signifies valor, heroism; the Pehlvi, therefore, was the language of the ancient heroes and kings of Persia, the valiant. (Mr. Erskine prefers the derivation from Pehla, a border.--M.) It contains a number of Aramaic roots. Anquetil considered it formed from the Zend. Kleuker does not adopt this opinion. The Pehlvi, he says, is much more flowing, and less overcharged with vowels, than the Zend. The books of Zoroaster, first written in Zend, were afterwards translated into Pehlvi and Parsi. The Pehlvi had fallen into disuse under the dynasty of the Sassanides, but the learned still wrote it. The Parsi, the dialect of Pars or Farristan, was then prevailing dialect. Kleuker, Anhang zum Zend Avesta, 2, ii. part i. p. 158, part ii. 31.--G.----Mr. Erskine (Bombay Transactions) considers the existing Zendavesta to have been compiled in the time of Ardeschir Babegan.--M.]

[Footnote 9: Hyde de Religione veterum Pers. c. 21.]

[Footnote 10: I have principally drawn this account from the Zendavesta of M. d'Anquetil, and the Sadder, subjoined to Dr. Hyde's treatise. It must, however, be confessed, that the studied obscurity of a prophet, the figurative style of the East, and the deceitful medium of a French or Latin version may have betrayed us into error and heresy, in this abridgment of Persian theology. * Note: It is to be regretted that Gibbon followed the post-Mahometan Sadder of Hyde.--M.]

The great and fundamental article of the system, was the celebrated doctrine of the two principles; a bold and injudicious attempt of Eastern philosophy to reconcile the existence of moral and physical evil with the attributes of a beneficent Creator and Governor of the world. The first and original Being, in whom, or by whom, the universe exists, is denominated in the writings of Zoroaster, Time without bounds; [1001] but it must be confessed, that this infinite substance seems rather a metaphysical, abstraction of the mind, than a real object endowed with self-consciousness, or possessed of moral perfections. From either the blind or the intelligent operation of this infinite Time, which bears but too near an affinity with the chaos of the Greeks, the two secondary but active principles of the universe, were from all eternity produced, Ormusd and Ahriman, each of them possessed of the powers of creation, but each disposed, by his invariable nature, to exercise them with different designs. [1002] The principle of good is eternally absorbed in light; the principle of evil eternally buried in darkness. The wise benevolence of Ormusd formed man capable of virtue, and abundantly provided his fair habitation with the materials of happiness. By

his vigilant providence, the motion of the planets, the order of the seasons, and the temperate mixture of the elements, are preserved. But the malice of Ahriman has long since pierced Ormusd's egg; or, in other words, has violated the harmony of his works. Since that fatal eruption, the most minute articles of good and evil are intimately intermingled and agitated together; the rankest poisons spring up amidst the most salutary plants; deluges, earthquakes, and conflagrations attest the conflict of Nature, and the little world of man is perpetually shaken by vice and misfortune. Whilst the rest of human kind are led away captives in the chains of their infernal enemy, the faithful Persian alone reserves his religious adoration for his friend and protector Ormusd, and fights under his banner of light, in the full confidence that he shall, in the last day, share the glory of his triumph. At that decisive period, the enlightened wisdom of goodness will render the power of Ormusd superior to the furious malice of his rival. Ahriman and his followers, disarmed and subdued, will sink into their native darkness; and virtue will maintain the eternal peace and harmony of the universe.

[11] [1101]

[Footnote 1001: Zeruane Akerene, so translated by Anquetil and Kleuker. There is a dissertation of Foucher on this subject, Mem. de l'Acad. des Inscr. t. xxix. According to Bohlen (das alte Indien) it is the Sanskrit Sarvan Akaranam, the Uncreated Whole; or, according to Fred. Schlegel, Sarvan Akharyam the Uncreate Indivisible.--M.]

[Footnote 1002: This is an error. Ahriman was not forced by his invariable

nature to do evil; the Zendavesta expressly recognizes (see the Izeschne) that he was born good, that in his origin he was light; envy rendered him evil; he became jealous of the power and attributes of Ormuzd; then light was changed into darkness, and Ahriman was precipitated into the abyss. See the Abridgment of the Doctrine of the Ancient Persians, by Anquetil, c. ii Section 2.--G.]

[Footnote 11: The modern Parsees (and in some degree the Sadder) exalt Ormuzd into the first and omnipotent cause, whilst they degrade Ahriman into an inferior but rebellious spirit. Their desire of pleasing the Mahometans may have contributed to refine their theological systems.]

[Footnote 1101: According to the Zendavesta, Ahriman will not be annihilated or precipitated forever into darkness: at the resurrection of the dead he will be entirely defeated by Ormuzd, his power will be destroyed, his kingdom overthrown to its foundations, he will himself be purified in torrents of melting metal; he will change his heart and his will, become holy, heavenly establish in his dominions the law and word of Ormuzd, unite himself with him in everlasting friendship, and both will sing hymns in honor of the Great Eternal. See Anquetil's Abridgment. Kleuker, Anhang part iii. p 85, 36; and the Izeschne, one of the books of the Zendavesta. According to the Sadder Bun-Dehesch, a more modern work, Ahriman is to be annihilated: but this is contrary to the text itself of the Zendavesta, and to the idea its author gives of the kingdom of Eternity, after the twelve thousand years assigned to the contest between Good and Evil.--G.]