

Chapter LI: Conquests By The Arabs.--Part II.

After the defeat of Cadesia, a country intersected by rivers and canals might have opposed an insuperable barrier to the victorious cavalry; and the walls of Ctesiphon or Madayn, which had resisted the battering-rams of the Romans, would not have yielded to the darts of the Saracens. But the flying Persians were overcome by the belief, that the last day of their religion and empire was at hand; the strongest posts were abandoned by treachery or cowardice; and the king, with a part of his family and treasures, escaped to Holwan at the foot of the Median hills. In the third month after the battle, Said, the lieutenant of Omar, passed the Tigris without opposition; the capital was taken by assault; and the disorderly resistance of the people gave a keener edge to the sabres of the Moslems, who shouted with religious transport, "This is the white palace of Chosroes; this is the promise of the apostle of God!" The naked robbers of the desert were suddenly enriched beyond the measure of their hope or knowledge. Each chamber revealed a new treasure secreted with art, or ostentatiously displayed; the gold and silver, the various wardrobes and precious furniture, surpassed (says Abulfeda) the estimate of fancy or numbers; and another historian defines the untold and almost infinite mass, by the fabulous computation of three thousands of thousands of thousands of pieces of gold. Some minute though curious facts represent the contrast of riches and ignorance. From the remote islands of the Indian Ocean a large provision of camphire had been imported, which is employed with a mixture of wax to illuminate the palaces of the East. Strangers to the name and properties of that

odoriferous gum, the Saracens, mistaking it for salt, mingled the camphire in their bread, and were astonished at the bitterness of the taste. One of the apartments of the palace was decorated with a carpet of silk, sixty cubits in length, and as many in breadth: a paradise or garden was depicted on the ground: the flowers, fruits, and shrubs, were imitated by the figures of the gold embroidery, and the colors of the precious stones; and the ample square was encircled by a variegated and verdant border. The Arabian general persuaded his soldiers to relinquish their claim, in the reasonable hope that the eyes of the caliph would be delighted with the splendid workmanship of nature and industry. Regardless of the merit of art, and the pomp of royalty, the rigid Omar divided the prize among his brethren of Medina: the picture was destroyed; but such was the intrinsic value of the materials, that the share of Ali alone was sold for twenty thousand drams. A mule that carried away the tiara and cuirass, the belt and bracelets of Chosroes, was overtaken by the pursuers; the gorgeous trophy was presented to the commander of the faithful; and the gravest of the companions condescended to smile when they beheld the white beard, the hairy arms, and uncouth figure of the veteran, who was invested with the spoils of the Great King. The sack of Ctesiphon was followed by its desertion and gradual decay. The Saracens disliked the air and situation of the place, and Omar was advised by his general to remove the seat of government to the western side of the Euphrates. In every age, the foundation and ruin of the Assyrian cities has been easy and rapid: the country is destitute of stone and timber; and the most solid structures are composed of bricks baked in the sun, and joined by a cement of the native bitumen.

The name of Cufa describes a habitation of reeds and earth; but the importance of the new capital was supported by the numbers, wealth, and spirit, of a colony of veterans; and their licentiousness was indulged by the wisest caliphs, who were apprehensive of provoking the revolt of a hundred thousand swords: "Ye men of Cufa," said Ali, who solicited their aid, "you have been always conspicuous by your valor. You conquered the Persian king, and scattered his forces, till you had taken possession of his inheritance." This mighty conquest was achieved by the battles of Jalula and Nehavend. After the loss of the former, Yezdegerd fled from Holwan, and concealed his shame and despair in the mountains of Farsistan, from whence Cyrus had descended with his equal and valiant companions. The courage of the nation survived that of the monarch: among the hills to the south of Ecbatana or Hamadan, one hundred and fifty thousand Persians made a third and final stand for their religion and country; and the decisive battle of Nehavend was styled by the Arabs the victory of victories. If it be true that the flying general of the Persians was stopped and overtaken in a crowd of mules and camels laden with honey, the incident, however slight and singular, will denote the luxurious impediments of an Oriental army.

The geography of Persia is darkly delineated by the Greeks and Latins; but the most illustrious of her cities appear to be more ancient than the invasion of the Arabs. By the reduction of Hamadan and Ispahan, of Caswin, Tauris, and Rei, they gradually approached the shores of the Caspian Sea: and the orators of Mecca might applaud the success and spirit of the faithful, who had already lost sight of the northern bear,

and had almost transcended the bounds of the habitable world. Again, turning towards the West and the Roman empire, they repassed the Tigris over the bridge of Mosul, and, in the captive provinces of Armenia and Mesopotamia, embraced their victorious brethren of the Syrian army. From the palace of Madayn their Eastern progress was not less rapid or extensive. They advanced along the Tigris and the Gulf; penetrated through the passes of the mountains into the valley of Estachar or Persepolis, and profaned the last sanctuary of the Magian empire. The grandson of Chosroes was nearly surprised among the falling columns and mutilated figures; a sad emblem of the past and present fortune of Persia: he fled with accelerated haste over the desert of Kirman, implored the aid of the warlike Segestans, and sought an humble refuge on the verge of the Turkish and Chinese power. But a victorious army is insensible of fatigue: the Arabs divided their forces in the pursuit of a timorous enemy; and the caliph Othman promised the government of Chorasán to the first general who should enter that large and populous country, the kingdom of the ancient Bactrians. The condition was accepted; the prize was deserved; the standard of Mahomet was planted on the walls of Herat, Merou, and Balch; and the successful leader neither halted nor reposed till his foaming cavalry had tasted the waters of the Oxus. In the public anarchy, the independent governors of the cities and castles obtained their separate capitulations: the terms were granted or imposed by the esteem, the prudence, or the compassion, of the victors; and a simple profession of faith established the distinction between a brother and a slave. After a noble defence, Harmozan, the prince or satrap of Ahwaz and Susa, was compelled to surrender his person and his

state to the discretion of the caliph; and their interview exhibits a portrait of the Arabian manners. In the presence, and by the command, of Omar, the gay Barbarian was despoiled of his silken robes embroidered with gold, and of his tiara bedecked with rubies and emeralds: "Are you now sensible," said the conqueror to his naked captive--"are you now sensible of the judgment of God, and of the different rewards of infidelity and obedience?" "Alas!" replied Harmozan, "I feel them too deeply. In the days of our common ignorance, we fought with the weapons of the flesh, and my nation was superior. God was then neuter: since he has espoused your quarrel, you have subverted our kingdom and religion." Oppressed by this painful dialogue, the Persian complained of intolerable thirst, but discovered some apprehension lest he should be killed whilst he was drinking a cup of water. "Be of good courage," said the caliph; "your life is safe till you have drunk this water:" the crafty satrap accepted the assurance, and instantly dashed the vase against the ground. Omar would have avenged the deceit, but his companions represented the sanctity of an oath; and the speedy conversion of Harmozan entitled him not only to a free pardon, but even to a stipend of two thousand pieces of gold. The administration of Persia was regulated by an actual survey of the people, the cattle, and the fruits of the earth; and this monument, which attests the vigilance of the caliphs, might have instructed the philosophers of every age.

The flight of Yezdegerd had carried him beyond the Oxus, and as far as the Jaxartes, two rivers of ancient and modern renown, which descend

from the mountains of India towards the Caspian Sea. He was hospitably entertained by Tarkhan, prince of Fargana, a fertile province on the Jaxartes: the king of Samarcand, with the Turkish tribes of Sogdiana and Scythia, were moved by the lamentations and promises of the fallen monarch; and he solicited, by a suppliant embassy, the more solid and powerful friendship of the emperor of China. The virtuous Taitson, the first of the dynasty of the Tang may be justly compared with the Antonines of Rome: his people enjoyed the blessings of prosperity and peace; and his dominion was acknowledged by forty-four hordes of the Barbarians of Tartary. His last garrisons of Cashgar and Khoten maintained a frequent intercourse with their neighbors of the Jaxartes and Oxus; a recent colony of Persians had introduced into China the astronomy of the Magi; and Taitson might be alarmed by the rapid progress and dangerous vicinity of the Arabs. The influence, and perhaps the supplies, of China revived the hopes of Yezdegerd and the zeal of the worshippers of fire; and he returned with an army of Turks to conquer the inheritance of his fathers. The fortunate Moslems, without unsheathing their swords, were the spectators of his ruin and death. The grandson of Chosroes was betrayed by his servant, insulted by the seditious inhabitants of Merou, and oppressed, defeated, and pursued by his Barbarian allies. He reached the banks of a river, and offered his rings and bracelets for an instant passage in a miller's boat. Ignorant or insensible of royal distress, the rustic replied, that four drams of silver were the daily profit of his mill, and that he would not suspend his work unless the loss were repaid. In this moment of hesitation and delay, the last of the Sassanian kings was overtaken and slaughtered by

the Turkish cavalry, in the nineteenth year of his unhappy reign. His son Firuz, an humble client of the Chinese emperor, accepted the station of captain of his guards; and the Magian worship was long preserved by a colony of loyal exiles in the province of Bucharria. His grandson inherited the regal name; but after a faint and fruitless enterprise, he returned to China, and ended his days in the palace of Sigan. The male line of the Sassanides was extinct; but the female captives, the daughters of Persia, were given to the conquerors in servitude, or marriage; and the race of the caliphs and imams was ennobled by the blood of their royal mothers.

After the fall of the Persian kingdom, the River Oxus divided the territories of the Saracens and of the Turks. This narrow boundary was soon overleaped by the spirit of the Arabs; the governors of Chorasana extended their successive inroads; and one of their triumphs was adorned with the buskin of a Turkish queen, which she dropped in her precipitate flight beyond the hills of Bochara. But the final conquest of Transoxiana, as well as of Spain, was reserved for the glorious reign of the inactive Walid; and the name of Catibah, the camel driver, declares the origin and merit of his successful lieutenant. While one of his colleagues displayed the first Mahometan banner on the banks of the Indus, the spacious regions between the Oxus, the Jaxartes, and the Caspian Sea, were reduced by the arms of Catibah to the obedience of the prophet and of the caliph. A tribute of two millions of pieces of gold was imposed on the infidels; their idols were burnt or broken; the Mussulman chief pronounced a sermon in the new mosch of Carizme; after

several battles, the Turkish hordes were driven back to the desert; and the emperors of China solicited the friendship of the victorious Arabs. To their industry, the prosperity of the province, the Sogdiana of the ancients, may in a great measure be ascribed; but the advantages of the soil and climate had been understood and cultivated since the reign of the Macedonian kings. Before the invasion of the Saracens, Carizme, Bochara, and Samarcand were rich and populous under the yoke of the shepherds of the north. These cities were surrounded with a double wall; and the exterior fortification, of a larger circumference, enclosed the fields and gardens of the adjacent district. The mutual wants of India and Europe were supplied by the diligence of the Sogdian merchants; and the inestimable art of transforming linen into paper has been diffused from the manufacture of Samarcand over the western world.

II. No sooner had Abubeker restored the unity of faith and government, than he despatched a circular letter to the Arabian tribes. "In the name of the most merciful God, to the rest of the true believers. Health and happiness, and the mercy and blessing of God, be upon you. I praise the most high God, and I pray for his prophet Mahomet. This is to acquaint you, that I intend to send the true believers into Syria to take it out of the hands of the infidels. And I would have you know, that the fighting for religion is an act of obedience to God." His messengers returned with the tidings of pious and martial ardor which they had kindled in every province; and the camp of Medina was successively filled with the intrepid bands of the Saracens, who panted for action, complained of the heat of the season and the scarcity of provisions,

and accused with impatient murmurs the delays of the caliph. As soon as their numbers were complete, Abubeker ascended the hill, reviewed the men, the horses, and the arms, and poured forth a fervent prayer for the success of their undertaking. In person, and on foot, he accompanied the first day's march; and when the blushing leaders attempted to dismount, the caliph removed their scruples by a declaration, that those who rode, and those who walked, in the service of religion, were equally meritorious. His instructions to the chiefs of the Syrian army were inspired by the warlike fanaticism which advances to seize, and affects to despise, the objects of earthly ambition. "Remember," said the successor of the prophet, "that you are always in the presence of God, on the verge of death, in the assurance of judgment, and the hope of paradise. Avoid injustice and oppression; consult with your brethren, and study to preserve the love and confidence of your troops. When you fight the battles of the Lord, acquit yourselves like men, without turning your backs; but let not your victory be stained with the blood of women or children. Destroy no palm-trees, nor burn any fields of corn. Cut down no fruit-trees, nor do any mischief to cattle, only such as you kill to eat. When you make any covenant or article, stand to it, and be as good as your word. As you go on, you will find some religious persons who live retired in monasteries, and propose to themselves to serve God that way: let them alone, and neither kill them nor destroy their monasteries: And you will find another sort of people, that belong to the synagogue of Satan, who have shaven crowns; be sure you cleave their skulls, and give them no quarter till they either turn Mahometans or pay tribute." All profane or frivolous conversation, all dangerous

recollection of ancient quarrels, was severely prohibited among the Arabs: in the tumult of a camp, the exercises of religion were assiduously practised; and the intervals of action were employed in prayer, meditation, and the study of the Koran. The abuse, or even the use, of wine was chastised by fourscore strokes on the soles of the feet, and in the fervor of their primitive zeal, many secret sinners revealed their fault, and solicited their punishment. After some hesitation, the command of the Syrian army was delegated to Abu Obeidah, one of the fugitives of Mecca, and companions of Mahomet; whose zeal and devotion was assuaged, without being abated, by the singular mildness and benevolence of his temper. But in all the emergencies of war, the soldiers demanded the superior genius of Caled; and whoever might be the choice of the prince, the Sword of God was both in fact and fame the foremost leader of the Saracens. He obeyed without reluctance; he was consulted without jealousy; and such was the spirit of the man, or rather of the times, that Caled professed his readiness to serve under the banner of the faith, though it were in the hands of a child or an enemy. Glory, and riches, and dominion, were indeed promised to the victorious Mussulman; but he was carefully instructed, that if the goods of this life were his only incitement, they likewise would be his only reward.