the splendid reign of Alp Arslân, the lover of letters and science, around whose throne stood twelve hundred princes and two hundred thousand soldiers,[1] and whose magnanimity could eclipse the victory which brought a Roman emperor captive to his feet? "You who have seen the story of Alp Arslân exalted to heaven, come to Merv and see it buried in the dust," was his epitaph. But a true central sun of this court was the world-famed vizier, Nizâm-ul-Mulk, a Persian, — the oracle and patron of religion and science, and the defender of justice and humanity for thirty years;[2] whose beneficence, it was said, extended from Jerusalem to Samarkand, so that in that whole vast empire there was no scholar, no student, no devotee, whom his munificent care did not reach.[3] The same rare genius directed the illustrious reign of the next Seljûrk prince, Mâlik, the Charlemagne of Asia, and fell a victim to court intrigues at its close. "The palace of Mâlik," says Gibbon, "resounded with the songs of a hundred poets." The accumulated errors of centuries were set aside by a new astronomical era, the crown of the science of that time. Order and security prevailed throughout Iran; and no less universal was the zeal of all classes in matters intellectual, industrial, and social.

The struggle of old propensities in these Turanic kings with the civilizing power of Iran was illustrated in the last of the Seljûrks, who riding intoxicated at the head of his army, shouting the verses of Firdûsî, was hewn down and slain. Hûlâgû himself,[4] who broke in pieces this wonderful Turkish dynasty with his northern hordes, sent the greatest astronomer, metaphysician, and physician of his time, Nassir-ed-Dîn of Tûs, as his ambassador, and set that scientist, with four others, to construct an observatory at Damascus. When he destroyed the library of the As-

[1] Abûl Ghazî, pt. iii. chaps. xiv. xix.
[2] Kremer: *Herrsch. d. Gesch.*, p. 438.
[3] Gibbon: *Roman Empire*, chap. lvii.
[4] Braun: *Gemälde*, etc., p. 224.

sassins at Alamut, he preserved the Koranic literature, and all works of higher science; only burning up the theology of the sect without mercy. His son and successor Abâkâ, equally famous as a ruler and as a conqueror, who so unlearned his Mongol habits that his armies trod out no grain-field on the march and destroyed no fruit,[1] yet died of his passion for strong drink,[2] owed the glory of his reign to his Persian ministers; one of whom, Alâ-ed-Dîn, poet as well as statesman, after long service, was sent into exile for his inability to gratify the avarice of his master, and for his honorable self-respect.[3] The next of the line was Arghûn, a Buddhist relic-worshipper and semi-Shamanist, following sorcerers to procure long life; who nevertheless knew that his viziers must be men honored in the land and acquainted with its culture, and chose such without regard to race or religion. One of these was Saad, a Persian Jew, hailed by his co-religionists as Messiah, and lauded by the native poets; famous for good works, but a target for court conspiracies, like the rest. In this reign was learned the financial lesson of the terrible results of paper extension, and the return to gold was celebrated by sayings of wisdom which modern experience cannot surpass.[4]

Last comes Ghâzân, signalizing his conversion from peaceful Buddhism or Mongol Deism to Islam by a bloody persecution of all other religions,[5] then converted again into the greatest of the Asiatic Khans, mainly through his minister, Reshîd-ed-Dîn, a Persian Jew of Hamadan, whose name, "the straight path of religion," was fitly given, and partly through his own universal genius, — at once a mechanician and artisan in all kinds, a linguist, patron of all sciences, and centre of all literatures, missions, and correspondence with courts, from India to

[1] Hammer, i. 272. [2] Ibid., p. 313. [3] Ibid., 307.
[4] Ibid., pp. 384, 385. [5] Hammer-Purgstall, ii. 28–30.

Rome, Germany, and France. This is the testimony of the historians of his time.[1] His gold coins were the standard of purity, even in Byzantium.[2] His public works were innumerable; his example stimulated historical studies into their highest bloom. But his great vizier, who had given thirteen sons to his service, and directed the State for a longer period than any other Persian minister, came at last, in a later reign, to share the fate of such greatness, being put to death with extreme cruelty, amidst curses on his head as a Jew.[3] Ghâzân even emulated his ancestor, Genghis, and the great traditional law-giver of Persia, Ardeshîr, and Nûshirvân, by the compilation of a new code of laws from the old native institutes, mingled with Mongol rules and customs, under the influence at least of the more cultivated of his subjects.[4] By this code were punished the false weigher, the bribed judge, the lawyer who took pay from both sides, the tradesman who sold the same goods twice over. "One hour of justice," it announces, "is worth seventy hours of prayer." Order is secured, intemperance punished, towns made responsible for the robbery of travellers; debts outlawed in thirty years; private houses protected against the trains of travelling officials of all sorts, who had freely quartered themselves on the people before. All firmans and all contracts must be registered; a Domesday Book carefully regulates taxation; mail-couriers are everywhere under strict discipline; army-pay is fixed by law; slaves are converted into soldiers, and captive bondsmen paid for their labor. Archives are provided for records, copies whereof are engraved on brass or stone. There are laws against usury, which, being resisted, led to the further threat to abolish existing debts entirely. Redeemers of wild land are exempted from taxation. And a new calen-

[1] (*Reschid-ed-din and Wassaf.*) Hammer-Purgstall, ii. 148–160.
[2] Ibid., ii. 169. [3] Ibid., ii. 260. [4] Ibid., ii. 155–174.

dar is drawn up by the astronomers, dating from Ghâzân's era of 1302. According to Abûl Ghazî Khan, he was the first of the Mongol princes who accepted Islam, and compiled, through his great scholars, a true and full history of the Mongols for the benefit of posterity; from which work, with others, Abûl Ghazî himself derived the materials for his own most valuable history.[1] All this is creditable to the follower of the great Genghis after the interval of nearly a century. But by this time the Mongols are well absorbed into the native population; and while Persian literature and thought continues at its high-water mark, the energies of the race of Hûlagû are exhausted. The last of the line was himself a poet and patron of poets, yet the weakest of rulers.[2]

The Mongols in Iran remind us of a vast nebulosity, susceptible of being moulded and condensed into transitional systems by the play of forces that long preceded and long outlived them. And this was prefigured in the really great man by whom they were originally set in motion and inspired with unity, and to whom every branch of their tree goes back. Certainly their first barbarous campaigns, and the establishment of their thrones put an end to the intellectual life of Asia, for the moment. The great cities, like Bokhara and Samarkand, though rising again into splendor, became seats of a narrower culture, more casuistical, theological, and mystic, than before. The Mongolians, it is said, in explanation of this, destroyed the Iranian population of the towns, and with them the really persistent and gifted classes, both in practical and mental life.[3] But it was not long before the infusion of more vital blood quickened much that had lain dead, and brought into play what needed only a more favorable soil. In fact, the Iranian population was effeminate, compared

[1] See p. 30 of translation (1730). [2] Hammer-Purgstall, ii. 270, 311, 312.
[3] Vambéry: *Bokhara*, p. 138.

with these hardy nomads.[1] It is to be remembered that the invasions were for the most part undertaken as military reprisals, or in that spirit of destruction which silenced all higher aims. Genghis was led to invade Iran by the assassination of four hundred spies whom he had sent disguised as merchants to Otrar, by Sultan Mohammed of Khahrezm (1214).[2] His devastation of the older cities was horrible beyond description; but after all he stands in history for much more than a destroyer. Genghis Khan was a legislator. His laws, indeed, though called unchangeable, were suited to concentrate nomadic tribes upon conquests, not to serve as statutes of a fixed empire. Born nearly six hundred years after Mahomet, he was the father of political changes almost as tremendous, and seems to have held himself under commission from a God of gods. At his coronation, according to the tradition, a Shaman of the family of his wife, commonly called But Tangrî, "the Image of God," and believed to have relations with the Divinity, uttered a revelation bidding him change his name from Tamûzin to Genghis (or the Greatest One).[3] The great Mongol historian speaks of him at death as ascending to "Tangrî his Father," after pronouncing such noble sentiments to his wife and sons as these: "Live in unity,—this endures forever; the body is born and dies. The soul of every deed is this: to be fulfilled when it is undertaken. His soul is impregnable who holds firmly to his promise. Shape thyself in some degree according to the wishes of others, that you may live in harmony with many." His life, as given by the same authority, is a strange mixture of magnanimity and treachery, of faithfulness to his wife and his early friends, and violent passions prompting to the murder of his own brothers. The truth of his record is as horrible a page of bloodshed and destruction as history

[1] Vambéry: *Bokhara*, p. 140.
[2] Ibid., p. 117.
[3] Abûl Ghazi, p. 78.

can show,[1] giving ample ground for the symbolic legend that he was born with a piece of blood-clot in his hand.[2] His laws or prohibitions[3] are against liars, enchanters, thieves, disbelievers in nomadic superstitions, inhospitality, titles, and artificial honors. He allows no precedence but that of merit, freely consorts with his chiefs, and opens his treasury to the whole mass of his followers. His toleration is complete. His armies are disciplined by the great hunts, of immemorial use in Northern Asia. Men are punished for crime with whipping or death; and one of their chief duties is, to be unwashed. Blind obedience to the Khan is the religion of the State, and to point with his finger is to confer an office. All women are at his disposal. The succession is hereditary, though to be ratified by the assembly of chiefs, Kuriltai. Ibn Batûta speaks of a law that this assembly shall have the right to depose the Khan if he violate the unchangeable Code of Genghis.[4] "Be quiet among yourselves, but swoop on the foe like a hungry hawk." Nothing is more emphasized than the need of unity in families, probably because nothing was more constantly violated. Hence the story of his parable to his sons of the bundle of rods, which could be broken only by separating them; and of the two serpents, one with many tails and one head, and the other with one tail and many heads. All religions are equally good and equally subservient to his will; and all, whether Uighur, Confucian, Buddhist, or Nestorian, bent before it. While that strange master of the world was divining with the shoulder-blade of a ram, traders of tribes and priests of all religions were dwelling at his court in Kara-Korum, amidst the art and riches of all nations from Paris to Cathay.[5] Here was a prestige of unity which promised

[1] Hutton: *Central Asia*, chap. iv.
[2] De Mailla.
[3] Hutton: Hammer-Purgstall, i. 22, 23, 36–40.
[4] Ibn Batûta, chap. xiii.
[5] Hutton: *Central Asia*, pp. 93–95.

some enduring hold on the vast empire which remembered the all-embracing sway of Cyrus, of Alexander, of Nûshirvân, of the first successors of the Prophet. The Mongol soon exchanged his free Deism for the sway of Mahomet. Ghâzân was the first to establish Islam again as the religion of Persia, and the Mongol empire, absorbed into the intellectual genius of Persia, was broken in pieces by her spirit of local independence. Here also the conqueror yielded to the conquered, and their "one world, one Khan," in less than a century had melted into fragments before the Sun of Iran. Like children who, when their passionate impulses are satisfied, turn directly to the very opposite extreme of good-nature and good-will, or, we may say, oscillate between destructive and constructive instincts, so the Mongols turned swiftly from their rage to rebuild the deserts they had made.

Ogotai, the son of Genghis, took the great astronomer, geographer, and statesman of China, Yeliu Chutsai, — a Tartar by origin, a Chinese by education, — to reorganize the empire. This great man "stood like a providence between oppressor and oppressed;" taught the rude autocrat the Platonic rule to set fit men to all functions, whether of making porcelain or making laws; and by his medical skill saved countless lives. "We are all travellers here: let us try to live in the memory of men." "We cannot return from the grave: let us lay up our treasures in the people's hearts." In the midst of these horrible days of blood, the great vizier is seen opening the treasures to the poor. He declared that he won his victories by putting each soldier in his proper place and work, and sending dullards to the rear.[1] His troops were really better than those of the old empires they invaded. It was the simple fare, the self-reliance, the content in barest necessities (the bottle of milk, the earthen pot and tent, the horse's blood

[1] Howorth: *History of Mongols*, i. 108.

in drought), that gave them the advantage over luxurious mercenaries. They had Greek fire, could mine, and wore better armor than their foes.[1] Their obstinacy in besieging towns was invincible. In spite of his intense Islamism, Timûr was a great devotee of the code of Genghis, and upheld it against the Mahometan priesthood, and followed Genghis in his military organization of the conquered nations. The civil organization was not less perfect.[2]

Then followed a new wave from the same great chaotic ocean. Genghis reappeared in his more terrible political descendant, Timûr the "Lame," to reconstruct the vanishing unity of the Mougol world, and sway with the same crude forces the sword of destruction and the sovereignty of despotic law. From his throne in Samarkand this Titan of the fourteenth century called into being the greatest empire ever seen in Asia, and seemed to extinguish in his one resistless will the immemorial antagonism of Iran and Turan. Well might the survival of the old native mythology of the land give his infancy the white hair of sovereign age, which had miraculouly marked the birth of the father of heroes, the mighty Zâl. Resembling Genghis in his barbarian instincts, in cruelty, self-indulgence, lust, and absolutely unlimited ambition, he possessed other qualities which grew out of a closer acquaintance than his ancestors had with the wealth and culture of Iran. The legend that he vowed in his childhood, under prescience of greatness, to destroy no human life, points to Buddhistic influence.[3] He had other great instincts of justice and truth, and a munificence past all parallel, doing nothing save on the most prodigious scale, like an incarnate omnipotence. He was a patron of science and poetry, himself fond of the society of the scholars and artists of his day, an author as well as a legislator of no mean order. He is believed to

[1] Howorth, ii. 62. Also Marco Polo.
[2] Vámbéry, p. 173.
[3] Markham: *History of Persia*, p. 185.

have improved or altered the game of chess. His works of religious art in Persia and India were magnificent, and his vast system of colonization filled the great cities of eastern Asia, especially Samarkand, with the splendor of all arts and sciences known to the West.[1] Such a spectacle was never seen before or since, — camps of ten thousand tents, gorgeous and sweeping, surrounded by shops, trades, and all the luxuries of the world; of a splendor like that of the "Arabian Nights;" athletics, jousts, elephant-games.[2] Yet he is himself described as plunged in sensual excesses and savage caprices, and his court as a scene of wild wassail, in which the ambassadors of European States were expected to do their part. He was acquainted with several languages, and his Institutes (modelled largely on those of Genghis) were said to have been wise and strong enough to secure such order throughout his dominions that "a child might carry a purse of gold everywhere without fear." The merciless destroyer of cities and generations, the petty tyrant who was said to have governed his thirty-six sons with the whip, was seen in far other capacities also: preserving the mosques, scholars, and hospitals of Bagdad from injury by his troops; discoursing compliments with the poet Hâfiz; building a mosque of forty-eight columns, with ninety trained elephants; administering penalties for crime with perfect impartiality towards rich and poor; and in his Institutes commanding generous treatment of suppliant or fallen foes, and following the best of the old Sassanian rules concerning taxation and improvement of lands.[3]

Every great event was by this son of destruction perpetuated by some magnificent architectural monument, to construct which artists were colonized from Persia, Syria,

[1] See Hutton's full account of his court, from the Spanish ambassadors in the beginning of the sixteenth century. *Central Asia*, chap. vi.

[2] Vambéry, p. 202.

[3] Markham: *History of Persia*, p. 201.

and the furthest West. Splendid, indeed, they were, with arabesques of blue and gold and glazed mosaic tiles reflecting back the sun. This annihilator of cities brought the "weavers of Damascus, the cotton-manufacturers of Aleppo, cloth-workers of Angora, goldsmiths of Turkey and Georgia, — clever artisans of every description, — to make Samarkand the emporium of Asiatic trade." This was certainly less of the nature of destruction than of that redistribution of matter in which progress consists.[1]

Again, Timûr was a Turk, and put down the Mongol to lift up the Turk, — institutions, language, and all; and his Turkish revival was intellectual, especially from a religious and mystical point of view. Scholarship was patronized. Colleges in great numbers still excite the wonder of visitors to Bokhara. In fact, the rude Turk established "the most brilliant empire known to the history of Islam, except that of the Omeyyads in Spain and that of the first Abbasides in Arabistan." Djâmî, master of sciences; Suhailî, translator of Pilpay; Alî Shîr Amîr, defender of Turkish nationality against all traducers, and builder of hundreds of benevolent edifices, and above all the writer of the charming and wonderful picture of Oriental beliefs and record of noble thoughts, the Dabistân, — were some of the personal glories of this reign.

Again the empire of the nomad, reared in a day, disappears from the scene at nightfall, like the tents from which it came. With Timûr's death begin division and disintegration, and the Uzbeg Tartars and Turcomans sweep over the land. But Iran is not dead. Bârber, a child of Genghis's race, but of such higher type as the Mongol could not but win from her traditions, the pupil of the Shâh-Nâmeh as well as the Koran,[2] famous for many noble traits, though of the old race of destroying angels, — begins the great Mogul empire in eastern Iran and northern

[1] Gibbon, chap. lxv.

[2] Hutton, chap. vii.

India; while Ismaîl, descendant of an Imâm or Sufi saint, sets up a native kingdom in Persia, in the name of Alî and the Shîites, and expels the Uzbegs from Khorassan; and with this Soffarian dynasty Persia enters on a new career. In 1600 A.D., if Mainwaring's account of Sir Anthony Sherley's mission to the court of Abbâs the Great is to be relied on, notwithstanding many of the old barbarities of absolute power, the country was still kept in such order by that monarch that "a man could travel through it with only a rod in his hand, without any hurt; and the people were very friendly to strangers," — a contrast to his barbarous treatment of the Turks in Syria and elsewhere.[1] The swift revival of the Ottoman power of Asia, under Mahomet I. and Amurath, after its utter overthrow by Tamerlane, is evidence of the recuperative force of Moslem civilization, if of nothing else.

So emerge the old traditions, the ineradicable forces of the native genius, above the wastes of the Mongol deluge. One of the strongest evidences of this is in the admiration with which, in spite of his barbarities, the life and deeds of the terrible Timûr have been regarded by his Mussulman subjects.

The work, which passes under the name of "Timûr's Life and Institutes," purporting to have been written by himself, is not mentioned by his earliest biographer, Sherîf-ed-Dîn, who wrote at the command of his grandson from journals kept by the great Khan's secretaries. It was found in manuscript in a library in Yemen; and the intense devotion to Islam ascribed in it to the great conqueror points strongly to a late origin. It proves, at all events, the impression left by his career on the Mussulman nations. We should e careful, therefore, not to trust too implicitly the ideal icture it draws of his virtues, though many of his most uel actions in war are not concealed; and the apparent

[1] *The Three Brothers* (London, 1828), pp. 87, 33-40, 67.

moral contradictions are such as everywhere strike us in Mongol character.

The style greatly resembles that of the old Assyrian kings, except in the stronger emphasis on humanity and justice. His invasions are usually justified on the same ground that such and such a nation "rebelled,"—in other words, did not accept his assumption of divine right to rule the world. Against unbelievers, especially Sunnites,[1] he had a general commission in full to ravage and destroy. He held it his duty to invade every oppressed land and every land divided by heresy.[2] It was the cruel oppression of the Uzbeg dynasties towards "the Faithful" that roused him to punish them.[3] He claims to have been stirred to conquest by a holy Mussulman father,[4] who predicts his glory, directs his steps, and with commonplaces of ethics and religion purifies his political measures. The burden of his autobiography is: "I acted according to my word; I regarded the rich as my brethren, the poor as my children.[5] I caused no one to suffer for the guilt of another. Those who had done me injury in battle, when they sued for mercy I received with kindness, and forgot their evil courses, and so treated them that suspicion was plucked out of their hearts. I delivered the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor.[6] Khodaudaud once said to me, 'Forgive thine enemy; but if he then return to enmity, turn him over to the justice of the Almighty.'[7] I associated with the good and learned; chose out the prophet and the teacher, the philosopher and the historian (not poets). I gained their affections, and entreated their prayers and their support.[8] I appointed intelligent reporters in every kingdom to keep me informed of the conduct of the troop and of the people.[9] I gave rewards and wages to deservi

[1] *Institutes*, trans., p. 359.
[2] Ibid., p. 335.
[3] Ibid., p. 31.
[4] Ibid., p. 374.
[5] Ibid., pp. 169, 345.
[6] Ibid., p. 165.
[7] Ibid., p. 327.
[8] Ibid., pp. 167, 325.
[9] Ibid., p. 169.

soldiers in their old age.[1] I gathered merchants and travellers about me.[2] I pardoned all criminals for just offences.[3] Ministers are not to take bribes or speak evil; they shall do good to the man who doeth evil to them, that he may return to friendship.[4] Every one's house should be safe from intrusion by troops; every one have fair trial before punishment,[5] and be protected in his labor." [6]

The extreme minuteness ascribed to his organization, especially of the army, must be founded on historical traditions. His devotion to religion and high morality, whether authentic or not, is certainly intended to be unexceptionable. He draws omens from the Koran for every act of his life; hears voices proclaiming his coming triumph; seeks in all things to know the will of God; [7] weeps in prayer; [8] declares that victory is not in numbers, but from above; [9] that every empire not established in morality and religion shall pass away; [10] that offices in an earthly empire are symbols of those in the kingdom of God.[11] He resolves to be a king through liberality and generosity and tenderness towards those that have separated themselves from him.[12]

Here then is a connection between the conquests of the Mongols and the progress of civilization, which Gibbon, in his brilliant summaries of the external facts, does not seem to have divined. Here, too, is full confirmation of the principle of Universal Religion, — that the apparent overturns of civilization by barbarian hordes at the intervals of ancient history are really steps of construction. The vitality of ideas and culture is so invincible, that their touch transforms the rudest swarms, the fiercest instincts of human nature, into ministers of natural vigor and stimu-

[1] *Institutes*, p. 277.
[2] Ibid., p. 215.
[3] Ibid., p. 219.
[4] Ibid., pp. 260, 261, 285.
[5] Ibid., pp. 347, 349.
[6] Ibid., p. 213.
[7] Ibid., pp. 19, 73, 89, 131.
[8] Ibid., p. 51.
[9] Ibid., p. 7.
[10] Ibid., p. 175.
[11] Ibid., p. 201.
[12] Ibid., pp. 55, 65.

lants of progress. We cannot do better than quote a striking statement of the facts from Mr. Howorth's excellent "History of the Mongols." Speaking of the results of their conquests, he says: "An afflatus of architectural energy spread over the world almost directly after the Mongol conquests. Poetry and the arts began rapidly to revive. The same thing occurred in Persia under the Ilkhans, the heirs and successors of Hûlâgû, and in southern Russia, at Serai, under the successors of Batû Khan. While in China it would be difficult to point to any epoch of Asiatic history which could rival the vigorous life and rejuvenescence which mark the reign of the great Khubilai Khan. . . .' As the Mongols controlled the communications between these various centres, and protected them effectually so long as they remained powerful, eastern and western nations were brought together, and reacted on one another. I have no doubt that the art of printing, the mariner's compass, fire-arms, and a great many details of social life were not discovered in Europe, but imported by means of Mongol influence from the farthest East." [1]

[1] Howorth: *History of the Mongols*, i. xi.

II.

THE SHÂH-NÂMEH; OR, BOOK OF KINGS.

THE SHÂH-NÂMEH; OR, BOOK OF KINGS.

IF we may measure the worth of a national epos by the duration of its elements in the love and faith of the nation, and their reach over the phases of its consciousness, no poem of this nature can be compared with the Shâh-Nâmeh of Firdûsî. The names and legends of its earlier portion belong to the oldest religious mythology of Iran, in its main features outlined two thousand years before this consummate artist wrought their heroic interpretation into epical completeness. And he assures us, with an earnestness to which the highest authority must be conceded upon every ground, that he has faithfully adhered to their spirit in the poetic form which they have assumed under his hand.[1] The people of Iran received this superb national apotheosis by a follower of Islam as the Athenians received the Jove of Phidias or the Pallas of the Acropolis, — as a real reproduction of their religious and political traditions. To the spaces of time covered by its colossal plan the Homeric period is a vanishing point. It reaches from the earliest to the latest hour of Iranian life, from the first mythic kings to the last Sassanide and Tartar and Arab dynasties which succeeded.

From the gardens of Mahmûd of Ghaznî, the poet of the tenth Christian century overlooks this immeasurable caravan of the ages, and summons every dear majestic form, as it passes, to bear witness to the heroic ideal, and

[1] That these legends existed substantially as he gives them, in the fifth century (five hundred years before), is clear from the Armenian historian, Moses of Chorene. That the same is true of earlier ages, is equally certain from the testimony of the *Avesta*. And all we can learn in other ways concerning the beliefs of the obscure periods of Persian history, as well as the voice of the nation itself, confirms the conclusion.

to live anew as a fit constituent of an immortal whole. Far from being, like the Iliad, the fixed picture of an early period transmitted through later social structures, the work of Firdûsî was his own creation out of materials which for a thousand years of national vicissitude had been accumulating without structural relations. For ten centuries of national decay they had lived only in the popular heart; had then been gathered in some rude shape, not now to be discovered, only to be left again without protection for hundreds of years more; finally to be combined with later traditions into one flaming constellation, in which all their ethnical phenomena assume the unity of significance which comes only by the idealism of art.[1]

The Shâh-Nâmeh is none the less a true history of ancient Iran for the impossibility of connecting its earlier heroic sagas with known personages and events. It is the immortal soul of a process whose material form has returned to the dust, and whose details may well be spared in view of the ideal essence so tenderly drawn forth and sacredly guarded by time. The stages of history are of value not as that endless succession of details to which the sensational school would reduce them, but as steps in the evolution of eternal principles, as advancing interpretations of the same all-embracing laws of life recognized successively upon higher and higher planes of human experience. Thus every successive outlook symbolizes a higher in the ascents of spirit, and leads on to it by a necessity which at once resides in the unity of human nature and assures its full expansion. It is the function

[1] The greater part of the Shâh-Nâmeh, derived from the Chodâi-Nâmeh, was wholly unacquainted with actual history. It is thoroughly mythical till it comes down to the Sassanian period, and even there it shows a great paucity of historical material, giving mainly ceremonies and sentences; but as it approaches the later kings of that dynasty, it shows acquaintance with both events and persons. Nöldeke says that no better connected account of this dynasty has been given than the Chodâi-Nâmeh (p. xix). The Turan wars are believed by Oppert to relate to Media as the scene of the epic, and as inhabited by Turanian tribes.

of the ideal in history, of what are fitly called the fine arts, to fix and transmit these interpretations of Nature in their pure essence, by a fine elimination of all perishable and confusing details, for the joy and solace and noble culture of mankind. In this sense the Shâh-Nâmeh of Firdûsî will be found to contain the whole history of the Iranian mind.

The attempts of ingenious scholars[1] to identify its heroes with Median and Scythian kings, as known to us through Herodotus and other Greek writers, or with the great Achæmenidan line, are based on slight resemblances, on arbitrary etymologies, and on features proceeding from general laws in the structure of the national legend. With the exception of the latest personages of the epos, inclusive of Iskander, the theory has no valid application, and is in fact set aside by the obvious derivation of the Shâh-Nâmeh names from those which figure in the old Avesta, and especially in the Vendidâd Sâde; and by the fact that legends not found in the Avesta were certainly based on equally antique traditions of the same cycle. Their connection with the past is ideal. It is explicable only by the special correspondence of the Iranian mind in the order of human progress—as we have endeavored to demonstrate — to the advent of conscious Will, to the entrance of personality among the all-mastering and all-confounding forces, natural and social, which preceded it. Iranian life transformed abstract ideas into persons; turned fatalities into living choice and the dualism of the will; put positive men and women in place of oppressive uniformities of mind or sense. Therefore its psychological history is not a record of saints, like Hindu idealism, nor of mechanical producers, like Chinese positivism; but a tale of heroes, a Shâh-Nâmeh, semi-myth, semi-history, yet altogether human and personal. The epic of Firdûsî is

[1] See Gobineau: *Histoire des Perses.* Malcolm: *History of Persia.*

its climax, its supreme type. It involved the full Iranian process, by which every god and every elemental force in old Aryan mythology became a man. The Shâh-Nâmeh names are sons of wondrous lineage. In the Avesta these names were developments of the older Aryan conception of struggle between the Nature-powers of good and evil, light and darkness. The social and political relations of the Iranian tribes with each other and with neighboring ruder tribes multiplied these figures and raised them into distinct ethical types, represented in family traditions, rhymed histories, natural songs; held together by the national interpretation of the strife of natural forces as a moral and spiritual — that is, a human, not a merely elemental — fact. With the growth of the Zoroastrian cultus, historical persons and events were brought under the more positively religious aspect of Dualism, while the ethical and heroic meanings remained on the whole unchanged. Finally, the glorious nationality of the Sassanidæ, and its tragic struggle with the Arab and the Roman, transfused this religious tradition with the pathos of actual historic life. Thus one dominant consciousness of a profound truth, wrought over and over again into fresh forms of experience, has given soul and shape to the great epic of Persia. The sublime idealization of which Firdûsî was the outcome was the unbroken evolution of twenty centuries.

Long before the Sassanian revival, probably long before the great Achæmenidan days, these antique personalities had been the inspiration and solace of the national heart; and in that social disintegration which lasted through the Seleucide and Parthian dynasties, they were the refuge of the vigorous tribes of eastern Iran, which never came wholly under the power of the invaders. In them these tribes cherished the true Iranian ideal of individual Will, — Titanic forces of personal independence and moral ardor, forever fated to noble strife. It was a splendid task which

their discouraged instinct was pursuing, in a purely ideal sphere, when all support of national unity and promise was apparently withdrawn forever; and it has been their reward to be immortalized in the tribute of that very race and religion that seemed to have swept them into oblivion; for Firdûsî was a Mahometan, like the Ghaznevide monarch who chose him for this sublime function, but the Persian ideals had overswept the poet's soul. A thousand years had passed since these isolated Eastern tribes had passed under Arab and Tartar dynasties. Through all these centuries they had gained the ascendency over their masters to higher cultures; and at last it was for one mighty birth to show all coming ages how they had seized upon these rude Centaurs, inspired them with splendid ideals, and by their own life in death lifted them into an immortal sphere. Such the message of the Shâh-Nâmeh to mankind.

Before proceeding to a fuller statement of what we have called the dominant idea of this epic, some account must be given of its immediate origin.

It is the merit of the Sassanian kings to have brought the national legends together, probably the oldest of them out of eastern Iran, and compiled a kind of prose chronicle, known under the different titles of "Basitan-Nâmeh" (Ancient Book), and "Khodâi-Nâmeh" (Book of Kings or Gods).[1] The real depositaries of these local or tribal traditions were, however, the proprietary chiefs (*Dihkânân*), — a territorial aristocracy who preserved their social pride and influence through all the vicissitudes of the nation down to the latest caliphs. Their title reflects the spirit of the Avesta, for Dihkân has the sense of cultivator as well as chronicler. Firdûsî tells us that it was from this class of persons that he derived the best information, and his references to them are frequent, as of final authority.[2]

[1] Mohl: *Shâh-Nâmeh*, i. x.

[2] Ibid., xlvii.

Among these chiefs we have reported the name of Dânishvâr as compiler of the Basitan-Nâmeh by command of the last Sassanide king (A. D. 652). It would be safe to ascribe a larger share in the collection of such materials to the literary culture of the earlier reign of Nûshirvân in the sixth century. Like all other productions of that period, they were undoubtedly in the Pehlevî tongue; but they must have been translated in great degree out of the Bactrian and other old Persian dialects. Firdûsî may well have used some of these older sources in preparing his versions in the Pârsî, inasmuch as the poet's home was in eastern Iran, and the literary and religious treasures of that portion of the conquered country would be most likely to have escaped the destructive fanaticism of Islam.

It is recorded that Omar was at first inclined to spare the heroic chronicles, whose religion was as free from idolatry as that of the Koran. But his puritanism was so shocked by the myth of the Sîmurgh and the white-haired child nursed in her nest, and perhaps by the fire-cult of the heroes, that he consigned the whole mass of national legends to destruction, as dangerous to the true faith.[1] However this may be, it is certain that here, as in their whole history, the Arab marauders were led by a purpose higher than they knew, and that their desert creed was warmed and expanded by the rich lore of Iran. They became the apt pupils of this ripe culture. We find their historians busy from the first in keeping alive the poetic traditions of their subjects, while naturally doing their best to suppress all remembrance of the glorious Achæmenidan kings. They treated the old mythic wars of Iran and Turan as genuine history, adding only the well-known names and events of recent times. The rulers of eastern

[1] It is believed that the denunciation of insane legends in the *Koran* (xxxi. 6) refers to these myths.

Iran were of Turkish, not Arab, origin.[1] They sprang from braziers and pewterers, slaves and robbers. They hated the caliphate of Bagdad, and were spurred by jealousy of its glory to an interest in literature as well as to the lust of conquest.

The native religion and culture took refuge with those warlike Soffarides, Samanides, Ghaznevides, whose conversion to Islam brought the ardor but not the intolerance of the Arab. Three hundred years after the conquest, Jakûb Ben Leis, a Samanide, or perhaps a king half a century later, has the Basitan-Nâmeh turned from Pehlevî into Pârsî, and sets his court-poet Dakîkî to putting it into rhyme; but the poet dies and the work stops. Twenty years later, at the end of the tenth Christian century, the famous Mahmûd of Ghaznî resumes the undertaking, and after immense labors in gathering the materials places them in the hands of one to whose poetic genius, by common consent, they of right belonged. The name of this king of Oriental poets was Abûl Kâsim Mansûr; but he is known everywhere by the title given him by Mahmûd, which has never been disputed, — Firdûsî, the Singer of Paradise.

We must pause a moment to note the splendid vitality of this Iranian imagination as shown in the history of the Shâh-Nâmeh. We see it bringing to its feet the Arab conquerors, and making the very princes of hated Turan its zealous students and apostles. We see it lifting on its wings to the highest sphere of fame the devout worshipper of a Semitic God. The exclusiveness of creed faded before its gospel of heroic humanity. The rude chiefs who were struggling for the prize of the caliphate found themselves obliged to pay court to native genius, and appeal to its resources against the foreign dynasty enthroned at Bagdad in the name of Mahomet himself, their common

[1] Von Schack: *Heldensagen d. Firdûsî*, i. 35.

lord. Every feature of this marvellous epic suggested universality of thought and faith.

Firdûsî was himself a devout Shîite, or follower of Alî, holding firmly to the Persian side of the great schism which divided Islam. Mahmûd, on the other hand, was a Sunnite. This fact may in part explain the misunderstanding which imbittered the poet's relations with his royal patron, and brought the lord of many kingdoms to the loss of a glory that was worth them all. In his whole record Firdûsî stands as the æsthetic ideal of the nation. In all respects he is a genuine Persian. Possessed from childhood with the great idea which his life's work rounded into full expression, he began collecting and versifying the heroic traditions around him with the dawning of his poetic sense. It is recorded of his boyhood, that the decayed condition of a very ancient dike near his home in Khorassan so moved his sorrow for the lot of his native province that he formed the resolution to rebuild it as soon as he could earn the means, and never forgot his vow. By his thirty-sixth year his epic ideal, growing in secret, like a young plant whose organs unfold one by one, had taken distinct form. But though snatches of the work had already attracted attention in Khorassan to what was going on, it was not till considerably advanced in life that Firdûsî was called to take his due place among the lights of the court of Mahmûd, whose interest had been awakened by the pathetic story of Rustem and Isfendiyâr. His own first love had been the tale of Ferîdûn and Zohâk, completest type of the epic warfare of good and evil; and he tells us that upon Mahmûd's birthday he had a vision, in which the whole world seemed in commotion, and a divine voice promised that all sorrow should pass away before this new Ferîdûn, the delight of mankind. In a kind of poetic tournament, Firdûsî so commended himself above all the court bards that it became evident that the long-

desired epic-master had appeared. When the laureate Ansarî, — who was wont, we are told, to have his favorite verses copied in gold letters within arabesque borders, — sitting among his companions in verse, beheld the country dress of the provincial rhymer, he is said to have cried out, "Only poets, good brother, have admission to this society." "I too am a poet," answered Firdûsî, and entered at once on an extempore contest, in which he amazed these literary pontiffs by his familiarity with the national legend and his brilliant improvisation.[1] A beautiful residence in the royal gardens, adorned with noble works of art, was placed at his disposal, with all the literary treasures of the State, and the poet's genius guarded against intrusion as a sacred trust. As the work proceeded, portions were read to Mahmûd from time to time amidst festal dance and song. The delighted monarch promised a piece of gold for every distich, and would have paid it down as it became due, but for Firdûsî's preference to receive the whole at once at the close of his work, and devote it to fulfilling the dream of his youth.

But the king of bards was not exempt from the irony which ever pursues ideal aims. Such exceptional honors could not escape envy, and Mahmûd seems to have been open to intriguing tongues, like all of his class. We are amazed, however, to hear that the poet was even permitted to suffer for lack of food, as well as made to feel his dependence by studied insults. Yet, strange to say, he seems to have been recognized during all this time as the greatest of poets, and the praises of the growing Shâh-Nâmeh were on every tongue. Even in the latest portion of his work, that which celebrates the Sassanian line, he still sounds the trumpet for his royal patron. If there was really any ground in his external relations for the sorrowful tone which pervades his personal episodes, if the admired poet

[1] Von Hammer: *Geschichte d. schön. Redek. Persiens*, p. 51.

was in fact poor and neglected, it may be that the fault lay in habits of his own, for Mahmûd of Ghaznî was certainly a promoter of the arts. But a more probable key to the mystery may be found in suspicions as to his orthodoxy. The story, however, can hardly be credited, that he fell at Mahmûd's feet and denied the faith which he strenuously asserted in many passages of his poem. Even at the close of his life he reaffirmed the creed of Alî in indignant terms, denouncing as slanderers those who charged him with denying it. It is certain that the king distrusted him, alleging that his native Tûs was noted for its scepticism.[1] He who had brought all the piety of Islam to bear tribute to the hated fire-worshippers, and glorified the legends of unbelievers with the glow of a monotheism believed to be sacred to the Koran alone, who was awakening germs of comparative religion in the quiet ferment of Iranian, Semitic, and Tartar nationalities around him, may well have excited the religious jealousy of a Mahometan prince. Nor would it be strange if interested rivals should have produced a gradual alienation from the genius which could evoke to life all the national enthusiasm for a glorious past.

At all events, the life of the poet henceforth was a tragedy. The death of an idolized son added grief to disappointment.

"Beloved companion of my sorrowing years,
Why hast thou chosen another path than mine?
Is it to greet new friends, thou leavest me?
Wearied of life in youth, thou yieldest me its woes.
Blood dims my eyes; the world of light is his,
But there he will his father's place prepare.
Old age has come, no kindred soul remains;
Yet am I seen by one who for my coming yearns.
Alas! that he has passed, so young, without one brief farewell!"

The discouragements of his position, and a keen sense of solitude and of the lapse of life, explain the frequent

[1] Von Hammer, p. 52.

plaintive ejaculations and meditations which interrupt the heroic current of his song. He constantly recurs to the uncertainty of all tenures and the need of complete submission to the will of God. Thus in the poem of "Kai Khosrû's Return," he suddenly breaks forth: —

"I am poor, forsaken wholly, and my love of song is spent.
The roar of beast and lay of bird are both alike to me.
The cup of threescore years is drained; my thoughts are of the bier.
Ah! that the rose's perfume dies! Alas, the Persian word
Cuts like a sword! May it yet leave me time
To tell one Saga more from the glorious days of old,
To bear my name down when my life is done.
Then shall He save me there above, the Lord of sword and tongue."

At last the great task is done, and the bolt falls, striking the toiler to the earth. Mahmûd, alienated by intriguing courtiers, proves a niggard, and pays but a fraction of the promised reward. The outraged poet flings it away for a glass, burns his latest verses, puts on a dervish's robe, shakes the dust of Ghaznî from his feet, and departs, leaving the bitter satire which cuts off the monarch's share in an inheritance mightier far than the gold-heaps that poured from the broken idol of Somnauth. "If I plunged into the sea of Mahmûd's court and found no pearls, 't was the fault of my star; how could the sea be blamed? But my book was not writ for Mahmûd, 't is for Alî and the Prophet." Say rather for humanity, for immortality, O Poet! Well may the epos of honor, heroism, and love, the high tragedy of Nemesis, dispense with the coffer of a Ghaznevide king. The sense of royal ingratitude was not aggravated by experience of public neglect. As he wandered, like Dante, from court to court, pursued by vindictive demands for his person, he found everywhere sympathy and honor. Better still was the assurance of immortal fame. "I have filled the world with my praise; and when my breath departs, I shall not die."

But the wound was mortal. Returning at last to his early home, the old man heard a child repeat a line of his satire, and the distress it produced in his mind ended only in death. The legend says that the prince of Tûs, probably through fear of Mahmûd, refused to bury the heretic with religious honors; but being warned in a dream, in which he saw Firdûsî crowned in Paradise, he repented and paid the tribute due.[1]

We can hardly do justice to the self-respect of genius, or to the less honorable rage of offended pride, without quoting from the indignant response that thundered against the insults of an ignoble king. Firdûsî ascribes the conduct of Mahmûd to his willingness to lend his ear to malignant slanders, when he should have considered the debt which the poet's great work would lay upon mankind. A Mahmûd may despise it, but let him understand that this is to defy the bolts of heaven: —

"While the world endures, the wise shall love this song,
For all the mighty dead have heard its call to life;
Nor other claim, O King, could save thy name from death.
Long as the world endures, this shrine shall ne'er decay.
Long have I labored, poor and ill-esteemed,
And thou hast rudely broken faith with me at last.
I made the earth a paradise, and Persia lives again.
Hadst thou not had a miser's heart, my head were crowned with gold.
Had Mahmûd been a prince, my seat were at his side.
O rarely generous king, whose boon 's a glass of beer!
Shall a slave's son learn royalty? In Eden plant
A bitter root, and though the sweetest streams it drink,
Yet shall the bitterness infect its fruit for aye.
And thou, the charcoal-maker's son, art still black as thy coal.
When I before the great Judge stand, dust on my head, I 'll pray,
O Lord, burn thou his soul in flames, but robe my soul in light!"

Surely the poet had a streak of the savage in him; and the conscious dignity of his claim finds poor ending in this

1 Mohl: *Shâh-Nâmeh*, i. xliv.

revengeful mood. Or shall we find in his wrongs such justification of its scorn as the world has accorded to Dante for similar sentence on his foes?

It was his fate to die in the full sense of these wrongs. For when Mahmûd at last came to recognize them, and sent full payment with robes of honor to the sad old sufferer in his native town, the messengers are said to have met his funeral train passing from its gates. His daughter, stung like himself by years of injustice, proudly refused to receive the gift; but a sister, remembering the longings of his childhood, asked that it be expended in accomplishing the object to which he would have devoted it, had it been duly paid. So the ancient dike was restored with the price of his great sacrifice, and a caravansary erected in his name. But a grander bulwark and a sweeter hospice stand forever, of his spiritual building, for the heart of man.

The chronicler of heroes shared the destiny of his great Iranians, — a life-long struggle for ideal achievement, successful therein beyond all dream, but smitten by Ahriman's fiercest blows; a victory won, like Rustem's over Isfendiyâr, under terrible conditions; the destiny of Good to be first the victim of Evil, and to rise to euthanasy through tears and blood.

His persecution served one good purpose which should not be overlooked. It proves him to have been surrounded by powerful enemies, who would have sharply criticised every aberration from the traditions of Iran. That no such criticism has appeared, fully sustains his claim of entire fidelity to them. The Mussulman historian, writing a century after his death, and claiming to have consulted an immense list of authorities, recognizes Firdûsî as his best and fullest source.[1] And so it has been

[1] *Modjmel-al-Tewarikh.* Mohl: *Shâh-Nâmeh*, i. xlvii. Firdûsî's poem was written before the middle of the eleventh century (1020 A. D.). A century earlier, Tabari had written

ever since. None disputes his claim. His triumph has made good his prophecy, and it lies in the higher planes of thought. The romancers of later times, whose stupendous supernatural fictions turn the charge into a compliment, pronounce his simplicity tame, finding truth not in the imagination, but in unbridled fancy, but none the less confessing his greatness by imitating him when they have need. These romancers, beginning with Nizâmî, open a new school of poetry, which wholly sacrifices historical or traditional connection to dramatic interest, and paints with the gorgeous colors that have given currency to the telling word *persiflage*, which no one would apply to Firdûsî's simple and earnest speech. Still later, Semitic influences cover the great personalities of the epic with Biblical associations, genealogical and other, absurdly incongruous with their strictly Aryan character.

An epic is no mere compilation of narratives, woven into connected and poetic form. It is in literature the complete ideal of a nation, an epoch, a civilization; and its full literary personality, and every characteristic trait and tradition of the period and the people find in such a supreme resultant their natural place and meaning. Of those who regard the Iliad as one connected work, some suppose its central motive to be the personal relation of Achilles to the Greek chiefs; others find its pivotal point in the siege of Troy. But the epic significance of the Iliad turns on no personal life or historical event. That which brought the rhapsodies together, and made them for centuries the inspiration of the Greek mind, and through this endowed the human race to endless time, was their common fitness to embody the Greek ideal, the type of civili-

from the archives of Persia the most careful of histories of Islam, extending like the mythology of the Shâh-Nâmeh from the earliest to the latest times; but he was equally indefinite in making known his authorities with the great epic poet of traditional lore. Tabarî drew from the same sources. Masûdî's *Meadows of Gold* was another historical work of great value, which just preceded Firdûsî (943 A.D.).

zation which imprinted itself on every Greek nature. All the semi-historical or mythic personages which the national genius had created in the image of its own motive forces, and gradually made into real powers, flowed naturally to the hand of the poet, who was himself the fullest expression of that genius, and could bring out their ideal relations on a scale of national experience broad enough to give them room. Thus Achilles' wrath, Ulysses' wanderings, or the Siege of Troy, was but the setting for a crowded picture in which every form was equally a living force of Greek instinct. Hence the dramatic interest of the epos, the variety, sharpness, and consistency of its characters, which are nothing less than products of the continued play of typical ideas and qualities brought to their ideal form, their natural relations to each other and the whole Greek consciousness of existence, by the master genius of the race. The elaboration of these personal types by the ideal life of one race has lifted them into universal relations, the true sphere of the ideal, and made them immortal companions of man in the ages. Nor is the religious element in the old Greek nature less distinct in Homer than is the dramatic. For the epos is, as its name imports, the "word" of a civilization, — its full ideal speech, in which no genuine form of its genius can fail to find voice.

This representative fulness renders it possible to find, as the master-key of every epos, the dominant consciousness, or motive principle, of the civilization which produced it. It is of this supreme element that the epos is the consummate flower. This assures it a universal function, since only a profound human interest, a structural law of being, could control the special development of any race or epoch. In the Homeric epic this all-resolving idea is free individuality, — the buoyant play of intense will and passionate instinct under conditions of a divine Nemesis, representing, however, a national or public rather than a

personal authority, and less in the interest of morality than of loyalty to the Greek ideal of heroism. And this key to Homer is the key to the whole history of Greek civilization. Again, the master-motive of the "Divina Commedia" was that of mediæval Christianity, the idea of a world-judgment on the virtues and sins of men, conceived after the developed theology of ten centuries of Christian teaching, — an apotheosis of those heavens and hells which formed a constant Presence of overwhelming terrors and all-inspiring hopes. It is easy to imagine why this judgment-day of the ages, lifted to the throne of an epos, should have gathered every great personality, good or evil, past or present, into its tremendous symbolic circles. It was the culmination of a religion which had been the soul and the school of thirty generations. Here the free individuality of Homer is supplanted by a terrific machinery which grinds every living being into food for Almighty Wrath or Almighty Good-Will, — a Nemesis, representative not of the moral but of the theological law, and working in human bodies and souls, not according to their inherent relations, but as an autocratic external police for the future life. It is the triumph of prescription, of irresponsible despotism over the insignificance of human endeavor, and moreover charged to the full with those mad rivalries, jealousies, and hates which constituted the life of the Italian republics in Dante's day. Over it soar indeed the poet's moods of infinite tenderness for all that he loved and adored; but the wondrously human loves and hates are alike steeped in the fearful autocracy of a semi-barbarous religion. The soul is not here a hero, as in Homer, but even in its virtues and its joys the veriest slave.

The Shâh-Nâmeh turns on a higher motive than does either the Divina Commedia or the Iliad. It is more profoundly moral than the Greek epic, and more freely human

than the Italian. It represents the tragedy of human destiny and the irony that makes so large an element therein, in so far as these arise from the conflict of good and evil. And this conflict is conceived in a far deeper and more personal sense than as the war of Iran with Turan. The national element, still more the ethnological, is secondary, and enters into most of the narrative only in a remote and insignificant way. But through the whole and every part, — through the vicissitudes of Ferîdûn's career; the martyrdom of Iraj and of Siâvaksh; the heroic woes of Rustem; the contrasted qualities of such feminine ideals as Sudâbe, Rudâbe, Menîshe, and Tahmîne; the shame of Sâm for his half-heathen child and the love of the giant bird who supplies the lack of parental care; the love-adventures of the heroes; the bitter evils of circumstances woven out of blind hopes and malicious plots; the grievous fortunes of noble men in false positions, like Pirân; the untimely blights that fall from royal selfishness, like that of Gushtâsp, upon loyal and noble hearts; the passionate or subdued laments that close the sweetest human experiences, one after another, with confessions of the impermanence of earthly hopes and joys, yet ever with the grand comfort of simple trust in righteousness of the heroic stamp, — through all this infinite play of human feeling, whereof the wars with Turk and Div are but incidents, flows the strain of divine necessity that the good shall suffer for the evil; the stress of limitations and compulsions, which no precautions can fend off and no virtue escape, and only heroic will and pure reconciliation to infinite forces can meet and conquer. And when we add the gathered stores of moral and political philosophy which the Shâh-Nâmeh has heaped around the later kings in place of a legendary lore more suited to remoter times, we may venture to say that no grand principle of self-culture, Stoic or Christian, Aryan or Semitic, old or new, is wanting to this Bible of

the heroic Will, this sublime Valhalla of ideal lives. Never for one moment is there a failure of the grand motive, the serious tenor, the solemn consciousness of life's summons to self-sacrifice and moral loyalty. So through every phase of triumph and defeat, of cruel circumstance and irreparable harm, of tenderness and anguish, we hear the steady peal of retributory laws, so vast in their reach of ideal relation that their every stroke seems to tell upon the whole world, as belonging to them and to them only, — as if for all mankind there could be no other liberty than to obey and trust the law of duty, no other school for heroes, no other mastery of fate.

Nothing is more universal in scope, yet nothing so concentrated, as the personal life. What the inherited woes of Cecrops' line are made to teach so impressively in Greek tragedy is less clear or just as an expression of ethical inviolability than the working of evil thought and conduct within the criminal's soul, bearing fruit after its kind, and upon the innocent circle nearest his life. And this is the characteristic teaching of the Shâh-Nâmeh. The martyrdom of love and faith forever involved in evil-doing is here brought into closest relation with its producing cause; and the effect is heightened by the fearless realism which will not blink the sternest facts of experience. In these heroic ethics the compensatory happiness so commonly made the motive of virtue, the final arrangement of poetic justice held so essential to the modern novel or play, constructed to please an audience at the cost of tragic power, have no place. The stern problems are left, as life is wont to leave them, unsolved, save by faith in unseen values, and the unpledged reserves of help in the spiritual nature. The law of sacrifice is absolute, and its tragedy complete, because the full meaning of the struggle with Ahriman is accepted, while the resolution of evil into good is referred to the forces of character only. Upon a plane

higher than that of outward circumstance of any kind, the passion and despair which have found free utterance must be healed. Such is the uninterrupted movement of this infinitely varied oratorio of moral conflict, in which heroism and religion are one.

So sincere is its realism, that the frequent appeals of the poet to his readers to remember the vanity of all earthly hopes and to grieve over the fickleness of fortune, the admonitions in which his sorrowful legends end, — to seek consolation in God and a life to come, — although in strong contrast with the brave silence of the heroes themselves on these matters of sentiment and faith, do not fall upon us as mere didactic commonplaces. They seem only natural expressions of sympathy, like those of the chorus in the old Greek tragedies. This plaintive Jeremiah at least knows how to respect the robust manliness of his martyrs, and to make their very woes teach disinterested loyalty to the noble and the right.

The heroes of the Shâh-Nâmeh are thoroughly human; they give way to natural emotions, to pride, to anger, to despair, — sometimes to less pardonable passions. They are generally colossal champions of the flesh, as well as unconscious servants of the spirit, or Titanic powers of noble will. They represent the crude social conditions out of which their semi-mythic forms were evolved. All the more shall we admire the glow of moral grandeur that is kindled within them; for all that has been said of the substance of this epic can be fully justified, and its culmination in such ideals as Siâvaksh and Iraj lift us to those spiritual levels to which all ages aspire.

Since a scope so grandly human must cover all human history, the Shâh-Nâmeh opens with the earliest mythic rulers of mankind. It must show even in them the conflict with evil in nature and with blindness and brutality in man. In the Avesta there were cosmic forces, elementary

processes of creation. But the heroic legend wants them as human will, even in those earlier stages when man is scarcely above the level of the lower creation. Gayômard is here a king, happy but for Ahriman, whose son slays the prince Siâmek, but is slain in return by the latter's son Husheng. The avenger has nature on his side: her tigers, wolves, and birds unite with men and peris to punish the common foe. Following up his mission of destroying evil, Husheng aims a stone at a snake, which strikes another stone instead, and fire is struck forth. The Iranian flame-god here springs, as fire does in the Veda from bits of wood, out of the rock hurled against an evil power. Firdûsî sees a mystic connection here. "As the Arabs turned towards a stone in prayer, so our fathers turned to the fire."[1] Really, the substance of both beliefs is the same, — that a higher life than the crude elements resides in Nature and awaits the first bold contact of human motive and will. The next king, Tahmurath, evidently represents the stage of growing self-confidence, in which man begins to be a power over evil. He not only instructs men in weaving, and in taming wild beasts, but is specially gifted in controlling demons, and triumphantly rides Ahriman himself, in shape of a horse, around the world. He forces their secrets from them by stronger force of will, and fails only when he doubts his own power. Firdûsî's moral is ready: "O Heaven! thou liftest a man above the sky, only to cast him down at once under the earth!" But only by such strenuous effort against evil "did man learn wisdom and that greatest of arts, — to write."

For now Society is born; and Jemshîd is its maker, ruler of the world by noble will. With Jemshîd enters a more distinctly moral force, though good and evil are not without moral significance in the lives of those earlier

[1] The black stone which the Arabs kissed in the Kaaba, and faced in prayer, was supposed to have been originally an angel.

kings. For mythology is truer to human nature than that form of the evolutionary theory which conceives the moral sense to have had a definite beginning in man after purely animal and selfish instincts had already become developed. Ideas of good and evil never could have been formed without some relation to the sense of right and wrong. Jemshîd indicates an advanced stage of this sense. He honors all men according to what they have achieved. Of the first three classes into which he divides mankind, even the laborer is no pariah, but a self-respecting worker. "He does not obey any one slavishly; is a free cultivator of the earth without strife. The wise have said, 'T is idleness enslaves those that should be free.'" Only the fourth class are here depreciated, "those who seek profit by trade, with arrogant thirst for gain," — in other words, distributors, or middle-men, as distinguished from producers; a class whose uses for civilized society had not yet been recognized, though it was even then clear to the poet that "their penalty was to be always in care."

As a social organizer, Jemshîd teaches subordination and due regard for position and powers. He, too, makes the Dîvs do his bidding, helping build houses for the suffering classes, teaching medicine and the healing of wounds. He also paid the just price for victories. "Never lived an investigator like Jemshîd; he sailed over seas, and nothing was hid from his sight." But this Iranian Solomon must discover also that will-power has its evil side. In his pride he conceives himself to be omniscient, because under his reign of three hundred years death was not, and the Dîvs did his bidding in bonds. "So everything fell away;" and the anti-Jemshîd appears in Zohâk. The biter, the serpent, the old Vedic cloud-god whom the lightning of Indra slays, is here wickedness incarnated as king. Zohâk, according to the epic, has not this function by inheritance, but by his own will. His father is "a good sheikh of the

desert, humbling himself before God, possessing herds and horses like the Persians." But the son was "bold and careless, proud of his hosts of gold-bridled Arab horses," and easily yielded to the tempter's "promise of knowledge for selfish ends." Firdûsî calls the tempter *Iblîs*, who is the Mahometan Ahriman; and the whole story has a distinctly Semitic coloring. The Persian legend evidently associated Zohâk with some Arabic or Assyrian dynasty of invaders. He begins by slaying his own father; and his passion for flesh causes serpents, the "kiss of Iblîs," to spring from his shoulders, craving constant supplies of human brain for food. Social order, the bonds of Jemshîd, is overturned; and Iran, rent with civil strife, passes over to the destroyer. Jemshîd dies, weary of this fleeting world. But Zohâk's fate is worse. Utter horror of himself, which no devices can remove, compels him to gratify the twofold demon with two chosen human victims a day, one of whom is saved by good men and sent into the wilderness, where these scapegoats of Iran become the Kurdish tribes,—nomads, and knowing not God. But now the terrible dreams of Zohâk are interpreted by his diviners as foreshowing the birth of Ferîdûn the avenger, whose head shall touch the sky, and whose brazen club shall strike down the tyrant in the name of his murdered father, and of the beautiful cow his nurse, another victim,—everything belonging to Ferîdûn being sacred, and the legend mixing up curiously Iranian and Semitic symbols. Zohâk vainly gropes through the land for the predestined child; but, after the type of all Oriental messiahs, he is borne away by his mother into India for safety, and there, in due time, learns his origin and function.

What Destiny has decreed cannot be stayed. The plot of Ferîdûn's brothers against his life fails, and he returns terrible to purify and deliver; captures the city of the wicked king, casts his godless talisman into the dust, slays

his magicians, and sits on the throne of Jemshîd the Good. The tyrant's wives rehearse the tale of his crimes, wanderings, and frightful pains; the people declare for Ferîdûn, who gains a great battle, then binds the demon in Demavend, and nails him to the rock. Strange transformation of the old legend! The punishment of the hero for bringing the fire of civilization to men against the will of Jove has here become a similar punishment of the spirit of evil for depriving men of the blessings of that fire. It is the difference between the Persian and the Greek. In the Zohâk myth, the punishment is in the interest of the moral law: in the Promethean, it is quite otherwise.

"Alas, let us not sin; since neither good nor evil things abide. It is best to leave good deeds for our monument in men's memories. Ferîdûn was not made of musk and amber; he won his glory by justice and love. Be just and generous, and thou shalt be a Ferîdûn, whose glory is to have delivered the world from the hands of the wicked."

A great and happy king, "who bound evil by good, whenever he saw a wrong or a desert place," Ferîdûn at last wishes for repose in old age, and divides his empire equally among his three sons; the youngest and best of whom has the ancient homestead of his race, Iran. Selm and Tûr, enraged at the distribution, conspire to dethrone Iraj and seize his patrimony. In reply to their arrogant demands, Ferîdûn warns them sorrowfully that they will reap as they have sown, and then tenderly commends Iraj to the protection due to his innocence and his right. Iraj, inspired by the purest self-denial, resolves to rise to a still higher plane, and trust wholly to the guidance of his brotherly instincts in face of almost certain death.

"Who, when he thinks on death, so sure to all,
Would plant the tree of hate, with roots in blood,
To bear the fruit of vengeance? Never dwelt

Hate in the kings of old. I will go forth
Unarmed, and yield my throne to them,
My brethren; asking but this recompense,
That I shall turn their cruel hearts to love."

Against his own good sense the old king grants consent, and sends a letter of fatherly counsel by the heroic martyr. And Iraj goes sweetly to his brothers, saying, —

"Will you but cease from hate, the whole is yours;
Let it go freely, if it bars your hearts
From the dear love I dearer hold than power."

But when they see how gladly all the army look on the fair boy and his noble ways, then the devil in them rages, and they kill him and send his head to his father. "O Earth! why didst thou not save him whom thou hadst nursed on thy bosom? And thou, O Man, who cherishest evil thought in thy heart, behold here the fruit it bears!" Then the old king Feridûn, looking out anxiously over the desert, beholds the caravan bringing its fatal message and freight, and breaks into loud lament over the pride of his heart, forever lost: —

"O trust not in earthly love! O thou just God,
Send thou the avenger from this sufferer's blood!
Then will I gladly greet the house of death."

And in due time comes the hero Manoshcihr, issue of this woe, heir to this demand for Nemesis. A new Jemshîd rises from the grave, and the war of God against Ahriman bursts upon the heads of Selm and Tûr. The criminals are beheaded, but the young prince, better than his age, does not send their heads to their woful father. His cry to the fleeing Selm is the voice of the eternal law: —

"The tree of thine own planting shakes its fruit
Into thy bosom. Is 't a thorn, thou sowed'st it,
Or robe of silk, the weaver was thyself."

The armies of the culprits are sent home forgiven, crying, —

"O Pehlevâns! crowned with victory, the earth
No more shall reek with blood; the star of tyrants fades."

Ferîdûn receives his grandson with thanksgiving "to the Power that renders to each his due, with guardian care." But the world is narrow now, and he longs for freer air. Failing under the burden of this tragedy, which covers all the sympathies of his being, he fades away from life, sorrowing till its span is past.

"So long ago he died, but left a glorious name,
Because he learned from suffering to be wise."

Such are the opening scenes of an epic whose movement embraces all history, and in which every shock of individual destiny seems to involve the whole frame of existence. In these scenes we have the key-note to the whole,—the dealing of the moral law with personal character, and the solution of all the mysteries of the life-struggle by loyalty to faith, manliness, love. The hero's sword was here, as it still is, the terrible minister of moral necessities deeper than human will; but love and forgiveness were the highest personal ideal, and it was their martyrdom that he came in to avenge. Equally marked in the very outset is the distinctively natural and human character of the Persian epic. It does not rest, like the Mahâbhârata or Râmâyana, on supernatural interests and aids, aggrandized at man's expense, but is penetrated by the profound sense of human experience, of struggle with circumstances, of the nets of sin and sorrow, of the grandeur of personal Will, the power of man to achieve, even in submitting to the inexorable limits of his existence. In the tale of Ferîdûn and his sons the human motive excludes all others. In other tales, the supernatural, sometimes prominent, is always secondary, and does not disturb the constant emphasis on the moral law.

It is in accordance with this motive that the interest is wont to gather about the closest natural relationship, the

sympathies and obligations that consecrate domestic ties, the filial, fraternal, sexual sanctities. These are the centres of personality. At these roots of character the forces of evil strike most fiercely. In these the blindness of passion, the agony of pain and loss, the coils of misleading destiny, are most destructive. In these are the situations which have always been found most full of tragic motive. In these relations, which Nature brings but once, and whose destruction by folly or crime or fate can never be repaired, poetry has found its supreme types of suffering and devotion. All races and faiths gather about this common hearth, and find in the power of courage and sacrifice to master or transform the bitter wounds of filial, fraternal, and conjugal ties, the height of heroic victory. The law of early races, that the nearest blood-relative should undertake the duty of avenging unnatural crimes, has wide scope in ancient mythology. In family crimes Greek tragedy centred. "The woes of Pelops' line," the dreadful fate that drives Orestes and his sister to follow up domestic crimes by bloody penalties involving agonies of atonement, have made them immortal types of an heroic virtue purchased at immeasurable cost. The Trojan War is the consequence of a broken marriage tie. Conflict between father and son, brought on by some fatal mistake, and ending either in the death of one at the other's hand, or in the infliction of irreparable injury before the dreadful illusion is broken, which comes to its supreme type in the Persian tale of Rustem and Sohrâb, is found at the heart of all great mythologies. Baldur is unintentionally slain by his brother Hödur, whom the evil spirit Loki misleads. The duels of Lancelot and his son Sir Galahad, and that of the brothers Balin and Balan, all noble knights of pure and tender heart, are the most touching episodes of the old British epic. The successions of night and day, the following of dawn by noon, of twilight by night, interpreted as the strife of

parent and offspring, are the key to a large proportion of the Greek myths; and the successive dynasties of the gods in Hesiod are dethronements of a similar nature. The supreme forms of atonement in all religions which rest on anthropomorphic ideas are sacrifices of children by their parents. They proceed not from cruelty so much as from the conviction that no other atonement can so thoroughly express the agony, and so the efficacy, of self-sacrifice as this. We read the terrible commandment of the god to Agamemnon to purchase the safety of the Greeks before Troy by slaying his daughter Iphigenia on the altar; the test of absolute obedience laid on Abraham and Jephthah by their religion; and, what is entirely similar in its origin, the Christian mystery of the Atonement, by which the abstractions of the Trinity become clothed to the popular imagination in all the fervent colors of human martyrdom both for the Father and the Son. No religion, however supernatural in its pretensions, however illusory in its dogmas, dispenses with resting its ideal ultimately on the natural relations of man as supreme; in other words, on the divine significance of the family, not only as the beginning of social progress, but as the undying principle of social existence and the germinal point of personal character. So soon, therefore, as the will began to get free expression, so as to form its own epos, we find that its ideal types of the tragedy of life, of the irony of fortune, and the struggle of human limitations with the mysteries of pain and death have been sought, not in the overwhelming interference of gods, nor in miraculous immunities from finite conditions, but in the intensest play of those relations which are nearest and dearest, most thoroughly human and universal. Of the high possibilities of these relations for tragic situation, for heroic culture, for the march of Nemesis, the Shâh-Nâmeh has much to teach.

This was to be expected from the emphasis of the Iranian

mind on the ideal dualism of existence, the moral and physical antagonisms which reveal it. The Shâh-Nâmeh is probably the most remarkable instance of this tragic emphasis among the great products of the religious imagination. All other cycles of legend which partake of the same spirit are so infinitely complex and discursive, that the strength of this mighty motive seems dissipated in a crowd of details. Scandinavian, British, Hindu, and Christian mythologies interweave such a medley of subordinate interests with every expression of it, that we lose the sense of its sovereignty. It does not stand forth as the very atmosphere of feeling, or the magnetic force that groups the infinite variety of circumstance around its poles, revealing the limits of passion and power, and the sway of cosmical as well as humanly universal law. In this instinct for human limit, this possession by their own central motive, only the Greek poets have surpassed Firdûsî; and they have not taken this special motive as central, upon so vast and difficult a scale. So skilfully does he manage the immense mass of materials, that everything helps to emphasize the personal glory or grief, to accent the tread of Destiny over man's strength and his weakness alike, as it beats up the latent forces of sacrifice and ideal aim from the dreadful soil of anguish and death. No *deus ex machina* finds place here, as the Euripidean god enters the dreadful coil of fate around Orestes and Electra, to settle all difficulties for the writer, and solve things insoluble, by mere fiat. The mercurial Greek's fancy might be satisfied with this; the serious Perso-Mahometan's, never.

Heroism is here the substance of religion, and stands on its own merit. It is itself the ideal, and no god can for one moment dispense with its conditions. It lifts the poet above the bounds of nationality, masters every race prejudice on which the legend might at first seem founded. It recognizes itself in the Turanian hero as well as in the

Iranian; in Pîrân, Afrâsiyâb, Pîlsam. And many Turanian women, who win the love of the Pehlevâns and bear the noblest persons in the epos, become more admirable to us, and awaken deeper sympathy than do the Iranians themselves. The same moral standard suffices for believer and unbeliever. Except in certain passages of the later portion, in which the hand of the Zoroastrian priesthood is apparent, the narrowness of the Avestan stand-point is escaped. The epos honors only Nature and truth.

The line of the great Pehlevâns of Seistan, motherland of Iranian liberties, begins in Sâm [1] and ends in the Persian Achilles, Rustem. Let us see how the legend evolves this colossal type of heroism.

To Sâm a son is born, with every mark of the true Pehlevân, save that his hair is white. This trait would seem, like the similar legend of the Chinese Lao-tse, to intimate a higher wisdom, not derived from the experience of age, and to foreshadow the idea of intuition, — something which the wise in their own generation could not conceive as belonging to a child, but destined to put their finalities to shame. Such is certainly the point of the Persian legend of Zâl. In the terror and shame of having brought some demonic power into the world, Sâm becomes selfish enough to expose his child on the top of Alborz; more cruel than the lioness, who cares for her whelps, "giving them her blood to drink, not for any reward, but because she cannot live without them." And indeed, when his father forsakes him, Zâl is taken up by the mighty life of Nature, as the hero is in all religious mythology. The infant's cry, in hunger and heat, brings the giant bird, the Simurgh, on mighty wings, to his relief; and her pity is approved by the voice from heaven foretelling his great destiny. So the young birds are his brothers, and he has

[1] Identified by Spiegel (*Zeitschr. d. Deutsch. Morgenl. Gesellsch.*, iii. 251) with Kereçâçpa, of the Aryan myth.

the largest share in their parent's love, — a love and admiration bred in the monsters of the wild when refused by human kin.

Sâm, meanwhile, slowly awakes to the sense of his folly and sin. Impressed by a dream in which his own whitening locks instruct him that his child's hair was not the work of demons, but of God, he sets forth to find his son. As his train labors up the heights of Albôrz, the mighty bird comes soaring from her nest on the summit, a majestic pile of sandal-wood and ivory and woven aloe-branches. In answer to the father's prayer, the Sîmurgh brings Zâl upon her bosom, — a noble youth, innocent of all craft, wise only in Nature's lore, which, like his symbolic hair, supplies that which lengthened years alone are supposed to bring; and his father receives him joyfully, while the Sîmurgh's parting gift is a feather from her own wing, which he was to burn whenever he should need her aid in the command of occult powers.

Next comes a new antagonism of wills, out of which the future shall be born. Zâl's romantic love for Rudâbe, daughter of the unbelieving king of Cabulistan, replete with stolen interviews and vows of devotion, results in a letter written to his father in praise of the maiden, which puts the old Pehlevân to a severer trial than the child's hoary head. What penalty must follow such mingling of the blood of Ferîdûn with that of Zohâk, such union of the true believer with the worshipper of Divs! But the Mobads, who seem bound, at least in the heroic legend, to play the part of liberalism, predict that the child of this marriage shall win the world for Iran, bring comfort to the whole land, and conquer all the strife and pain of Turanic wars. It is religion itself that bids him drop his narrow creed and treat Gentiles as his own blood. Again, the slave of superstition is liberated through suffering, by the power of love. Sâm writes to the Shâh, hoping to have his

consent to the innovation. Meanwhile Rudâbe's parents must bear their part in the shock of old belief. Dreading the anger of the Shâh, and expecting his kingdom to be laid waste, the father is tempted to slay both his daughter and his wife; but the latter's higher faith restrains him, with the saying, "When fire and water, wind and dust, mingle, the old tired earth is refreshed;" and, "The longest night has its dawning." The brave woman goes further still. She appears before Sâm to plead with him at the head of his army, and with no slight effect. Manoshcihr is shocked at the intermixture of creeds, and sends Sâm against Cabulistan with a host whose tread shakes the whole earth, and whose martial movement is described by Firdûsî in a passage which is like Chaucer at his best. But the old man cannot face his son's reproachful reminder that he is but repeating the injustice done him in infancy, and both heart and conscience are moved. There is one resort. It is to send Zâl himself to make his own impression by pleading his cause with the Shâh, armed with a letter in which Sâm details his own services, describes his free life in the saddle as a throne, and commends the strength and devotion, which has now all passed into this young hero, to the king's mercy, with prayers and vows. By his noble presence, his skill in answering difficult questions concerning all subjects of physical and moral and religious interest, in a grand tournament of the seers, and by the foresight of his great destiny on the part of the priests, the prejudices of the monarch are overcome, and he consents to the marriage. Whereupon follow festivities that make men ask if the resurrection has not come. The long hates of races and beliefs are dissolved in love. But the significant fact is that the hero's own presence and power determine his fate, and cut the knot of circumstances that could not otherwise be loosed.

Such was the parentage of Rustem, mightiest among

the mighty, — a champion whose glory was not to strangle hydras in his cradle, nor to be dipped in a weapon-proof bath by his mother, like the demigods of Greece, but to be nursed by the heroism of a love which had conquered the prejudices of race and creed. The arm that should crush the foes of Iran was prepared for its work by an inherited nobility of soul capable of recognizing and loving nobleness under whatever disguise.

We cannot trace the long-spun web of tragedy, portrayed by the delight of the legend in its favorite hero through centuries, without sense of the lapse of time. We hasten to the tale of the last and heaviest debt paid by this epic redeemer to the limitations of man and the irony of fate. The tale of Rustem and Sohrâb is the crucial point of Oriental feeling. Firdûsî opens it with an admonition:

"The tale of Sohrâb will fill your eyes with tears, and stir you against Rustem. But do you blame the autumn wind when it strips the unripe orange from its bough? Death comes to all, nor was the mystery ever solved, nor ever will it be for thee; for none return from that gate. Do not wonder that fire burns while fuel is given; or that an old root bears stems. It is vain to murmur at the universal law. Hast thou kept thy soul from evil, thou shalt not fear the last hour. Act well thy part on earth, and blessedness shall meet thee beyond."

With this serene reconciliation to death as the natural law, opens the story of a whelming catastrophe, which everything that human folly and wisdom could do, seemed but to render the more inevitable. It is followed by the picture, in the same lofty strain, of the close of Rustem's great career, — a sacrifice to deeds of villanous and unnatural hate.

Sohrâb is the child of Rustem's passion for the daughter of a Turanian king, who seeks him out with the offering of her admiration for his heroic deeds, the unasked boon of a heart "never before unveiled to man." Return-

ing to Iran, Rustem is unknown to the boy, who grows up in his father's image, worshipping this unseen ideal through his mother's praises, and longing to behold his face. He is named Sohrâb from his ever gladsome looks, — the young lion of the mingled blood of Iran and Turan, irresistible in strength. He forms the plan to invade Iran, and give the throne to his father, forgetting that Rustem, as the loyal servant of his king, must himself first be overthrown. Upon the march the adventures of the young hero are many and marvellous; and the terror of his approach startles Kai Kâus, the king of Iran, into sending in all speed to Rustem, bidding him haste to the rescue, "stopping not to finish the word on his lips or to smell the rose in his hand." Rustem's delay leads to a quarrel with the Shâh, in which the free spirit of the Pehlevân, and his sensitiveness to unjust suspicion, are brought into full play. The quarrel is appeased, and Rustem advances to meet the Turanians. Henceforward the overruling sweep of Destiny appears at every step. Rustem becomes a spy and slays a Turanian chief, becoming thereby specially obnoxious to Sohrâb, who, of course, does not recognize his person. Looking out on the Iranian army, Sohrâb inquires the names of the chiefs; but Hedshîr, a prisoner, who informs him, conceals the fact that Rustem is among them, and gives the colossal form another name. Rustem, he says, is in Seistan, at a feast of roses, — foolishly hoping by this deception to prevent a collision, which, of course, could only be avoided, not by petty lies, but by his knowing the truth. The poet asks, —

> "Why seekest thou, O Man, the steps of fate to lead?
> 'T will have its way with thee. 'T is thine to turn
> Thy heart away from fleeting things, their care and pain."

Sohrâb cannot believe that one like Rustem can be away in the hour of his country's peril, and threatens Hedshîr

with death as a deceiver. But the prisoner, fearing he may kill Rustem and conquer Iran, ventures to brave it out, and holds to the falsehood, though Sohrâb strikes him to the earth. The battle follows. Moved perhaps by some blind presentiment, Rustem tarries in his tent. But presentiments and precautions alike fail. Excited by the deeds of the unknown Turanian champion, Rustem at last rushes to meet him. Then an access of pity holds his hand, and he cries, "O tender youth, the earth is cold, the air is sweet. I who am old have slain hosts with my arm. I cannot bear to kill thee, thou art so noble. Come, join Iran, and be our friend." "Thou art Rustem," exclaims Sohrâb. But again destiny thwarts the natural instincts, and Rustem denies his own name. "I am but his slave!" Dreadful necessity, where two souls are unconsciously at one, yet their arms in mortal conflict, their wills forced by sternest illusion to the bitter end! "Alas," mourns the poet, "every beast knows its place; man only, in cruel war, cannot discern a son from a foeman." Rustem had been over-confident. He had parted with much of his strength, thinking it a burden, and now he is flung to the earth, escaping with his life only by demanding of Sohrâb a second trial, after which the loser must die. Less willing than ever to confess his name to his antagonist, he returns to his tent, and prays that his old strength may be restored to him. The prayer is granted; and Sohrâb in turn is hurled to the earth and fatally wounded. And now, too late, the dying youth speaks mournfully of Rustem as his father, whom he should never see, though taught by his mother's praises to honor him as the greatest of men, and led forth into Iran only by the longing to see his face. We hear the agonized cry of the old man, "I am Rustem." And Sohrâb cannot hold back his terrible sense of wrong: "Art thou Rustem, who hast plunged the sword without mercy in my breast? I sought to move thee to peace,

but no love could rise in thee. See this onyx, which my mother bound upon my arm to give to thee, for it is thine. Ah! too late, too late! The father must slay his child." Then Sohrâb tenderly tries to stay the raving of grief. It is in vain. What help is there in self-destruction? "Remember that what has come could not be turned aside. But now bid the king of Iran cease from the war, which I alone have caused; and Turan has trusted only in me. For I believed we should conquer; how could I have thought to die by my father's hand? So was it written in heaven. I came as the lightning comes, and I pass away like the wind. O Father, in heaven thy child shall meet thee again!"

The poem follows step by step the agony of Rustem, and his unavailing efforts to save the fast-fleeting life. He appeals to the king for a potent balsam, which Kai Kâus, with cowardly jealousy, refuses. "Never," says the messenger, "did this king pay a friend his dues, nor lift a heavy-laden soul." The sufferer digs the grave of his son with his own hands, seeking for himself only death; yet pardons the deceitful Hedshîr, whose falsehood had brought all the woe. The chiefs vainly try to console him, and the whole land resounds with mourning as he bears his heavy burden to its shrine of sandal-wood in far Cabulistan. Of all the scenes which attend the dreadful calamity, none is more touching than the barbaric grief of the mother, Tahmine. She kisses his armor, and wets his crown with tears. She presses his horse to her bosom, and lays her head upon his hoofs. She closes her palace gates, gives all she has to the poor, and dies of sorrow within a year. There is no remedy in this visible world for wounds so deadly. The heroic age of mighty instincts confesses this, pouring out wails over the hopeless cruelty of fortune and the vanity of the world. Yet we note that there is a robust faith behind the despair; for Rustem

lives, in spite of his whelming woes, to do heroic work in this world. The religiousness of the poet, casting Rustem for consolation on the future life alone, is manifest injustice to the very ideal which his materials afford. An heroic age may naturally fail to interpret itself to a reflective age through its forms of speech, which spring from the emotions alone. But the language of deeds is universal; and to see the nobler elements of character struggling forth in this form through the terrible obstacles of a semi-barbarous state of society, is far more interesting than to study the most unexceptionable doctrine, which ages of civilization have brought to didactic perfection to serve as the creed of a positive religion, and made the factitious aureole of its founder.

The dealing of a tragic Nemesis with breaches of the natural relations is again illustrated in the story of Gushtâsp and Isfendiyâr, in which the part of Rustem is again intensely interesting, and by far the most noble. This story belongs to a later period of the epic narrative, and shows signs of an ecclesiastical influence not visible in the more purely heroic portions that precede it. For Gushtâsp is the ruler whose reign is associated in the legend with the advent of Zoroaster, and the conversion of Iran to his religion. Even here, in its treatment of this ideal of the Church, the broadly human element of the heroic epos counteracts in great degree the narrowing effects of organized religion.

Gushtâsp has repeatedly promised to bestow the throne on his son Isfendiyâr, on condition of his performing well-nigh impossible feats for the glory and safety of Iran, and as often the promise has remained unfulfilled. The seven adventures of the young hero in capturing the famous Brazen Fortress remind us of the labors of Hercules, and perhaps like them have an astronomical origin. They raise him to the summit of glory, but do not secure their earthly reward. Gushtâsp now bids him undertake a harder

task; no less than to bring Rustem in chains to his court, that the old Pehlevân's pride may be humbled, and submit itself to the will of a king. For Rustem has dared to say before his face that he is no man's subject, and wears an older crown than that of a Shâhân-shâh. Isfendiyâr shall break this pride, and then the crown shall be his. The prince sees clearly that the aim is to put his expectations out of the way, if not his life, and the outrage to be perpetrated offends everything noble within him. Yet he undertakes it, as he says, out of pure filial duty. "Keep the crown if you will; a father's bidding shall be done, though it bring the judgment day." "If a bad ending come to this, 'tis the power of fate." He is not without hope that the hero will consent to be led in fetters, out of loyalty to the Shâh; and so, by admonitions to the duty of a subject, and praises of Gushtâsp as the patron of the faith and head of the priesthood, as well as by promises of protection and reward, the foolish youth would fain persuade him to an act of servility and shame. Quite as aggravating is the charge of neglecting court attendance to one conscious of being the strong arm that protected the court itself. His reply is noble: "I will give you everything in my power, but do not dishonor the gift by personal outrage. I will appear before the Shâh, and do him homage. But the Dîv must have taken away your senses, if you imagine that I will consent to the indignity of wearing chains." Isfendiyâr is moved, but not sufficiently to throw up the shameful office. He even adds the insult of neglecting to send for Rustem to a banquet, — after promising to do so, — upon the worse than frivolous excuse that they are likely to meet afterwards as foes. Rustem, however, goes without being sent for, but is treated with indignity again, and receives the insulting apology, "that the day was hot and the way long!" Isfendiyâr, in a conceited speech, reproves him for his infidelity and partial

descent from a Dîv, which rouses Rustem to recount his exploits. Isfendiyâr does the same, laying special stress on his services to the true faith in destroying idols; and Rustem retorts with reflections on Gushtâsp's character and record. In all this, Isfendiyâr's conduct shows poorly beside his opponent's; but so the trouble deepens, rivalry is aroused, and the fates have decreed conflict between them. To Rustem the situation is terrible, since to submit would be intolerable, and to kill Isfendiyâr is equally dreadful to so noble a nature. The heroes part at the tent door with bitter words. Isfendiyâr's nearest friend warns him not to persevere. "Ahriman has taken you in his net." Zâl, on the other hand, forebodes his son's death. It is characteristic of Rustem that he forms a plan to overpower Isfendiyâr by main strength, then save his life, and give him the atoning service of love.

But this generous hope is foiled. The issue of the combat is doubtful. Isfendiyâr seems to have, in this half-priestly legend, a special aid and protection in strife from his orthodox commission. A quarrel arising between the followers of the two chiefs results in the death of Isfendiyâr's sons. Rustem is roused to indignation at his men; but his promise to atone in every way possible is received by Isfendiyâr ungraciously. Then Rustem cries, "My trust is in God," and renews the fight. But Isfendiyâr's arrows all take effect, while Rustem's glance off from the body of the child of the Holy Law. So Rustem withdraws, sorely wounded, for the night, and Isfendiyâr leaves the field to mourn his bitter loss. "Ye noble ones, now so pale, where is the soul that was here? I see but clay." Then he sends to his unrelenting father, "Behold the fruit of the tree you have planted." And to his friend, recovering his calmness, he says, "Cease to mourn. And why should more blood be shed? To death we all go, young and old, and only wisdom can lead us on our way."

Meantime Zâl for his son's sake burns the Sîmurgh's feather, and the great bird appears, bringing Nature's healing to his wounds. He shall find an elm by the sea-shore, and cut an arrow from its wood, and with this only, Isfendiyâr can be slain. But whoso slays this sacred life shall never more know peace; and even beyond the grave shall he find pain. But Rustem braves the condition for the sake of the victory so necessary to his honor. "Good name, at least, will I leave behind me." It is time for him also to resort to occult aids, since his foe has so manifestly a charmed life. The fate of Isfendiyâr now in his hands, Rustem beseeches him, by all they both hold sacred, — "by sun and moon and Zerdusht's fire, and the God to whom we pray," — to abandon his monstrous demand, and warns him that he will be slain. Isfendiyâr ridicules the prediction, and the fatal arrow, shot with tears, does its work. To his lamenting friends, the hero finds consolation in having led men on the path of the true faith, and that he dies, not by the strength of Rustem, but by the sorceries of Zâl. On the other hand, Rustem, made self-reproachful by success, confesses that the Dîv has caught him in his net, with all his endeavors to be true to manly dealing. "Would that I had been the slain! Alas, that I resorted to secret arts! The glory of my name is gone forever!" It is now Isfendiyâr's turn to show a noble spirit. "I blame neither you nor the bird. This is my father's doing, that he might keep his throne." He commits his son to Rustem's charge, to be reared in knightly virtues and honorable toils, and to stand as his father's seed in a line of kings. And Rustem reverently promising, the noble reconciliation is complete.

Isfendiyâr is now his father's Nemesis. "Your desire is accomplished; your throne is yours, and I have the chambers of death. God shall decide between us at the last day." And so, with tender entreaties sent to his mother

and sisters not to weep too much for him, nor uncover his face, but wait for reunion beyond death, Isfendiyâr passes from the scene. Bashûtan takes home the body, through mourning Iran, to a court not unaffected by natural grief and shame.

Then rises the indignant protest of Iranian freedom. The chiefs renounce respect for their king, and cry as one man: "O wretched man, thou sentest him to Cabul that this might be! May shame weigh down thy crown, and vengeance never let thee go!" Bashûtan refuses to bend before the throne, and thunders: "Thou blind and selfish man! the wrath of Heaven shall fall on thee, who hast sent thine own son to death, with heart harder than stone!" Isfendiyâr's sisters recount their brother's virtues, and ask what king before has sought to slay his own flesh. If Isfendiyâr desired the throne, did not Gushtâsp himself drench the world in blood to obtain the crown of Lohrasp? Even thee thy father sought not to kill, but took away thy diadem. But thou hast given away thy child for such a bauble!" The Shâh has no word of anger or defence, but bids Bashûtan comfort the mourners.

"Softly, O Mother, he sleeps in everlasting peace, glad to be free of earthly woes."

This last scene, in which the Pehlevâns are avengers and smite the cruel king without fear, is politically one of the most suggestive in the whole epic.

The Oriental theory that the king is the father of his people makes him responsible to a standard of personal character to which the equally patriarchal habit of absolute filial servitude should naturally be subordinate. And while for the most part in the Eastern practice this royal *patria potestas* has been, as we have found in India and China, as well as in certain stages of old European civilization, limited in certain ways by tradition, custom, posi-

tive institution, or religious prestige, there is another force, to which it is even more accountable; namely, the ideal of personal heroism. This has been the natural rival of autocratic institutions, even under their harshest form.

It is the chief emancipator from that absolutism which the earliest social traditions secured to the father of a family. The resistance of women and children to this kind of despotism forms a leading trait in the legends of most ancient nations. Military service was almost the only force which effectually diminished the *patria potestas* in early Roman times, giving, as it alone did, the right of private ownership (*peculium castrense*) to the son. But nowhere did the rights of personality derive such furtherance from the heroic element as in the Iranian family, pictured in the Shâh-Nâmeh. We have seen in the story of Isfendiyâr the warning against passive obedience to parental tyranny, even when enforced by royal claims. That of Siâvaksh, on the other hand, relates the martyrdom of a prince who refused such obedience for the sake of his own honor and truth. A nobler assertion of the higher law of self-respect was never made in tragedy or song.

Siâvaksh, like Iraj, whose history his fate recalls, is the mirror of gentleness, purity, and valor, — the Sir Galahad, as Rustem is, in some respects, the Sir Tristram, of our epic. Forced against his will to visit the harem, and charged by one of the queens with criminal conduct, in revenge for his refusal to gratify her passion, he is proved innocent by ordeal, and put in command of the army on its march into Turan. Afrâsiyâb, the king of that country, alarmed by dreams presaging that Siâvaksh will be his destroyer, hastens to offer terms to the invader, to which Siâvaksh agrees, in hopes to spare the effusion of blood. The treaty is guaranteed on Afrâsiyâb's part by a hundred hostages of his own kindred, who are sent into the Iranian camp. King Kai Kâus, informed of the good news, is

enraged, and commands his son to break the treaty, ravage Turan, and send the hostages to court to be slain. Siâvaksh prefers to disobey his father rather than violate his word, and makes haste to send home the hostages safely to Turan. "Above the sun and moon stands the will of a greater King. Before Him the lion is as the blade of grass. Shall I madly rise against Him, and bathe these two lands again in blood?" The hostages shall say to Afrâsiyâb: "This treaty has brought me to grief; but I will not break my oath to save my throne. The world is my throne, and God my refuge. As I cannot return to Iran, I ask of Afrâsiyâb leave to pass through his dominions and find rest from this bitter strife."

The effect of this integrity on the Turanians may be imagined. It is to the honor of the epic that it recognizes the nobler instincts of the heart as human, not as the prerogative of the famed race or religion. No personage so moves our sympathy in suffering as Pîrân, the chief counsellor of Afrâsiyâb. He advises the king to receive Siâvaksh with open arms. "No prince on earth compares with him in body or soul. They tell me that to see him is to love him. It were fit thou shouldst honor him if he had but given up his crown to keep his faith." Afrâsiyâb fears "what the young lion may do when his teeth are grown;" but Pîrân persuades him to write a cordial invitation to the young exile. This letter shows not only that the Turanians are regarded as having the same religious sentiment as Iran, but that even Afrâsiyâb, the evil genius of the epos, is capable of meeting a noble action in a noble way. "Praise be to the Eternal, whom the heart can feel, though none can measure Him. God spare thee such a journey. Stay with me, I will give thee castles and men." So Siâvaksh writes sorrowfully and tenderly to his father: "I have walked through fire and wept blood; I have made peace, but my father's heart is like steel towards

me. May he live happy, though I fall into the lion's jaws. I know not what fate awaits me, but I can no longer remain with him." In Pîrân he finds a second father, as tender as the other was harsh; the old man's youth is renewed as they walk together, while Siâvaksh sighs as he remembers his own childhood and Iran. The meeting with Afrâsiyâb is equally affectionate. "Ended is the world-ravaging war. Now thanks to thee, O youth, that panther and lamb shall feed together, for the world is wearied of strife." He cannot sleep for thinking on this lovely guest. But the courtiers are envious, and the joy of the hour is clouded with evil-boding. Pîrân, on his part, does not rest till he has Siâvaksh married to the daughter of Afrâsiyâb, and a beautiful city, full of gardens, statues, and all delights, rises amidst perpetual summer as their home. A son is predicted, who shall unite the hostile crowns. Love has dissolved the hates of nations and creeds.

But Pîrân finds sad presentiments in the heart of his favorite, and the astrologers confirm his fears. In spite of Pîrân's encouragement, the vision of war and desolation is before his eyes, and the near approach of death. A Turanian chief, the king's brother, who hates Siâvaksh for his noble qualities and his success, by villanous falsehoods contrives to fill Afrâsiyâb's mind with suspicion, and Siâvaksh is doomed to destruction. Fully aware of his coming fate, the prince sends his wife to Pîrân, with tender farewells, destroys his palace, and goes to meet Afrâsiyâb's army on the way to Iran. His little band of followers make no resistance to their enemies, yet are slain; and he falls, sorely wounded, into the hands of the king of Turan. Afrâsiyâb is dissuaded from his fell purpose for the moment by his own army, and contents himself with throwing the wife of Siâvaksh, his own daughter, into prison, for pleading in her husband's behalf. But Siâ-

vaksh does not escape; he is murdered by Garsêvaz in the wilderness, where a purple flower springs from his blood and is called by his name.

The murderer is cursed by all men. Pîrân has the courage to rebuke Afrâsiyâb, and takes Feringîs to his own home. In due time Kai Khosrû is born, the child of grief and the star of promise. Afrâsiyâb seeks his destruction, but is persuaded by Pîrân to consent to his being brought up by peasants, in ignorance of his real origin. But his royal qualities — as those of Krishna, Buddha, Iskander, and the Jesus of the Apocryphal Gospels — can be hidden by no outward conditions; and at his demand Pîrân is forced to reveal the secret.[1] Over Afrâsiyâb, too, the youth exerts such a charm that the past shall be buried. The cautious Pîrân suggests that Afrâsiyâb need not fear the fulfilment of his dreams, since the boy is but half-witted. Khosrû personates a fool, and a promise in the name of all that is sacred is exacted from the king that he shall not be harmed. He is sent to the city of Siâvaksh, to be reared amidst the memories of his father's life and death:

"For Siâvaksh the very beasts of the wilderness mourn; the nightingale in the cypress bewails his fate; and every leaf, as after the autumn blast, hangs withering from the pomegranate tree."

But Rustem rushes to Kai Kâus, eager to avenge the deed, as well as to rebuke the unnatural father: —

"O evil one, thy sowing has borne its fruit. Better thou wert in thy grave. Who was so pure, so noble as this prince? Alas! his head, his face, his mighty limbs, the joy of all eyes! The tracks of his feet were blest!"

Then before the king's eyes he kills that wicked queen, to whom he traces the calamity; while Kai Kâus dares not lift his head for shame.

These legends, of which it is more to my purpose to give the outlines than to indulge in extended quotation, fairly

[1] The old messianic legend of all religions.

illustrate what I should designate as the religion of the Shâh-Nâmeh in its relation with personal freedom. Constantly the higher law of honor, sacrifice, love, and truth, asserts itself against the authority traditionally vested in the throne, as well as in the priesthood. Heroism is the true divinity, the practical ruler. Heroic Iran, like Homeric Greece, of which it was the Aryan prototype,[1] is deeply conscious of the rights of the personal will as against mighty obstacles, physical and moral. In the epos, these are embodied for the free-souled Pehlevân in the tyrannical and unjust will of his king as much as in the enmity of his peers. Never does any noble passion, least of all moral indignation, fail to speak its full protest for fear of irresponsible power.

When Kai Kâus breaks into rage against Rustem for delaying to answer his summons, Gêv asks in astonishment, "Darest thou lift thy hand against Rustem?" "To the block with him!" screams the king. And Rustem cries out: "It is I that am the lion among men. Let the Shâh turn pale before my anger. I owe my strength to God, not to the Shâh. My steed is my throne, the world my page, the helm my crown; and this arm shall defy kings. No slave am I; to God alone is my service pledged. I have not chosen to be a king, but to follow my duty and my right." Thereupon he rides off from court, and when the king sends to entreat him to return, he replies hotly, "What is Kai Kâus to me? A handful of dust." Finally, the Shâh must ask pardon, and "strews dust upon his tongue."

The scene is curious enough when we contrast it with the common conception of the court of an Oriental despot, or even with the Mahometan ideal, which Firdûsî would

[1] It must be remembered that the state of society represented by Firdûsî is in no sense Mahometan, but everywhere in the epic betrays itself as very much earlier, and resting on what may be a pre-Homeric basis.

have given us, had he drawn his materials from his own age. This fearlessness of the Pehlevân before his king is all the more remarkable, because combined with profoundest reverence for the idea of loyalty to the throne. It seems to hint of creditable elements even in the most servile formalities of Eastern obeisance. Full as these are of apparent man-worship, we find them here combined with an independence such as few modern republicans would dare to show before the popular will, or even the party majority.

When Zâl comes into the presence of Kai Kâus, to advise him against his wild scheme of invading Mazanderan, it is with measured step, and hands crossed as in prayer; yet he does not hesitate to warn him boldly of the dangers of his ungoverned will. Rustem himself, who spurns the arrogant Kai Kâus, is humble as a servant before the truly royal Kai Khosrû, and springs to obey his command to rescue an imprisoned knight. "He bends his head and invokes blessings on the Shâh, whom all greet as sovereign, whose feet are on the heads of kings." The just and humane ruler is obeyed with enthusiasm; the unjust one has forfeited all title to his respect. He can assume the part of a Mentor to the young king Tûs, and bids him "slay the rebellious, but dry the tears of the submissive, as a father. Be ever true; for life is short, and the world passes away. Even Jemshîd fell, the greatest of kings."

This right to reserve obedience till it is consistent with self-respect, through the real majesty of the person who claims it, is even more strikingly illustrated in Tûs, the banner-bearer of Iran, a spleeny, ambitious, and passionate Pehlevân, who regards his own line of descent as of incomparable grandeur. Kai Khosrû has been brought from Turan amidst the acclamations of the people, and all the roads are fragrant with spices and radiant with festive

colors, and old Kai Kâus makes atonement to the son for casting off his father, with tears and embraces before his peers. Tûs alone holds aloof from the new star, insisting that the succession belongs to Feríborz, the Shâh's son, instead of his grandson; and braving the indignation of the whole court by his jealous pride. But when he sees Khosrû, his prejudice gives way, and he submits at once to an inborn right to rule. This is not all. Kai Kâus himself so far yields to Tûs's protest as to consent to give the throne to whichever of the two princes should take the enchanted castle of Bahmen. Feríborz, aided by Tûs, fails; but Khosrû, in Semitic style, makes the walls of this Iranian Jericho drop down at the name of God, and the very Divs fall in thousands amidst clouds, thunder, and earthquake; then enters in the blaze of day, and lights the holy Zerdusht fire. This has a priestly look; but the fall of Tûs's pride before the nobleness of Khosrû did not need the added sanction of the Church to produce the reconciliation that follows and makes Iran one and happy.

The same responsibility of kings to the heroic ideal, in whomsoever embodied, runs through the epos, even down to the end of the great Sassanide age. Of these higher claims of magnanimity, justice, and truth, every Pehlevan is the minister. The true line of kings begins in Feridûn, "who never saw a wrong or a desolation but he bound it with the chains of virtue, as became a king." This is the "Book of Kings," and it is written to dispense a poetic justice to the doings of kings. The rights of personal will, in their highest and apparently unlimited form, are here affirmed to be duties, and all history is declared to be the evidence. The probe goes deeper than conformity to tradition or law: it strikes to the quick of motive. It is dealing with the moral quality of actions, not with their form, however specious. The mythopoetic imagination

has here constructed the whole history of a people for ages, upon the sway of justice, — laws of retribution above the will of kings.

Thus the plan of Kai Kâus to wrest the beautiful land of Mazanderan from the wicked Dîvs of Ahriman might have seemed a service to the faith; but it is denounced and punished as a mad scheme, because it is undertaken out of the mere love of conquest; and because, thinking its loveliness existed merely for his own gratification, he masacres its people without mercy. The penalty was for the army to be smitten with blindness, and nearly starved in the wilderness, — a supernatural one, it is true, but inflicted by evil powers, not by the wrath of God.

Afrâsiyâb, the incarnation of Turanian hostility and guile, has many generous qualities; his counsellor, Pîrân, is a very noble person, whose advice he frequently follows; his procedure against the innocent Siâvaksh is palliated in some measure by the panic into which he has been thrown by presageful dreams. But none of these things are permitted to justify even a king in the murder of so noble and beautiful a guest, and the tree of wrong bears fruit after its kind. Rustem hears of Siâvaksh's death, sits awhile overwhelmed with grief, then like a fury descends upon Turan. "Woe to Turân! Let the land be swept with vengeance, as Gihon bursts its banks!" Afrâsiyâb sees his son slain, and escapes, after terrible loss, to the distant provinces, where, driven from place to place, he at last puts himself into the power of a holy man, Hom, evidently the Holy Word,[1] who takes him in a net; and Khosrû is at hand to slay him, along with the actual murderer of Siâvaksh, and poetic justice is satisfied.

On the other hand, the ideal king is found in Khosrû,

[1] The details of this hunt and capture of Afrâsiâb, as related in the Shâh-Nâmeh, abound in traits and objects taken from the old Avestan mythology, which we cannot here pause to recount. See Spiegel: *Erân. Alterth.*, i. 653, 654.

born in suffering, brought up in exile, sought out by heroes with manifold toils and perils, and brought in flight to his repentant grandfather Kai Kâus, to receive the crown that his father deserved. Some details of the story are doubtless taken from traditions of Cyrus. But the theory that the two are one rests largely on the common mould in which the religious legend has always cast the early lives of messiahs. Kai Khosrû is the ideal of legend, the Cyrus of history. Siâvaksh, the idolized martyr, seems to all Iran to have risen from the grave in Khosrû. He is not only the flower of heroism, but the soul of piety and patriotism. He swears, at his grandfather's command, to give no rest to Afrâsiyâb, and then spends the night in prayer, with face turned to the holy fire. He is represented as covering the Avesta with pieces of gold; yet this is previous to the coming of Zerdusht! His liberality is profuse. He offers great prizes in dresses, servants, and lands to such as shall accomplish certain achievements in the holy war, the greatest being to bring him Afrâsiyâb's crown. This curious custom is nowhere else mentioned in the Shâh-Nâmeh, but is evidently regarded as the climax of royal generosity. Khosrû is described as barbarically adorned with jewels, and throned upon an elephant, holding the old bull's head mace of the Iranian kings. Princes sit in the dust around him. He drops a golden ball into a cup, the image of Jemshîd's world-goblet. The earth shakes with martial music and the tread of hosts, as the nations march before him, and he blesses their chiefs as they pass by. He also gives them counsel at intervals, and sometimes proves himself as profound a moralist and as devout a theist as any Mahometan Sufi.[1] The homily to Ferâmorz shows what the epos regards as the basis of royal authority.

[1] It is manifest that Firdûsî has in some degree islamized his hero; but, on the whole, these discourses are in accord with the rest of the epos, and substantially of native quality.

"Show thyself worthy thy noble birth. Never spur thy horse against the harmless, nor harm them in thine anger. Be ever protector of the poor and consoler of thy people. Never say 'to-morrow.' Flee strife, and trouble none that hurt thee not. Seek not fleeting riches. Build not on the vanity of the world, which now is red, now black. The time hastens on when thou shalt rest in death; be careful that thy heart accuses thee not, and that thou go hence in peace. God numbers thy breaths. Keep soul and body in cheerfulness, and strive for the true end. So may the Creator keep thee, and cover thy foes with dust."

To old Rustem he says, in like manner, but with more regard to the fighting man's animal instincts, mingling an epicurean love of wine and pleasure with the philosophy of resignation to the swift lapse of life and the passage of all human grandeur: —

"Wise is he who thinks not of the morrow. Life is given for joy. Where now are Ferîdûn and Selm and Tûr? Gone! and their tracks vanished in dust. Why long for treasures, instead of tasting life's joys. Our last treasure is the inevitable grave. Let the night be glad with wine, till morning dawns, and Tûs awakes us with call to arms. Man strives and struggles, but all has such issue as Heaven foreordains; joy and sorrow alike go over our heads, and whoso complains thereof is without sense. If God stands by me, I will avenge my father's death."

It is a curious mixture of Islam and Iran. The stormy passion for physical stimulus is natural enough, but fate and foreordination do not properly belong to the Iranian mind. Yet the combination is by no means impossible, and contempt for treasures that can be laid up on earth well becomes the hero who is forever facing death.

The chiefs are commanded to wage war humanely: —

"Ravage not the land on the march, nor harm the peaceable and industrious. Be merciful towards the unarmed, for short is rest in this earthly dwelling."

Khosrû punishes offenders with a lofty justice that is recognized by all. Dying warriors ask of Fate only this,