



to see Kai Khosrû once before they die. He gratefully remembers the virtues of Pirân, and his protecting care, mourning that at last he so turned against Iran that he must needs be slain; and treating his body not as a foe-man's, but embalming it, and seating it on a throne in armor, in the resting-place of kings. He is himself magnanimous, pardoning the Turanian foe as soon as he pleads for mercy. After a hard-won victory, he chivalrously protects the wives of Afrâsiyâb, listening with softened heart as they plead against his merited anger. His speech to the soldiers is beyond the Mahometanism of Firdûsi's day, and the poet seems to have caught it from some great fountain of wisdom and mercy, from which he drew through all that portion of his work which covers the Sassanian time: —

“All Turan, as well as Iran, will be your home. Cast away then every thought of revenge, and make the land happy by your mercy; for the people are stricken with fear. I give you the wealth of Turan, and ask only this in return. Try to do right. As you have felt the winter, carry with you the spring. It is unworthy of you to strike the fallen. Turn your eyes from lust. Respect property. So shall enemies turn to friends. He who would please me, must abstain from desolating the land, and call him who does so accursed.”

The close of Khosrû's reign betrays the hand of Islam. As perfect king, in himself and by contrast with Kai Kâus before and Gushtâsp after him, he must crown his life by renouncing the world, of which he has seen all the glory and the vanity, and receive that celestial reward which puts earthly thrones to shame. Reflecting that he might easily fall like Jemshîd, remembering his mixed blood, content to have accomplished justice on his father's murderers, and to have made himself the terror of infidels and evil-doers, Khosrû secludes himself in his palace to prepare for his withdrawal by solitude and prayer. This contempt of the visible world, so utterly opposed to Persian traditions, naturally enough excites the alarm





of his whole court; and the chiefs, through the aged Zâl, entreat him not to abandon his public duties, clearly intimating that his conduct looks like possession by a demon. But no explanation is given them, except a desire to obtain the peace of God and a place in Paradise. A dream, in which the Persian Saviour Sosyosh plays the extraordinary part of summoning him to divide his goods among the poor and prepare to enter the everlasting light out of this dark world, confirms his purpose. The most remarkable feature of this exalted mood is his homily to the peers, who return from fierce war with Turan to hear themselves exhorted not to weep for his departure, "since all must die, and every one cries out to the Creator, when he has grown old and weary, 'Take me to thy rest!'" He will pray for them, and they must spend seven days in joy. Of course they believe him mad. Then he tells old Gûdarz to pour balsam into wounds; to spend, not hoard; to build the hospice and rebuild fallen towns; to console the afflicted; to keep the holy fire burning. Gifts of provinces and fiefs are lavished on the best. "Tell me now what else ye need, for the shepherd is to leave his sheep." He appoints his successor, who is unwillingly yet loyally received, and takes tender leave of his family. Then, accompanied by the people in procession, he sets out for a distant mountain; but before reaching it, dismisses all but three Pehlevâns, who refuse to leave him, and who, in fulfilment of his warning, are buried in a snow-storm, during which he is taken up to heaven, while they sleep their last sleep.

Such for the epos is the reward of ideal royalty: to escape the evil hand of disease, old age, and common death; to be translated by its own will to divine abodes. And such the power possessed by the true king to bring his whole people to sacrifice all their interests to satisfy his sense of a divine duty. The mixture of Mahometan





person with Iranian heroism here is not easy to analyze; but the main fact shown is, that the Iranians had an ideal of royal virtue which was more to them than the mere person of a king; and that the Pehleván who could allow a Khosrú to give up the whole State at the command of his convictions, would also resist a Kâus to his face, like Rustem; or, like Bôzhan, rebuke a Gushtâsp for cruel treachery towards his own son.

But the ideal king or hero does not so well illustrate the genius of the time and people as the real central figure of the epic action, who embodies alike the merits and the faults of the civilization, the positive conflict of good and evil that its conditions require. Rustem is a creature of mighty instincts, which are dowered with the strength of a hundred men. He is the child of the fierce strife between Iran and Turan, but combines with its passions a chivalrous humanity hardly compatible with them from the modern point of view. At drinking and club-swinging even Iblís cannot compete with him. After a boastful drinking-bout with seven chiefs on a hunting-party, he rises up from Zabul wine to defeat Afrâsiyâb's host, and then spares the fallen, and scorns to rob the dead. Div or dragon, thirst or cold, are as unable to cope with his purely human strength as are the warriors of Turan, when he goes, all alone, to free the spell-bound army of the reckless King Kâus in Mazanderan; but he is so tender-hearted that he does not fail to pray for them all, "because though all sinners in God's sight they are nevertheless His children." His talk is fresh with natural emotion, and there are few pictures in the epic so charming as his interview with a beautiful youth on the borders of a stream, ending in unbounded surprise and joy when this charmer reveals himself as the young Kai Kobâd, the true prince whom he had come from Iran to seek, and bring back to the throne of his fathers. His merciless revenge for Siâ-





vaksh upon the son of Afrāsiyāb, reaching even to the mutilation of his remains, when the youth had actually pleaded for his life on the strength of his love for the martyred prince, is as barbarous as Achilles' wrath against Hector. For when he confronts Pilsem, Afrāsiyāb's brother, doing wonders in the battle, he pities him, and sighs that so much manliness must die so young. His similar pity for Sohrāb, and his terrible agony of grief and madness when he finds he has slain his own son, have already been described. When Bēzhan is found to have been inveigled into the power of Afrāsiyāb by Gurgin, his envious companion, and Rustem is going alone to deliver him, and the whole court is anxious and indignant, demanding the punishment of the offender, Rustem pleads for his forgiveness, "because he has repented, and if he be now cast from grace, his spirit will be broken." We have seen how superior Rustem is in moral manhood to the champion of the faith, Isfendiār, in refusing, at his demand, to soil his noble fame with even the outward pretence of bondage. So the difference between Rustem's seven adventures or labors in delivering Kai Kāus from Mazanderan and the seven feats of Isfendiār in taking the Broken Fortress, is greatly to the advantage of Rustem, both in regard to motive and detail. He goes alone, without a word of direction or a hand of help, through perils of which he has no foreknowledge. Isfendiār goes with an army, learns from a prisoner of war what he is to meet, accomplishes his object by deception, and ends by barbarously massacring his foes. Rustem acts from spontaneous desire to save his countrymen and his king. Isfendiār acts partly from unquestioning obedience to his father's command, indeed, but with the ulterior hope of acquiring the crown.

In every great national peril Rustem holds the fate of Iran in his hands, and seems to have a permanent commission from her guardian gods to save her, lasting





through many generations of mortal men. This vast responsibility, with the personal self-abnegation it involves, gives his whole life the highest ethical interest, maintained as it is both by the terrible fatalities of the circumstances by which he is continually tortured and finally slain, and by the lofty courage with which in spirit he meets and conquers them, while subject to them in the flesh and in the affections. This mighty struggle of solitary human strength against overwhelming necessity for a whole epic period is essential tragedy. His exposure to the intolerable rancor and caprice of Kai Kâus, the prodigious odds against him in the strife he must wage against enemies visible and invisible, the anguish of discovering that he has killed his own child in unnatural fight, the attempt of Gushtâsp to outrage his honor and humiliate him in his old age before the court, and the insulting conduct of Isfendiyâr, constitute a series of adversities unsurpassed in heroic legend; and in no case does he sink below the level of his conviction and self-respect. That in the conflict forced on him by Isfendiyâr he should be obliged to accept the terrible condition, that if he should slay the champion of orthodoxy he must expect no relief from pain here or hereafter, lifts Rustem to the position of a martyr to the right of protest against ecclesiastical pretensions to rule the fate of the soul. The same honor was foreshadowed in his mixed blood, and in the reputation of his family and province, for non-conformity. In that part of the Shâh-Nâmeh tradition which relates to the closing events of his career, and which has marks of priestly interference, Rustem bears the burden of infidelity; yet even here the nobler impartiality of the national tradition in large measure overcomes the evident purpose of Firdûsî to take the orthodox side. As we have already said, the old Iranian mythology, heroic rather than technically religious, looks not at the creed but at the manhood of its Pehlevâns, who





are all of more or less Turanic blood. Rustem everywhere represents this breadth of spiritual sympathy, and is quick to be reconciled with his bitterest foes; as where he so readily accepts the charge of Isfendi-yâr's son, confided to him by the dying prince from whose terrible arrows he had just escaped. And at last, in the successful plot of his enemies to lure him on to his destruction, his generous confidence is their main reliance for accomplishing the crime.

Rustem is great enough to see life as a whole, and to find the solution for its ironies, wrongs, and failures, in renouncing the self-indulgence of ease, and in living for the law of duty. Of course, this statement must be interpreted in accordance with the age and the race in which the character was mythically conceived and developed. But whatever Firdûsî has added to the simple traditions of a heroic age is but the self-conscious rendering of instincts really existing in that age, and determining the conduct of its typical men. The spectacle of a battle-field where dead heroes are strewn like wrecks, draws from him this philosophy, which, as instinct, is thoroughly natural: —

"Regard the world from whatsoever point, you will see grief, anxiety, and pain. The ever-turning wheel brings sometimes strife and poison, sometimes the sweetness of love. But whether we die in one way or another, let us not be troubled about the why or how; but depart when our time comes, regardless of the turns of fate. Be the God of victory our trust, and perish the fortune of our foes."

But a more lofty place is reached in his unselfish service of his country. He is without ambition to make himself prominent, or to claim the reward he could so easily exact. He is the Washington or Cincinnatus of old Iran; and when he has saved her life, he more than once avoids the ovations prepared for him, and modestly begs leave to withdraw to his loved Seistan and the ancestral house. "O





King! thou art full of goodness, but I long to behold the face of Zâl."

With Rustem and Zâl ends the heroic race of Seistan,—Titans of Nature and freedom, paladins of an earlier chivalry, foreshadowing at once the Arab sheikh, the knights of Arthur's Round Table, and the demigods of Scandinavia and Greece, as well as a class of ardent and powerful leaders in all times; combining acceptance of inevitable things like death with robust faith in valor and freedom, and keen instincts for this world's savors and bodily delights. Firdûsî's portraits are touched with the color of Islam, but their forms and features are essentially old Persian. He has made the legend read its own lesson, how sorrow and death have their will at last, with all this courage and passion, this strength before which the earth trembles and demons flee; and how the sense of immortality is identified with heroic doing and suffering in this earthly life. These lessons of all ages are nowhere more distinctly or more pathetically pronounced than in the *Shâh-Nâmeh*.

The story of Pirân represents the tragedy of a situation in which the penalties of a bad cause fall on the good men who are in some way forced to serve it. We see the wise, thoughtful, brave, and humane counsellor of Afrâsiyâb striving all his life loyally to serve his king, in a broad and noble spirit ill suited to the task. The story of his love and protecting care for the exiled Siâvaksh and for his son Kai Khosrû, which we have already given in outline, is a picture of surpassing moral beauty. But neither Firdûsî nor the Iranian chiefs render his conduct the admiration it deserved. Firdûsî, in fact, ascribes to him a certain insincerity, where the interest of his cause was concerned, which seems to be nothing more than justifiable reticence towards the enemy of his country. His appeal to Rustem, against the continuance of the barbarous





war of Iran and Turan, is certainly very noble. Rustem replies with the warmest testimony to his rectitude, but offers only impracticable conditions of peace, one of which is that Pīrān himself shall come over to the Iranian side, with the promise of great reward. Pīrān sees that the demands cannot be agreed to, but will carry them to Afrāsiyāb. In the council of war they are rejected, and Pīrān, positively refusing on his own part to forsake his king and country, though their ruin seemed certain, returns to the Iranian camp with the irritating decision, to be met with violent reproaches. Firdūsi seems to echo these, and says that Pīrān retired with his lips full of lies and his head of plans of revenge. But surely the old chief's indignation at being asked to turn traitor was creditable; and as for the lies, we are not told what they were nor what was their motive. On another occasion the same proposals are made to Pīrān by Gudarz, another Pehlevān; and again the hero refuses either to give up Afrāsiyāb's nearest relatives to be punished with death, or to leave the service of his king. His proposal to spare human life by reducing the war to a single duel is denounced by Gudarz with unfeeling contempt; yet the Iranians are by and by glad to accept a similar one, — that of a fight between twelve champions on each side, thus justifying Pīrān's judgment.

Even Afrāsiyāb turns against his faithful counsellor, and the heavy burden of a lost cause falls upon the head of the best among its supporters. He is oppressed by forebodings, and sees the setting of his own sun. In every duel the Iranians are victorious, and Pīrān falls under the spear of Gudarz, who savagely drinks his blood in revenge for Siāvakhsh, — the last refinement of irony, since Pīrān was the exile's one saviour and friend. In their touching lament over his dead body, his brothers dwell on the sadness of his destiny, recalling the old saying,





"No burial shall he have, nor grave-clothes; and his bleeding body shall be carried about by his foes." "All is over with him, and the wind has swept all his labor away." Even Kai Khosrû, who owes to him his throne and his life, condemns him for sacrificing everything to his love for Afrâsiyâb. The poet also utters over him this mournful plaint:—

"So false and treacherous is the course of things, mixing rise with fall.

The wise man sees with pain how Fate promises and fulfils not."

The religion of the Shâh-Nâmeh is purely monotheistic. Retaining the fire-symbol, the Amesha-çpentas, and Çrao-sha, yet very inconspicuously, it treats Ahriman, not as co-equal with the supremely good spirit, but merely as the power of evil in human conduct; so that he appears as the name of any man who is on the wrong side. We have not Ahriman, the devil, as God, but men who are "Ahri-mans," or "devils." In fact, the personal Ahriman had long given way to a more intensely exclusive power than Ormuzd, and was lost in the God of Islam. But this Semitic worship is inspired by the heroic traditions of Iran and humanized by the personal qualities of the great Pehlevâns of the epos. Firdûsi's views of life, fortune, destiny, and the future life were Mahometan; but there was no escaping the free, democratic, self-asserting, this-world spirit of the legend with which he had to deal. The reign of Gushtâsp, indeed, introduces a new element into the legend itself,—the hand of Zoroastrian orthodoxy. Down to that period the poem knows no impassable religious line between Iran and Turan. The prayers and vows of Afrâsiyâb cannot be distinguished, either in form or substance, from those of Rustem or Kai Khosrû. Iran has no monopoly of virtue or of piety. The impartiality of the heroic stand-point is complete. But with the





advent of Zerdusht, in the days of Gushtâsp, it is otherwise. Lohrasp, his successor, a scion of a new race, is noted only for building a national altar for the reformed faith, and for transferring the court to Balkh, conformably to the traditions which ascribe the origin of Zoroastrianism to eastern Iran. Firdûsî celebrates Zerdusht as "a tree reaching to heaven, with deep roots and many branches; its fruit wisdom, its leaves knowledge; who is fed by it shall never die." "The tracks of his feet were blessed." He brings a vase of fire from paradise to Iran's king, bidding him accept God the creator, and the true religion, and Gushtâsp obeys. He plants a cypress, on whose bark he writes the creed, with the ancient history of Iran, and surrounds it with palace walls. Wherein this creed differed from the old theism of the Pehlevâns for a thousand years does not appear, except that the epos itself becomes narrower in its sympathies, as if under the influence of a positive Zoroastrian Church, seeking to impose itself on the freer theism of the princedom of Iran and Turan. The myths no longer rise to the old universality and freedom. They are in the interest of Zoroaster. The war with Turan becomes a family religious war. The Prophet even appears in old age at court, and forbids tribute to the Turks, who in turn denounce Iran for falling away from the faith into superstition. This surprising turn in the spirit of the epos corresponds with an equally unexplained change in the political relations of the two peoples. The mastery over Turan, gained by Kai Khosrû at such cost, and apparently so decisive, has disappeared, and in its place is a long-recognized right of Turan to demand tribute of his successors. Gushtâsp, the political founder of orthodoxy, has the old rôle of a national redeemer, to be driven off by his father into exile, and to return master of the situation and be crowned as the true king; but his glory, of course, fades in the brighter star





who succeeds him. Isfendiyâr, subjected to the same persecution and peril in his youth, learns his high function through suffering, and becomes the champion of the Church, despatched to convert the world and punish the noble old heretic of Seistan.

But we have seen that even during this period the ecclesiastical spirit is so strongly antagonized by the heroic element, that in spite of the poet's apparent sympathy it really plays an ignoble and inferior part. And it is soon succeeded by new epical constituents, — Semitic, Egyptian, Greek, — in which we find the same predominance of the heroic over the technically religious.

It is for the life of world-famous Iskander that Firdûsî begins to draw on other than native sources. Queen Humâi rules wisely, and her child Dârâb is a new ideal for the mythologists. He is put through the conventional process of exposure to death, wonderful deliverance, and final ascension to his destined throne in spite of every obstacle. Cast into the Euphrates in a chest, he is rescued, and brought up in ignorance of his birth till the time comes to take his crown. He marries the daughter of Philikûs, king of Rûm, and Iskander is their child. He, too, is supplanted by Dârâ, a younger half-brother, and must resort to invasion to secure his rights. The story of Rustem and Isfendiyâr finds an echo in that of the Iranian King Dârâ (Darius), defeated and assassinated, but before his death reconciled with Iskander, to whose care he commends his children. Thus Iran legitimates Alexander's conquest, and claims him as her own. The epos makes him confirm all the liberties of Iranian feudalism, modify the harem by abandoning forced supplies of women, and generously maintain all Sufis, or holy men, besides prohibiting injustice generally. From this point the epos continues on the large track of universal ethics and religion. In the new and in many respects peculiar





instance of Iskander, Firdûsî still holds to the supreme significance of heroism, which belongs to the Iranian consciousness, though much of his material is drawn from the Græco-Egyptian pseudonymic romance of Calisthenes. Alexander's infancy, accession, and achievements are constructed on the conventional mythic mould, to show that wrong and suffering can only testify to the sovereignty of justice in human events. But after acquiring the throne which had been unjustly given to another, Iskander endures no more suffering, either from his own sins or those of other men. He is all-victorious, as he is all-noble. But none the less necessary is it that he should learn the conditions of mortal existence, the folly of extravagant desires, the vanity of self-exaltation, the sovereignty of Fate, and find freedom only in accepting the supreme order of the world. East, West, North, and South yield to his victorious arms. Yet the emphasis falls after all upon solitary personal experiences, whose meanings are conveyed miraculously to his senses, as in parables, lessons of moral wisdom, symbols of truth and duty, prophetic intimations of death from Nature and from man. And so the epos, which had been purely heroic, becomes with Iskander distinctly ethical and didactic.

His personality is overwhelming. In the disguise of a messenger from Iskander he goes fearlessly into hostile camps and courts; but as his superiority to his play-fellows betrayed him in his childhood to be the destined king, so nothing can hide his majesty when masquerading in these maturer functions. "Go free," says the Arabian queen to the seeming envoy who is astonishing her court, "for the very dust of the earth knows that thou art thyself Iskander." Yet around this world-master gather the mysterious intimations of a law higher than his own will, of the transiency of human pride and human praise. The legend makes Iskander great enough to feel these rebukes,





and to see the plane where king and subject are equal. The Brahmans tell him that desire is the hell of his soul, and the essence of punishment. His cheeks blanch and eyes fill with tears, and he goes away silent. In Habesh a voice speaks to him from a dead king on a throne of gold, saying, —

“Thou hast destroyed many thrones and lifted thy head to heaven; but the time of thine own departure is come.” “His face becomes crimson, and he departs with a wound at his heart.”

Following a sage far away into the sunset of the deep, and beyond an immeasurable city, he pursues the fount of immortality. But in the dark he loses his guide. The sage finds what he seeks, but the king fails. Then the generosity and devoutness of an unbeliever, Faghfûr the emperor of China, puts the great conqueror to shame, teaching him that true religion forbids the doing of evil to any, and that a true gift, however bounteous, is given, not as service to any earthly king, but to God. The angel Isrâfil, the speaking birds, the field of riches that it is as dangerous to leave as to take, the omens of coming death, admonish the world-master that self-indulgence is foolish and vain. Finally, reason and philosophy have their good work in him, through Aristâlis (Aristotle), who dissuades him from the Oriental policy of putting to death by treachery all living members of the royal family of Iran (Kaiânides) who might afterwards revolt against his dynasty. The philosopher conjures him to do injury to none of these princes, but rather, by generous treatment, to turn every one into a bulwark of his throne; and Iskander is man enough to consent. When he dies, his obsequies are performed by sages who moralize on the lessons of his life in the spirit of the old Bible text: “I have said, ye are Gods; but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” The poet's comment is this: —





"Iskander is gone, and lives only in men's words. He slew thirty-six kings : see what remains in his hands ! He built ten fair cities, which now are deserts ; he aspired to what none else had achieved ; East and West repeat his story, — and there is the whole. Behold, the word [of God] is best ; never shall it, like these old palaces, be the prey of winds and rains."

Ignoring the foreign dynasties which succeeded Alexander, the epos reopens with Ardeshr Bâbegân, the restorer of the faith. This national saviour, like the other heroic ideals, begins his career in obscurity, and reaches the throne by his own resistless will. His reign is conceived in the same ethical and didactic spirit as that of Iskander. Through the whole Sassanide period the kings are preachers, and deliver long addresses or exhortations in a high moral strain to their nobles or their children. The proverbial lore of these ages seems to have been treasured up in the form of homilies, and ascribed by the nation as by its epic bard to the kings of the great race of Sâssân. To these, even heroic achievements are secondary. We might fancy ourselves fallen on a line of Stoic kings. Ardeshr's person, however, is of the old Pehlevân type, — "beautiful as the sun, a lion in fight and a Venus in feasts." His youthful feat of mastering the fortunes that went with the possession of a mysterious worm found by a damsel in an apple, and by whose spinning a peasant's family became a mighty empire, is doubtless a mythic version of Iranian relations with the land of silk ; and the hero's device of entering the castle of this famous guardian worm in guise of a merchant simply follows the model of earlier heroic legends. These stories are a curious opening of the Sassanide portion of the epos, and seem to show that Firdûsî must have confined himself faithfully to the older materials before him, since he would hardly have invented such a porch as this to the grandest period of the national life.





Ardešhîr ascends the throne of Gushtâsp with the proclamation that his "empire is justice, and that he is the asylum of mankind, the open audience-chamber for all." But as the older heroes were mighty in deeds, so is Ardešhîr in moral wisdom; and he includes the whole religious law in practical duties.

"Rich is he who is content: do thou resist cupidity, and hate strife. Be not anxious about the future, nor mortified at the past; nor mix in affairs not thy own. Regulate thy heart by God's commands. Resist deceit. Honor the king as your life; but if the king does not protect you against oppression, his royalty abandons him. May my subjects be happy by my justice."

To his son Shapûr he thus discourses of true kingship:

"A throne may be overturned in three ways,—if the king is unjust; if he favors unworthy persons; if he hoards his wealth. The means of the cultivator are the riches of the kingdom. It is the king's business to see that they bring him fruit. Have courage to shut thine eyes to sins committed against thee. When the king is angry, the wise man finds him of little worth. Fear not to be generous. Do not play at wine and feasting, but remember the excitement of wine exhausts the body. Speak not overmuch, and make no show of your virtue; listen to all, and remember the best. Make not friends thoughtlessly. Treat not the poor with contempt when he seeks you. Put not a bad man on the throne. Pardon the penitent, and avenge not the past. Be a providence to all men. In five hundred years your descendants will have gone over to Ahriman, and the land will be a desert. May God protect, and all good men aid you!"

The right of revolution against kings, and their responsibility to the laws of personal and private duty, as here set forth in precepts, are in entire accord with the spirit of the older legends of Kai Kâus, Gushtâsp, and other arbitrary monarchs.

The legendary story of Bahrâm-gûr, a king who shares with Nûshirvân the worship of all later Iranian tradition, is here in point. Yezdegerd, "the Wicked," maltreats his son Bahrâm, and sends him to Arabia, where he is educated





by the king of Yemen and his sage. Conceited, presumptuous, and cruel, Yezdegerd conceives himself in no need of Divine aid; and his death by the kick of a horse is set down as a judgment on his sins, which perhaps really consisted in some offence to the priestly class. Many of the nobles claim the crown, but all unite at last in placing Khosrû, a good old man, on the throne, and the army sustains their action. Bahrâm, returning from Arabia, appeals to the chiefs, who, after discussion, agree to choose a king out of a hundred persons, of whom Bahrâm is one. In opposition to the direct line of Yezdegerd, the mutilated victims of his cruelty are brought out to prevent the election of Bahrâm; who, indeed, finally persuades the assembly to select him, but not till he has promised to do justly, and has shown his heroic qualities by fighting a lion. Then Khosrû himself salutes him; he gives his adhesion to the law of Zoroaster, remits arrears of taxes, and the land is filled with joy.

On this free choice of the local chieftains follows an ideal reign. The king discovers the hidden treasure of Jemshîd, but refuses to keep it, on the ground that the king should receive only what is earned by justice and the sword, and orders its distribution among the poor: —

“Why take the fruits of the toil of dead kings? Why open my heart to the greed of gold? I am not bound to this fleeting world. My throne and my head deserve curses, whenever one of my subjects can complain of my injustice.”

The legend delights in making Bahrâm a kind of royal providence moving about among the people in disguise, righting wrongs, bestowing treasures heaped up by fraud, on deserving poor or otherwise unfortunate persons. For a season falling into luxurious ease and self-indulgence, he is roused by an invasion to instant self-recovery. And when he discovers that his indiscriminate bounties caused





mischief in many ways between the rich and poor, he seeks out wiser methods. Such measures as abolishing taxation, and importing Indian jugglers to amuse the people, may or may not have been improvements; but his moral homilies are of the most liberal and lofty tenor, and during his reign Iran was, we are assured from other sources, an asylum of all persecuted faiths. Christians, Gnostics, Manichæans, Buddhists, Jews, all mingled in the religious and political ferment, which was prevented from overturning the monarchy by the stringent hand of the Zoroastrian Church. The narrowness and intolerance of this institution, as we know it in history, hardly comports with the noble precepts placed by epic tradition in the mouths of nearly all the Sassanide kings. But these precepts are still less in harmony with the autocratic faith of Islam, or with the fatalism of the Koran. They are probably, as Mohl suggests, and as their simple and often primitive character shows, really the remains of old Persian wisdom, treasured up in or before the days of Nûshirvân.<sup>1</sup> We shall soon see how powerful was the influence of this national literature on the spirit of Islam itself and the sects that sprung from its bosom.

It is suggestive of a Persian rather than of a Mahometan origin of these ethical sayings, that the people are brought strongly into view as murmuring against the luxury of the rich, and complaining of their own disadvantages. It was upon feelings of this sort that the communist Mazdak wrought with such effect that he came near overturning the social order of Iran. The king, Kobâd, became his convert, and the palace was beset by crowds of malcontents. Bahrâm, finding the treasury empty in consequence of these disorders, abandons the throne in discouragement, hopeless of the evil world. He is succeeded nominally by Kobâd, but really by Mazdak, whose eloquence and

<sup>1</sup> Mohl, vi. v.





ambition raised him to the office of treasurer, where he readily took advantage of the destitution prevailing among the people, to overturn the existing social order. "What shall be done," he asks the king, pointedly, "with one who refuses to heal one bitten by a serpent, with a remedy which he held in his hand? How much more should he be punished who holds back bread from starving men!" Armed with the very natural replies to these questions, Mazdak proceeds to break down property rights, and to consign all things to communistic pillage. He is said to have distinctly proclaimed equality of property and community of wives. This doctrine so flourished, says the epic, that no one dared oppose it. Prince Khosrû, afterwards Nûshirvân, however, with other important persons, looking more deeply into the situation, found it wisest to put the reformer to death.

But the strongest proof that the ethics of heroism, not the interests of a priesthood, have prescribed the contents of the Shâh-Nâmeh to the very last, and consequently that Firdûsî has really refrained in the main from reading into the old traditions of Iran the spirit of a later and very different religion, is found in the figure<sup>1</sup> of the grand vizier of Nûshirvân, *Buzurjmihr*. He is the intellectual and political paragon, who confounds the Mobads on their own ground, and teaches the wisest of kings the arts of government and self-discipline. Finally, by conquering the extremity of injustice with unyielding fortitude, he proves the personal soul greater than kings, and virtue the real master of the world. Even as a youth he interprets dreams and asks and answers knotty problems with irresistible authority. His homilies reach the pith of the moral ideal, maintain the rights of reason, and inculcate generous and noble treatment of others as simple justice. It is not easy to find a purer and more humane spirit than

<sup>1</sup> Wholly mythical, says Nöldeke, *Tabari*, p. 251.





that of these sentences. This Oriental Boëthius discourses thus: —

“Keep far from sin; treat all men as thyself; remove alike from thyself and thy enemy all that thou dost not approve. If thou hast rectitude in thy thought, thou wilt do no evil. A bad action is a tree that bears evil fruit. If thou wouldst do no evil, weigh well thy words. Never, O King, permit divorce between thy reason and thy heart. It is reason that gives serenity, and delivers from evil in both worlds. But 'tis a poor spirit which says, ‘None equals me in knowledge.’”

“Teach your child to write [and what depends on it]. It is the most honorable of arts, and reinstates one who has fallen.”

By this the sage seems to refer to the usefulness of this art in affairs of State; for he goes on to show how important it is to the scribe to know how to adapt himself to the feelings of rulers. It is part of his wisdom, of course, to teach obedience and devotion to the king. Yet, as events proved, this meant with him the old patriotic loyalty which was part of the heroic ideal, not a tame, passive obedience. We shall see what his philosophy meant by freedom.

The attachment of Nûshirvân to his vizier is shown by seven grand festive conferences, in which the latter stands to be questioned on all subtle problems, and gives oracular replies. Much of this proverbial lore is commonplace enough, but its quality is as good as that of other collections of a similar kind, and was doubtless the storehouse of Persian political idealism for many generations. It has much of the tenderness of Marcus Aurelius, and not a little of the severity of Epictetus: —

“Two things never die, only two, — words that are sweet, and words that are good: they never grow old. Happy he who has shame [self-respect] and virtue. Do nothing, O King, of which your soul will be ashamed! Do no evil to men, but help them; this is the law of religion.”

“Who is the happy man? He who follows not Ahriman to sin. Who, though mean of rank, is the great man? He who is most wise and capable of governing his passions. Who is wise? He who quits





not the way of God to follow the evil spirit. To have wisdom is to be filled with hope, and to see only good in the world; to choose the straight, not the crooked way. The servant of God will not turn from the divine commandment to avoid suffering, to gain treasure, or to please any one. For no price will he barter the way of God. Neither serenity nor wisdom goes with evil actions. Is it better to have high birth, or instruction? It is better to have instruction. It is the ornament of the soul. For birth, little can be said. Without merit, it is a sad thing and feeble. Only by discipline is the spirit strong. A right-minded laborer is not contemptible to the wise; and all riches are loss to men of evil mind. The true friend is he who varies not, who wounds you not, nor fears to suffer for you. What is that which lasts forever?—A benefit. What the most splendid ornament of humanity?—The spirit of the wise, who controls his desires. What is greater than heaven?—A king with an open hand and a worshipper's heart. What the heaviest thing?—Sin. What does all mankind condemn?—A gross king, who harries the innocent; a rich man who refuses himself clothes and company; a shameless woman; a precipitate man; a poor man who pretends to be mighty."

Here is a catechism which might well supplant the dogmatic creeds.

The loyalty and heroism of this great counsellor was put to the severest test by Nûshirvân himself. Even this great king was not proof against the temptations of irresponsible power. Buzurjmîhr, suspected of theft, falls into disgrace; and then, replying with becoming dignity to the charge, that he too had a throne higher than the king's in every respect, is imprisoned in a cave, and no more heard from. Tired of waiting in vain for apologies, Nûshirvân sends to know how he bore his punishment, and is answered that his "days are happier than the king's." Further severities bring the same response. Threatened at last with death, the hero replies that for him to leave a painful existence is easy, but it is the king whose heart can be terrified by death. This brings royalty to its senses, and the vizier comes out of his prison a conqueror, to resume his function of interpreting things too





dark for kings or Mobads to solve. Here is greatness of another sort than Isfendiyâr's or even Rustem's. Yet it belongs to the evolution of similar qualities of will. And in passing from the oldest to the latest portions of the Iranian epos we have not crossed any important border-line, either ethnic or ethical.

Nûshirvân himself, who seems to have done more towards collecting the materials for the epos than any other of the Sassanide kings, is enshrined there in a wisdom of his own. Firdûsî sings of conversations between the king and his Mobads, in which the latter play the part of disciples, and not of masters.

On one occasion the Grand Mobad said: "O King, the general-in-chief has raised three hundred thousand dirhems for us, which we put in thy treasury." Nûshirvân replied: "I desire no treasure obtained by inflicting pain. Let it be restored to those from whom he has taken it, and add what they need. Take down his palace and take away his office."

And here is the Golden Rule of religious freedom:

"The Mobad said, 'An infidel does not necessarily harm the king. Every intelligent man must know that.' Nûshirvân replies: 'I have myself said the same thing, and the believers have heard it from my lips. The world is in no part without religion, though some prefer one faith and some another; one worships idols, another the true God. But none thinks that evil speaking is better than benediction. The world does not go to ruin for words. Say thou always what thou thinkest in thy heart. Yet if the king himself has not true belief, who shall draw benedictions on the world? Faith and kingship are soul and body.'"

"He who takes care for his reason, O Mobads, cares for his life. All I have learned seems only to pay my debt to my soul and my reason. See that reason guards you against your faults, for it is more precious than a crown."

"Once the Mobads remind him that he has not spoken wise sentences for their instruction for a long time. 'I have spoken words enough,' he replies; 'it is on my actions that I must depend.'"





He counsels his son not to shed blood lightly, nor lightly go to war, and to render justice alike to great and small. This son, Hormazd, begins by undoing his father's good work, and making way with his ministers. But a letter written by Nûshirvân coming to his sight, in which his bad courses are predicted, with their sure penalty, he returns to right ways for a season. Not long afterwards his army, headed by Bahrâm, whose faithful service has been repaid with insulting suspicion, revolts; and we are introduced to one of those stirring debates of the Iranian chiefs which decided the fate of dynasties. The most striking feature of this debate is the appearance of Bahrâm's sister, who enters the meeting with the *clan* of a prophetess, and in an eloquent historical argument protests against her brother's assumption of the throne, as an outrage on the legitimate dynasty. To her replies a prince, who believes that the Kaiânides have had their day, a thousand years long, and that their line is practically extinct: "Let their names be pronounced no more. Shame on a king without faith!" The end is, that Gurdîya distinctly repudiates her brother's cause, while the chiefs almost unanimously drink wine to the glory of the new aspirant. Hormazd, in virtue of this revolution in the army, is dethroned and deprived of sight.





CSL

## NOTE.

THE abrupt termination of this chapter, and of the volume, clearly shows that Mr. Johnson had not completed his work at the time of his death. He left no notes of any additional chapter, and probably intended to write no more than a concluding one. His characteristic trait, however, of fully developing his thought in all its bearings warrants the belief that he would have summed up in a concluding chapter not only the substance of this volume, but of the two preceding volumes upon Oriental Religions, as his Introduction in the "India" was for the whole work ("India," Introduction, p. 33). Still his work is practically complete. The volumes carry in themselves his conclusions. This one fully gives by hints and statements his concluding thought, — to him the fitting and all-important result of his studies of Oriental Religions, — namely, the connection between the religions of personal Will, which found their culmination in Mahometanism, and Universal Religion; and the natural and necessary evolution, in connection with scientific thought, of the worship of personal Will into the worship of cosmical Substance, Order, and Law.

A. M. HASKELL,

*Editor.*

AS 000 263

~~5-23~~