



A. H. 12.

Position of
Greek and
Persian
empires.

In neither of the great Powers which Abu Bekr was about to try conclusions with, had the nerve and virtue of earlier days survived. Luxury, corruption, and oppression, religious strife and military disaster, had impaired their vigour and undermined their strength. Barbarous hordes, overrunning the Western empire, had wrested the farther provinces from Byzantine rule. Between the Kaiser and the Chosroes again, war had long prevailed. Syria and Mesopotamia,—scenes of the coming chapters,—being the prize, now of one, now of the other. By the last turn of fortune, Heraclius, marching from the Black sea, had routed the Persians on the field of Nineveh, and advanced triumphantly to the very gates of the enemy's capital. Siroes, after putting to death his father and eighteen brothers, enjoyed but a few months the fruits of his parri- cidal crime; and (as we are told by Gibbon) 'in the space of four years, the royal title was assumed by nine candi- dates, who disputed, with the sword or dagger, the fragments of an exhausted monarchy.' Such was the condition of Persia, its court imbecile and anarchy rampant, at the time when Abu Bekr was engaged in his struggle with the apostate tribes. Nevertheless, the Arabian armies met with a fiercer and more protracted opposition on the Persian than on the Syrian side. And the reason is that Islam aimed its blow at the very heart of Persia. Constantinople might remain, with Syria gone, ignobly safe. But if the Arabs gained Irac, Ctesiphon (Medain), close at hand, must fall, and Persia with it. To this quarter attention will be now directed.

6 A. H.
627 A.D.Mothanna
attacks
Chaldæa.

Among the chiefs who helped to reclaim Bahrein, Mothanna has been named. Advancing along the Persian Gulf, he reduced Catif, and carried his victorious arms into the delta of the Euphrates. 'Who is this Mothanna?' asked Abu Bekr, as tidings of success kept reaching Medina; 'and to what clan doth he belong?' Learning that he was of the great Bekr tribe which peopled that vicinity, he commanded him to march forward, fighting in the ways of the Lord. The service was such as Bedouins love; and his column was soon swelled to



8,000 men. But opposition gathered in front. The Christian and heathen tribes were roused; and Abu Bekr, anticipating the impending struggle, resolved that 'the Sword of the Lord' should be again unsheathed, and so Khalid was deputed to subdue Chaldæa.

A. H. 12.

By the beginning of the twelfth year of the Hegira, rebellion had been put down throughout Arabia, excepting the South, which was also in fair way of pacification. It was now Abu Bekr's policy to turn his restless Arab columns to similar work elsewhere. He despatched two armies to the north. One, under command of Khalid joined by Mothanna, was to march on Obolla, an ancient city near the mouth of the Euphrates, and thence, driving the enemy up the western bank, to work its way towards Hira, the capital of Chaldæa. Iyadh, at the head of the other, was directed to Duma (midway between the heads of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf), which had cast off its allegiance; and thence to pass also on to Hira. Whichever first reached that city was to be in command of the country¹.

Troops
sent
to Irac.
i. 12 A. H.
March, 633
A. D.

Iyadh, hampered by the enemy, was long detained in the neighbourhood of Duma. Khalid, meeting no such obstacle, was joined on his march from Yemama to Irac by large bodies of Bedouins. These were of the greater service, as his numbers had been thinned, not only by the carnage at Yemama, but also by the free permission given the army, after that arduous campaign, of furlough to their homes. Nevertheless, the expedition was so popular that when Khalid, after a flying visit to the Caliph, rejoined his camp as it neared the Euphrates, he found himself at the head of 10,000 men; and this besides the 8,000 of Mothanna, who hastened loyally to place himself under the great leader's command.

Khalid
joins
Mothanna
in Irac.

The country before them was, in some of its features, familiar to the invading army, in others new and strange.

Mesopotamia
and
the Syrian
desert.

¹ Tradition here probably anticipates the march of events. It is doubtful whether the Caliph had the city of Hira yet in view; for the aims of Khalid and his Master widened as victory led him onwards.



A. H. 12. From the head of the Persian Gulf across to the Dead Sea stretches a stony desert, trackless and bereft of water. Advancing north, Nature relaxes; the plain, still wilderness, is in season clothed with verdure, bright with flowers, instinct with the song of birds and hum of winged life. Such is the pasture-land for hundreds of miles between Damascus and the Tigris. Still further north, the desert gradually disappears, and, about the latitude of Mosul, blends with the hills and vales of Asia Minor. Athwart the plain, from Aleppo to Babylon, runs the Euphrates, while the far east is bounded by the Tigris flowing under the mountain range that separates Irac Araby¹ from Persia. Between the two rivers lies Mesopotamia, full of patriarchal memories. Over this great waste there roamed (as still there roam) Bedouin tribes with flocks and herds. The greater part had long professed the Christian religion. Those on the Syrian side, as the Ghassan of Bostra, owed allegiance to the Roman Empire; those on the east were dependent upon Persia. But nomad life tends to fickle loyalty and laxity of faith; and, not infrequently, these northern Arabs were now led by affinity with their brethren of the south, and by the lust of plunder, to desert their ancient allies and ancestral faith, and cast in their lot with the invading columns.

Chaldæa
and Delta
of the
Euphrates.

The lower Euphrates—Irac Araby—is in striking contrast with the region just described. The two great rivers, while yet far from the sea, approach each other; but, instead of joining, still keep apart, and for some two hundred and fifty miles, running parallel, inclose the memorable plain of Dura. The country is covered with long hillocks and mounds marking the ancient channels of irrigation, and strewed with fragments of brick and pottery, remnants of a dim antiquity. The face of the land was not then, as now, a barren waste, but richly cultivated and watered by canals. On the Tigris, a little below where the two rivers approach, was Medain, 'the twin city' (so called from Seleucia on the western bank and Ctesiphon

¹ Irac of the Arabs, as distinguished from *Irac Ajemy*, i.e. 'foreign' or Persian Irac.



on the eastern), the capital of Persia. Fifty miles farther south, a mass of shapeless mounds, looking down upon the Euphrates from its eastern shore, mark the site of Babylon, and from their summit may be descried the Birs Nimrud (or 'Tower of Babel') rearing its weird head on the horizon of the verdant plain. Thirty miles yet further south lay Hira, capital of the surrounding Arab tribes. It stood (like its successor Kufa) on a branch which issues from the Euphrates by a channel in the live rock, cut by the hand of man, but of unknown antiquity. Sweeping along the west, the rival stream feeds many marshes, especially the great lake called the 'Sea of Najaf;' and, after a wide circuit, rejoins the Euphrates above its junction with the Tigris. There was in olden times another branch called the 'Trench of Sapor,' which, intended as a bar to Bedouin incursions, and taking a yet wider range to the west, returned into the parent river near Obolla. This is now dry, but originally it carried a stream which, like the other, helped materially to widen the green belt pressed in upon by the farther desert. The lower delta again, subject to tidal flow, alluvial, low, and watered with ease, is covered with a sea of corn, and has been called 'the garden of the world.' Besides the familiar palm, the country abounds with the fig, mulberry, and pomegranate. But the climate is close and oppressive; the fens and marshes, always liable to inundation, were aggravated by the neglect of dams and sluices in those days of anarchy; and the Arab, used to the sandy steppes of the peninsula, gazed wonderingly at the luxuriant growth of reeds and rushes, and at buffalos driven by the pestiferous insects to hide their unwieldy bodies beneath the water, or splash lazily along the shallow waste of endless lagoons. All Chaldæa, from the estuary upwards, was cultivated, as now, by *Fellaheen*, or Arab peasantry, and these were lorded over by *Dihcans*, or district officers of the Persian Court.

Such then was the magnificent province lying between the desert and the mountain range of Persia, the cradle of civilisation and the arts, which now attracted the Moslem

Khalid
summons
Hormuz.



A.H. 12. arms. The first to oppose them was Hormuz, Satrap of the Delta, a tyrant, hated by his Arab subjects. To him, as master of the tribes gathering in front, Khalid addressed a letter in the haughty type of Moslem summons: *'Accept the Faith and thou art safe; else pay tribute, thou and thy people; which if thou refusest, thou shalt have thyself to blame. A people is already on thee, loving death, even as thou lovest life.'* Then placing Mothanna in command of the advanced column, Adi, son of Hatim (the famous chieftain of the Beni Tay), over the second, and himself bringing up the rear, Khalid advanced on Hafir, the frontier station of the Persian empire.

Battle of
Chains.
Hormuz
slain.

Startled by the strange summons, Hormuz sent word to the Chosroes, and himself set out to meet the invader with an army whose wings were commanded by princes of the royal blood. He marched in haste, thinking to have an easy victory over untrained desert tribes; and reaching Hafir first, took possession of the springs. Khalid, coming up, bade his force alight, and at once unload their burdens. 'Then,' said he, 'let us fight for the water forthwith; by my life! the springs shall be for the braver of the two.' Thereupon Hormuz challenged Khalid to single combat, and, though he treacherously posted an ambuscade, was in the encounter slain. The Moslems then rushed forward, and with great slaughter put the enemy to flight, pursuing them to the banks of the Euphrates. The Arabs had now a foretaste of the spoils of Persia. The share of each horseman was a thousand pieces, besides great store of arms. The jewelled tiara of Hormuz, symbol of his rank, was sent to the Caliph with the royal Fifth. An elephant taken in the field, and led as part of the prize to Medina, was paraded about the town, much to the wonder of the admiring citizens, but sent back as unsuitable to the place. The action was called 'the Battle of the Chains,' from a portion of the Persian soldiers being bound together (as tradition contemptuously says) to prevent their giving way.

'The
Lady's
Castle.'

The defeated army fled towards the capital, and Mothanna with his horse hastened after them. Crossing the



Euphrates, he came upon a fortress called 'The Lady's Castle,' held by a Persian princess. Leaving his brother to besiege it, he advanced to a second fort defended by her husband. This he took by storm, and put the garrison to the sword; which, when the lady heard of, she embraced Islam, and, forgetting her Persian lord, gave her hand to Mothanna's brother.

A. H. 12.

The ardour of Mothanna was near to causing a disaster. When the message of Hormuz reached Medain, the king despatched another prince with troops to reinforce him. Rallying the defeated army, this force met Mothanna, who had been brought up by the great canal, or branch of the Tigris, which runs athwart the peninsula, and placed him with his small flying column in great peril. Khalid, apprised of the check, hastened to relieve his lieutenant, and just in time. The field was fiercely contested. Again the enemy fled; a prodigious number were either slain or drowned; the remainder escaped in boats. The deep channel stopped farther advance; but the spoil of the enemy's camp was very great. Khalid scoured the country, killing all the men fit for war, and taking their women captive. But the Fellaheen, or unwarlike peasants, he left unharmed.

Persians again defeated.

The court was now thoroughly aroused. Arab invaders, it was said, would best be matched by Arabs who knew their tactics; and so the king raised a great levy of the Bekr and other loyal clans, under a famous warrior of their own. He also summoned Bahman, a veteran general, from the east, to command the imperial troops. The combined army, in imposing force, advanced to Walaja near the junction of the two rivers. Leaving a detachment to guard his conquests in the delta, Khalid marched to meet the enemy. The battle, long and obstinate, was won by the tactics of the Moslem leader, who surprised the exhausted enemy by ambuscades in their rear. The discomfiture was complete. The Persians fled; and with them their Bedouin allies, but not until several had been taken prisoners. Flushed with success as he gazed at the scene around, Khalid thus addressed his followers:—'Ye see the riches of the land. Its

Victory of Walaja, ii. 12 A. H. April, 633 A. D.

Khalid's oration.



A. H. 12. paths drop fatness, so that corn and oil abound even as do the stones with us. If but as a provision for this present life,—let alone merit of fighting in the ways of the Lord,—it were well worth our while to battle for these fair fields and banish care and penury for ever¹. Khalid here struck a chord delightful to the Bedouin heart. Now, also, the inducements with respect to the other sex began to tell. Persian ladies, both maids and matrons, ‘captives of their right hand,’ were forthwith, without stint of number, and by permission which they held divine, lawful to the conquerors’ embrace; and, in the enjoyment of this privilege, they were nothing loth to execute upon the heathen ‘the judgment written.’ Thus religious fanaticism grew along with martial ardour, both riveted by motives native to the Arab—fight and foray, spoil of war, and captive charms.

Battle of
Allis,
iii. 12 A. H.
May,
633 A. D.

The cup had but just touched their lips, and many a chance might yet dash it from them. The great family of the Beni Bekr was divided in the struggle, part holding with Khalid and part with Persia. A bitter feeling was aroused between the Bedouins of Mesopotamia and the invaders, aggravated by defeat and the treatment of those taken captive. Smarting under injury, the Christian tribes roused their nomad brethren on both banks of the Euphrates, and urged the Court of Persia to revenge. Just then, Ardshir the king fell sick, and Bahman was detained at court; but he sent an army across the Euphrates to join the loyal Bedouins, who, from every side, flocked to Allis, half-way between Hira and Obolla. News of this great rising forced Khalid to fall back hastily, and recross the Euphrates. Leaving a strong detachment at Hafir to secure his rear, he boldly advanced to meet the enemy. The Arab tribes first rushed to the attack, and Khalid slew their leader. Then the Persians with a vast front came up, and the Moslems were hard pressed as they had never been before. The battle was fiercely contested, and the issue at one time so doubtful that Khalid vowed to the Lord that in event of victory the blood of His foes should flow

¹ Khalid's speech is quoted by Al Kindy, the Christian Apologist, S.P.C.K., 1887, p. 85.



in a crimson stream. At last the Persians, unable to withstand the impetuous onset, broke and fled. To fulfil his savage oath, Khalid proclaimed that no fugitive should be slain, but all brought alive into the camp. For two days the country was scoured by the Moslem horse, and a great multitude of prisoners gathered. Then the butchery commenced in the dry bed of a canal, but the earth drank up the blood. Company after company was beheaded, and still the gory flux remained. At last, by advice of an Arab chief, Khalid had a flood-gate opened, and the blood-red tide redeemed his vow. There were flour-mills upon the spot, and for three days corn for the army was ground by the reddened flood. We may hope that tradition has magnified the details of this great barbarity; but its memory lived in the name of the 'River of Blood,' by which thereafter the ill-omened stream was called.

A.H. 12.
The 'River of Blood.'

The battle over, a sumptuous repast was found ready spread in the enemy's camp, to which the Persians, when surprised by Khalid, were about to sit down;—a novel experience for the simple Arabs, who handled the white fritters with childish delight, and devoured with avidity rich pancakes and other eastern delicacies. Khalid ate his supper leaning on the body of a stalwart hero, 'the equal of a thousand warriors,' whom, in single combat, he had but just cut down. Tidings of the victory, with choice portion of the spoil, a welcome earnest of the royal Fifth to follow, were at once despatched to Abu Bekr. The messenger, himself a brave warrior, described the heat and progress of the battle, the feats and prowess of its heroes, the multitude of captives and the riches of the spoil. The Caliph, overjoyed at his glowing tale, bestowed upon the envoy a beautiful damsel from amongst the captive maidens he carried with him.

A Persian supper on the field.

Abu Bekr's delight.

For the moment the spirit of the Persians was broken; but their Bedouin allies proved so troublesome to Khalid, and occupied a position from which they could so materially annoy his rear and communications with Medina, that he resolved on reducing the whole tract west of the Euphrates

The principality of Hira.



A.H. 12. occupied by these tribes, together with Hira, its capital. The Lakhmite dynasty had long ceased to rule over this city, which now for many years had been governed by a Persian Satrap. Partly from its interests being akin to those of the Christian tribes of Mesopotamia, partly from its being a dependency of Persia, the influence of Hira had hitherto been little felt in Arabia proper. But recent events had shown that even the Beni Bekr might combine with the border capital to resist the invader; and to prevent the recurrence of such a danger, Khalid now directed his steps to Hira.

Amghisia
sacked.

With this view he advanced rapidly up the western channel of the Euphrates, and surprised Amghisia, a town the rival of Hira in size and wealth. The inhabitants fled, and the booty was so rich that each horseman took 1,500 pieces. When the Fifth reached Medina, Abu Bekr was overwhelmed at the sight; 'Oh ye Coreish,' he exclaimed in ecstasy, 'verily your lion, the lion of Islam, hath leapt upon the lion of Persia, and spoiled him of his prey. Surely the womb is exhausted. Woman shall no more bear a second Khalid!'

Hira be-
sieged capi-
tulates.

Finding boats at Amghisia, Khalid embarked his infantry and baggage, and was tracking up the stream to Hira when, the Satrap having laid open irrigating escapes above, the flotilla grounded suddenly. Apprised of the cause, Khalid hastened with a flying squadron to the canal-head, closed the sluices, and enabled the boats again to ascend. Then the army, having disembarked and taken possession of the beautiful palaces of the princes of Hira¹, encamped before the city walls. The Satrap fled across the river; but the city, defended as it was by four citadels, refused to surrender. The ramparts were manned, and the besiegers kept at bay by the discharge of missiles. A monastery and cloisters lay without; and at length the monks and clergy, exposed to the fury of the besiegers, induced the citizens to capitulate on easy terms embodied in a treaty. Then they brought gifts, which Khalid accepted, and despatched to Medina. Abu Bekr ratified

¹ *Life of Mahomet*, 1861. Vol. i. p. clxxi.



the treaty and accepted the presents, but desired that their value should be deducted from the tribute. A. H. 12.

The men of Hira bound themselves to pay a yearly tribute, all classes, saving religious mendicants, being assessed thereto. The Moslems, on their part, engaged to protect the city from attack. The treaty, though shortly set aside by the rising which swept over the land, is interesting as the first concluded with a principality without the peninsula. One strange condition may be mentioned. The beauty of Keramat had been long proverbial, and a soldier laid claim to her on the ground that Mahomet, hearing him extol her charms, had promised (so the story runs) that when Hira was captured she should be his bride. Khalid insisted that the prophetic promise should be now fulfilled. The thing was grievous to the lady's household, but she took it lightly. 'Care not for it,' she said, 'the fool saw me in my youth, and hath forgotten that youth remaineth not for ever.' He soon found out that it was even so, and was glad to name a ransom, which having paid, she returned to her people. Treaty with Hira.

The occupation of Hira was the first definite step in the outward movement of Islam. Here Khalid fixed his headquarters, and remained a year. It was, in fact, the earliest Moslem capital beyond the limits of Arabia. The administration was left with the heads of the city, who were at the least neutral. Khalid, indeed, expected that, being of Arab descent, and themselves long ruled by a native dynasty, the inhabitants would actively have joined his cause. Adi, grandson of the poet of that name, was one of the deputation which concluded the peace. 'Tell me,' said Khalid, rallying him, 'whether ye be of Arab or of Persian blood?' 'Judge by our speech: doth that betray ignoble birth?' 'True,' answered Khalid; 'then why do ye not join our faith, and cast in your lot with us?' 'Nay,' answered the Christian, 'that we shall never do; the faith of our fathers we shall not abjure, but shall pay tribute unto thee.' 'Beshrew the fools!' cried Khalid; 'Unbelief is as a trackless desert; and the wanderer in it the silliest of mankind. Here are two guides, an Arab and a stranger; Hira remains Christian, 12 A. H. 633 A. D.



A. H. 12. and of the two they choose the stranger !' The flux and reflux of Roman invasion had, no doubt, loosened their faith in Persia; but the court of Medain was near at hand, and, though in the last stage of senility, sufficiently strong to retain its hold upon a small dependency like Hira. The permanence of Arab conquest, too, was yet uncertain; the love of their ancestral faith was still predominant; and so the city chose to remain tributary. Several centuries later we find the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in considerable numbers still attached to the Christian faith¹.

Prayer,
and Service
of Victory.

Public prayer, outward symbol of the dominant faith, was now established; and the citizens might hear the cry of the Muedzzin, as, five times a day, beginning with the earliest dawn, it resounded from the adjacent camp. Khalid celebrated his success in a special *Service of Victory*. The occasion was memorable. Clad in a flowing robe girt loosely about the neck, he turned, when prayers were ended, to the assembly, and thus extolled their bravery: 'In the field of Muta, when fighting with the Greeks, nine swords were broken in my hand. But I met not any there to match the foes ye have encountered here; and of these none more valiant than the men of Allis.' The early campaign in Irac, however, is surrounded by tradition with a special halo; for the loss here on the Moslem side had not hitherto been great, and the fighting could hardly

¹ The feeling of this Christian principality in losing first their native rulers, and then being swallowed up in the Moslem invasion, is well expressed in these verses sung by one of their poets. Mundzir and Noman were princes of the Lakhmite dynasty:—

Now that the Princes of the house of Mundzir are gone, shall I ever again behold the royal herd of camels returning at eve from the pastures of Khawarnac and Sedir?

Now that the horsemen of Noman are passed away, shall I ever again feed the young she-camel on the pastures between Mecca and Hafir?

Like a flock of goats on a stormy day, we are scattered by the Beni Maad (the invading Moslems), even as pieces of camels slaughtered for the feast.

Heretofore our homes were sacred, and we like the teats of a well-filled udder, Yielding tribute at the appointed times to the Chosroes, and imposts in cattle and gold.

Alas! even so is the changeful wheel of the well of fortune. Now the day ascends with joy and gladness, and now it sinks into darkness and distress.



have compared with that of many a well-contested field A. H. 12. in the Prophet's time.

While Hira was left in the hands of its chief men, summary rule was set up over the adjacent country. The *Dihcans*—great landholders and imperial tax-gatherers—had been waiting upon fortune. Seeing now that Khalid carried everything before him, many began to tender submission and enter into engagements for the revenue. Abu Bekr had wisely enjoined that the Fellaheen should be maintained in possession, and their rights as occupiers of the soil respected. The demand remained unchanged, with the addition only of a light poll-tax. In other respects, the terms, made with the consent and approval of the army, corresponded with those of Hira. Holding their ancestral faith, the people became *Zimmies*, or protected dependants. Khalid undertook to defend them, and they on their part pledged allegiance and bound themselves to give notice if danger threatened. Garrisons were quartered here and there, and the troops held ready in moveable columns. Thus the country west of the Euphrates was kept in check, and also the lower Delta to the east. Throughout this region none was secure from rapine but such as had entered into engagements. Hostages were taken for the revenue; and a formal discharge given upon its payment. The tribute, as well as the booty, was all distributed among the army 'for the strengthening of the same.'

Persia meanwhile was hopelessly distracted. Male progeny near the throne had been so ruthlessly massacred, that no heir of royal blood could anywhere be found, and a rapid succession of feeble claimants was set up by the princesses left to form the court. Thus paralysed, the Persians did little more than protect Medain by holding in force the country opposite as far as the Nahr-shir, a deep channel, which, drawn from the Euphrates, flowed athwart the peninsula. This line was threatened by Mothanna; but Abu Bekr gave stringent orders that no advance should be made till all was secure behind. No tidings, moreover, had as yet been received from Iyadh at Duma, with whom co-operation was imperative. Khalid fretted at remaining

Adminis-
tration of
the pro-
vince.

Persia
paralysed
by internal
troubles.



A. H. 12. thus inactive, 'playing,' as he complained, 'for so many months the woman's part.' But he curbed his ardour, and contented himself with inditing two letters, in imperious tone, one to 'the Princes of Persia,' the other to 'the Satraps and inhabitants at large.'

Anbar. Towards the north and west, however, aggressive measures were continued. Siege was laid to Anbar, a fortress on the Euphrates some 80 miles above Babylon. The worn-out camels of the army were slain and cast into the deep fosse, which thus was crossed and the city captured. The Persian governor sued for terms, and was permitted to retire. Anbar and the well-watered neighbourhood thus

Ain Tamar. secured, the army attacked Ain Tamar, a fortress on the desert border three days' journey further west. The Persian troops were here supported by a great gathering of Arab tribes, and among them the same Taghlib levies which had followed their prophetess to Yemama. These met Khalid as he approached, but were repulsed, and the Persian governor, seeing the rout from the ramparts, fled and left the fugitives to defend themselves as best they could. Refused terms, they surrendered at discretion. The persist-

Khalid's severity.

ent opposition of the Christian Bedouins now led Khalid into an unwise severity that embittered them against him. Their leader was beheaded in front of the city walls, and every adult male of the garrison led forth and put to death; while the women and children were made over to the soldiers or sold into slavery. In a cloister of the church, hard by, were forty youths, who in their terror barred the door upon the enemy. When the retreat was forced, they

Christian students.

gave themselves up as students receiving instruction in the Gospel. Their lives were spared, and they were distributed among the leaders. The fate of these unfortunate youths, snatched from a Nestorian seminary to be brought up as captives in the Moslem faith, must have been common enough in the rude and sanguinary tide of Saracen invasion; the reason why tradition makes special mention of these, is that amongst them were progenitors of several distinguished men, such as Ibn Ishac, the historian, and Musa, the conqueror of Spain.



All this while, Iyadh, who ought long since to have joined Khalid, was battling unsuccessfully with enemies at Duma. The Caliph, becoming anxious, sent Welid, who had been deputed by Khalid to Medina in charge of royal booty, to assist him. By his advice an urgent message for help was despatched to Khalid. The courier reached just after the fall of Ain Tamar; and Khalid, with no enemy now in the field, replied in martial verse:—

Wait, my friend, but for a moment, speedily shall help appear;
Cohort upon cohort follows, waving sword and glittering spear.

Leaving Cacao in command at Hira, and starting at once with the flower of his force, he crossed the intervening desert, and made good his word.

He was not a day too soon. Okeidar and Judi, chiefs of Duma, were supported by the Kelb and other tribes from the Syrian desert; and now the Ghassan were pouring down from the north, under Jabala, Christian prince of Bostra. The position of Iyadh, thus beset, grew day by day more critical. The advent of Khalid changed the scene at once. His very name was a tower of strength. Okeidar had already felt his prowess, having several years before been taken by him prisoner to Medina¹. Much afraid, he hastened to surrender, but on the way was taken prisoner and beheaded. Then Iyadh on the Syrian side, and Khalid on the nearer, attacked the hostile tribes and utterly routed them. Jabala effected his flight to Bostra. But the helpless crowd that remained were hemmed in between the two forces, and none escaped. The gate of the fort was battered down, and the crowded inmates put promiscuously to the sword. The women were sold to the highest bidder; and the most beautiful, the unfortunate Judi's daughter, bought by Khalid for himself. Celebrating thus fresh nuptials on the field of battle, he enjoyed a short repose at Duma, while the main body of the troops marching back to Hira, were there received with timbrels and cymbals and outward demonstrations of rejoicing.

But all was not going on smoothly in that vicinity. The absence of Khalid had encouraged the Persians and their

¹ *Life of Mahomet*, p. 458.

A. H. 12.

Iyadh at
Duma.

Duma
stormed by
Khalid,
vii. 12 A. H.
Sept.
633 A. D.



A. H. 12. Arab allies, especially the Taghlib, still smarting under the execution of their leader, to resume offensive operations. Cacao, though on the alert, was able to do no more than guard the frontier and protect Anbar from threatened inroad. At this news, Khalid hastened back; and placing Iyadh in the government of Hira, despatched Cacao across the Euphrates, while he himself appointed a rendezvous at Ain Tamar to attack the Taghlib tribe; for he had vowed that thus he would crush the viper in its nest. On the eastern bank the Persians were routed and their leaders killed; while on the western, by a series of brilliant and well-planned night attacks, the Bedouins were repeatedly surprised as they slept secure in their desert homes, cut to pieces, and their families carried off. Thus Khalid fulfilled his vow. Multitudes of women, many of noble birth, were distributed among the army. A portion also, with rich booty, were sent to Medina, and there disposed of by sale¹.

Battle of
Firadh.
Persians,
Greeks, and
Bedouins
defeated,
xi. 12 A. H.
Jany.
634 A. D.

Following up his Bedouin foes, Khalid at last reached Firadh, on the Syrian border, and by the river rested his army during the fast of Ramadhan and for some weeks after. But the Byzantine garrison on the frontier, uneasy at the prolonged encampment and threatening attitude of Khalid, and making common cause with the Persian outposts and neighbouring loyal tribes, advanced in imposing force to chase the invader away. They challenged Khalid to cross the river; but the wary general bade them rather come over to the eastern bank. A long and severe conflict ensued. The Moslems were victorious; the cavalry pursued the fugitives, and the carnage must have been great, for tradition places it at the fabulous number of a hundred thousand.

Khalid's
incognito
pilgrimage,
xii. 12 A. H.
Feby.
634 A. D.

For the moment opposition was crushed, and no enemy anywhere in sight. The season for the Meccan pilgrimage being now at hand, Khalid formed the singular resolve of

¹ One was bought by Aly. He had recently taken into his harem another girl, one of the captives of Yemama; she was of the Hanifa tribe, and the son she bore him hence called the Hanifite, whose descendants being thus of the stock of Aly, had a political rôle of which we shall hear hereafter. He also married in this year a granddaughter of the Prophet, the child of Zeinab and niece of his deceased wife Fatima.



performing it incognito, unknown even to his royal master. So, having recruited his army for ten days on the well-fought field, he gave orders to march slowly and by easy stages back to Hira. Then, making as though he remained behind, he set out secretly with a small escort on the pious errand. Without a guide, he traversed the devious desert route with marvellous sagacity and speed. Having accomplished the rites of pilgrimage, he retraced his steps from Mecca with like despatch, and entered Hira in early spring, just as the rear guard was marching in. So well had he kept his secret, that the army thought he had been all the while at Firadh, and now was journeying slowly back. Even Abu Bekr, who himself presided at the pilgrimage, was unaware of the presence of his great general. When, after some time, the secret visit came to his knowledge, he was much displeased. But the action which he took in consequence belongs to the succeeding year.



CHAPTER IX.

CAMPAIGN IN SYRIA. BATTLE ON THE YERMUK¹.

12-13 A. H. 633-4 A. D.

Khalid-ibn
Said posted
on Syrian
border,
12 A. H.
633 A. D.

THE campaign in Syria opened under a very different Khalid, son of Said. An early convert, and as such an exile to Abyssinia, he held high place as a confessor of the faith. Employed as envoy in the south, he was forced to retreat in the turmoil following the Prophet's death, and now claimed fresh command. Although Omar and Aly doubted his fitness, Abu Bekr, overcome by importunity, sent him to rally the friendly tribes on the Syrian frontier; but unless attacked he was to take no forward step. The Byzantine garrisons, alarmed at his approach, summoned their Bedouin allies, and assumed a threatening attitude. Khalid was thereupon permitted to advance, yet cautiously, and so as to allow no danger in his rear. Proceeding onwards to the Dead Sea, he routed there a Syrian column; but finding himself so far away, called urgently for reinforcements. Just then the Moslem troops, having crushed apostacy in the south, were returning in great numbers to Medina, and so were available for any other service. Ikrima, with Dzul Kelaa and his Himyar followers, being the first to appear, were despatched in haste to support Khalid in the north.

Ikrima sent
to his sup-
port.

Also Amru
and Welid.
End of
12 A. H.
Jany.
634 A. D.

Two other Chiefs of note were despatched with a similar commission. These were Amru and Welid, who

¹ It is well again to remind the reader that our authorities are purely Arabian, the entire loss of Syria being recorded by the Byzantine authorities in but a few lines. Details, especially of the enemy's numbers, movements, &c., must be received simply as rumours handed down by tradition.



were away on a joint command, given them by the Prophet, A.H. 13. 12-
 in the country between Tayma and the Red Sea. Since the
 reduction of Duma, this tract having quieted down, Abu
 Bekr gave them the option either of remaining where they
 were, or of engaging in a work 'better for them, both in
 this present life, and in that which is to come.' To this
 Amru made answer: 'I am but an arrow in the quiver of
 Islam, and thou the Archer. It is for thee to pick out
 the fittest shaft, and whithersoever thou wilt, discharge it.'
 So they were dispatched, Welid to join Khalid, and
 Amru to occupy Ayla and the tract south of the Holy
 Land.

Emboldened by these reinforcements, Khalid hastened Khalid
 in the early spring to gain the first laurels of the campaign. defeated at
 Forgetful of his master's injunctions, he was in his eager- Marj, near
 ness decoyed by the Byzantine general towards Damascus. Sea of
 He had reached as far as Marj Soffar, to the east of the Sea Tiberias.
 of Tiberias, when the enemy closed in upon his rear, and cut Beginning
 off his retreat. Discomfited, he fled, leaving his camp in of 13 A.H.
 the enemy's hands, and Ikrima to retrieve the disaster. March,
 That able leader rallied the retreating force, and with a 634 A.D.
 sufficient remnant, including the brave Himyar band under
 Dzul Kelaa, took up a strong position on the frontier, until
 help should come. Khalid continued his flight, but was
 stayed on the road by a message from the indignant Caliph.
 'By my life!' he wrote, 'thou shalt come no further; thou
 pratest bravely when secure, but in battle art a coward.
 I have no patience with thee!' To those about him, he
 said,—'Truly Aly and Omar knew the man better than I.
 Had I listened to them, this mishap had not been.' We
 hear no more of Khalid ibn Said.

In the present emergency, it was fortunate for Abu Bekr Reinforce-
 that Arabia being now entirely pacified, he was able, as ments for
 the columns returned, to hurry them off to Syria, there to Syria.
 retrieve the fortunes of Islam. Duly sensible of the gravity
 of the enterprise,—nothing short of measuring swords with
 the Kaiser, the Caliph strained every nerve to meet it.
 He had thrown down the gauntlet, and was waging war, at
 one and the same time, with the potentates both of East and



A.H. 12-13.

addressed
by Abu
Bekr.Syrian
Army.

West. The brigades now formed for this great enterprise were pitched one after another at Medina on the plain of Jorf, a little way on the Syrian road; and, as each was ready to march, the Caliph walked (as nearly two years before he had done with Osama) by the side of the mounted leader, and gave him thus his farewell command. 'Profession,' he would say, 'is naught without faith. The merit of a work dependeth on the purpose of the worker. The reward promised in the Book of the Lord for such as fight in His ways, is great. Set this ever before thee and before thy men. But when thou haranguest them, be brief, for in the multitude of words the foremost are lost in the hindermost. So striving, ye will obtain the prize, riches and glory in the present life, and in the life to come a great reward.' Then with a hearty 'Fare ye well,' he would retrace his steps and return to his simple home.

The force thus brought together differed altogether in composition from the army of Irac. That in the main consisted of Bedouin tribes, which flocked to the banners of Mothanna and Khalid; the men of Mecca and Medina were there comparatively few, for most had returned to their homes after the battle of Yemama. In the Syrian army, on the contrary, there are reckoned at least 1,000 Companions, men who had seen and conversed with the Prophet, and no fewer than 100 of the famous Three hundred of Bedr. These enrolled themselves at pleasure under the chief of their choice; but, once enrolled, they yielded to that leader implicit obedience; while he, on his part, consulted their views and wishes on all occasions of importance. Sheikhs of renown, who but a few years before had wielded the whole power of Mecca, and haughty chieftains of high descent, now joined with alacrity the column of any one, however young and inferior, into whose hands the Caliph was pleased to present the banner of command. And the whole force, thus formed in separate detachments, held itself at the absolute disposal of the Commander of the Faithful.

Four
battalions

Four such detachments were now despatched. *First*, Shorahbil was appointed to supersede Welid, who shared



in the disgrace of Khalid. Rallying the scattered fragments of the discomfited force, he took up the most advanced position. *Second*, followed Yezid, son of Abu Sofian, with a levy from Mecca, which included many chief men of the Coreish roused by the Caliph's call and stirring news from Syria. His brother Muavia shortly after joined him with further remnants of the beaten army. Abu Obeida, trusted Companion of the Prophet, led the *third* column, and posted himself near Amru, who commanded the *fourth*, in the Wady Araba, west of all the others. Many of the new troops, specially the levies from the south, travelled after Bedouin fashion with their families, ready to make the north their home. For the marvellous conquests of Khalid's army in Chaldaea suggested the even more inviting prospect of settlement in the 'Land of blessing and promise,' as it is called in the Coran, a land flowing with milk and honey.

A.H. 12-13.
concentrated on the Syrian frontier.

The four battalions thus gathered in the spring of the year on the Syrian border numbered 30,000, besides a reserve of 6,000 under Ikrima. In their first advance they met with little opposition, and putting to flight such Arab and Greek troops as occupied the country about the Dead Sea, eventually took up ground in a sort of *echelon*, threatening the garrisons in the south of Syria. Abu Obeida, approaching Damascus, held a position the furthest east, near to Ikrima and the recent scene of disaster. Next came Shorahbil, overawing Tiberias and the valley of the Jordan. Yezid, in the Belcaa, threatened Bostra; and Amru, in lower Palestine, Hebron. Each of these eventually found himself confronted by a Byzantine force.

Their advance.

For Heraclius was at last alarmed. A few years before he gloriously repulsed the Chosroes; but after that, had relapsed into inactivity. Tidings of the invasion, an irruption, as it would seem, of barbarians from the south, now roused him from his lethargy. Repairing to Hims, he gathered an immense force, and sent it, in four divisions, to stem the advancing tide. The largest, numbering (as tradition has it) 90,000 men, was commanded by his brother Theodoric. The Moslems, startled at the formidable array,

Four battalions oppose them.



A.H. 12-
13.

Abu Bekr's
command
to draw
together.

consulted how to meet it. Amru urged the commanders to gather into one body.—‘For how,’ he sent to say, ‘can our scanty numbers, divided and apart, encounter these mighty hosts?’ To this they agreed, and Abu Bekr, who had constant tidings, was of the same mind. ‘Draw ye all together,’ was his order, ‘near unto the river Yermuk. Ye are the Lord’s host, and shall surely put the enemy to flight. Such as ye, shall never be discomfited by reason of the fewness of your numbers. Tens of thousands are smitten in battle because of their sins. Wherefore, do ye eschew sin. Let every man stand close by his fellow. So shall the Lord give you the victory.’

The two
armies at
Wacusa
on the
Yermuk,
ii. 13 A.H.
April,
634 A.D.

Acting thus, the columns concentrated on a spot south of the Yermuk, near where it was crossed by the high road from Damascus. The Greeks, suiting their tactics, also drew together, and pitched their camp on the northern bank of the river. The place was singular. The Yermuk, taking its rise in the high lands of the Hauran, runs in a deep and rugged gorge far beneath the level of the land; and descending rapidly, falls into the Jordan below the Lake of Galilee. The battle-ground was probably some 30 miles above the junction. Here the stream, by fetching a compass, leaves on its northern bank a wide plain, the field of Wacusa, bounded on three sides by a sheer precipice; while the remaining part was shut in by a ravine which nearly closed the circuit. Only a narrow neck was thus left for entrance, across which the highway passing, formed the key of the position. The Greeks, tempted by the wide expanse, entered from the north, and spread themselves out upon the plain. Thereupon the Moslems crossed the river and encamped likewise on the northern bank, upon a spot abutting on the road, and thus threatening the exit of the enemy. Amru, seeing this, rejoiced and said: ‘Be of good cheer, my friends; the Greeks are shut in, and few that are shut in escape.’ A desultory warfare ensued, without definite result. The Byzantine troops often formed up in force, and as often were driven back; the ravine was to them a strong protection, and the Arabs gained no material advantage. In such indecisive skirmishing two

iii. iv.
13 A.H.
May and
June.



months passed away, and the armies remained still facing one another. A.H. 12-13.

Abu Bekr became anxious at the delay, and the urgent appeals for reinforcements. It was not so much poverty in number, as lack of fire and military genius, that disquieted him. Abu Obeida was mild even to timidity; Amru an able counsellor, but lacking military dash. The mettle of the generals had not yet been fully tested; and their independence one of another, in the absence of a general-in-chief, was fatal to common action. When, therefore, the cry reached Medina for help, the Caliph exclaimed: 'Khalid is the man for this! By the son of Welid, with the help of the Lord, shall the machinations of Satan and of the Greeks be overthrown.' Accordingly, he sent this message to him:—'Depart and join thyself unto the armies of the Faithful in Syria, for they are downcast and forlorn. But beware (referring to his stealthy pilgrimage) that thou return not again to do what thou hast done. The Lord helping, thy removal shall not dishearten thy followers in Irac. Go forward, and high resolve attend thee! Fill up the measure of the Lord's benefits upon mankind, and He shall fulfil the same on thee. Have a care, lest the world and the flesh ensnaring thee, thou stumble and thy works perish. The Lord doth recompense!'

Khalid transferred to Syria.

Sets out with reinforcements.

This mandate disconcerted Khalid. He set it down to Omar, who, envying him the conquest of Irac, would thus snatch it from his hand. There was reason for the fear. But had Abu Bekr lived, it had been otherwise, for he continued thus:—'Take with thee half the army, and leave Mothanna half. When the Lord shall have given thee victory in Syria, then thou shalt return to thy command in Irac.' Reconciled by the assurance, and loyal to his Chief, Khalid began by selecting the Companions and flower of the force to accompany him. Mothanna insisted that the division should be equal, and was at last conciliated by securing a goodly portion of the veterans. The strength of either moiety was about 9,000. Mothanna accompanied the great general whom he had served so loyally to the border of the desert, and taking a last farewell, retraced his steps to Hira.



A.H. 12-
13.

Marches
across the
Syrian
desert

by a peril-
ous route,

The Syrian desert lay between Khalid and his new sphere of action. He could not take the northern route, because of hostile tribes and Byzantine garrisons; therefore, turning south, he crossed a second time that waste and tumbled sea of sand, the Nefud, and halted at Duma. Thence he took the direct road to Syria, and keeping the same, would in a few days have reached Bostra, but he feared lest the enemy opposing him in that direction should hinder his junction with the Moslem army. He formed, therefore, the bold design to strike north, right across the waterless and pathless desert, and emerging at Tadmor, so turn the Roman flank. A council of war was held, and a Bedouin guide brought in. 'There is but one way,' said he, 'a way so bare, and for five days so waterless, that even single horsemen shun it, lest they perish on the road.' 'By the same shall we go,' was Khalid's prompt resolve; and when expostulated with on the wild and perilous attempt, he answered that, with divine aid and firm resolve, nothing was wild and nothing perilous. The words fired his followers, and the project was by acclamation carried. 'Do this then,' said the guide, 'if ye will. Gather as many camels as ye can; withholding water for a while; then let them drink plentifully, and again a second time; afterwards, bind their ears and slit their lips, so that they ruminate not. So haply may your water last.' At each stage across the wilderness, ten such camels were slain for each troop of a hundred lances. The water drawn from their bodies, was mixed with milk for the horses. The men were given but a single draught each day. On the fifth day a shudder crept over the host. The supply was at an end. They had reached the neighbourhood where water should have been, but signs were wanting, and the guide at fault. After casting anxiously about in all directions, he cried in despair—'Search for the bramble bush; the bramble should be here; if ye find it not, we are lost.' So they searched all round. At last they came upon a half-concealed root; and with loud shouts of 'Great is the Lord!' rushed to the spot, dug down into the ground, and found a plentiful supply of water.



They were now on the Syrian side of the desert, about a hundred miles east of Damascus. Early next morning, Khalid fell on the astonished neighbourhood, scattering terror all around, and attacking Tadmor, which after slight resistance yielded. Then fetching a circuit, he skirted the Hauran within sight of Damascus, and emerged at Adzraat. Having achieved this marvellous journey in the course of a few weeks, and reopened communications with the south, he sent tidings to Abu Bekr of his safety, with the Fifth of spoil taken by the way; and, about midsummer, effected a junction with the army of the Moslems which still lay inactive on the Yermuk.

A.H. 12-13.

and effects
junction
with Syrian
army,
iv.v. 13 A.H.
June, July,
634.

Fresh reinforcements had lately arrived and raised the flagging spirits of the enemy. They numbered 240,000, of whom a portion were felons released for the occasion, and others chained in line, that they might not fly, or in token rather of resolve to die. Such are the exaggerated, and it may be fanciful, rumours handed down as, no doubt, current in the Moslem ranks. But whatever abatement is made from them, so much we may readily accept, that the army with which Heraclius sought to stay the surging tide of Saracen invasion must needs have been very large. We may also believe that though devoid of union, loyalty, and valour, it was well appointed, and elated by its late achievements in the Persian war. In discipline and combined movement, and also in equipment, the Byzantine must vastly have surpassed the Arab force. But the Bedouin horse excelled in celerity and dash. Their charge, if light, was galling, and so rapidly delivered that, ere the surprise was over, the troop itself might be out of sight. The Byzantine army, it is true, had Bedouin auxiliaries as numerous, perhaps, as the whole Moslem army. But their spirit widely differed. The fealty of the Syrian Arab was lax and loose. Christian in name, the yoke of his faith sat lightly on him. Indeed, throughout the empire, Christianity was eaten up of strife and rancour. With the reinforcements came a troop of monks and bishops, who, bearing banners, waving golden crosses, and shouting that the faith was in jeopardy, sought thus to rouse the

The two
armies
compared.



A.H. 12-
13.

passion of the army. The passion roused was often but the scowl of hatred. Bitter schisms rent the Church, and the cry of the Orthodox for help would strike a far different chord than that of patriotism in the Eutychian and Nestorian breast. Lastly, the social and ancestral associations of the Syrian Bedouin, alien from his Byzantine masters, were in full accord with his brethren from Arabia; and of such instinctive feeling, the invaders knew well to take advantage. With this lukewarm and disunited host, compare the Moslem in its virgin vigour, bound together as one man, and fired with a wild and fanatic fervour to 'fight in the ways of the Lord,' winning thus at one and the same time heavenly favour and worldly fortune. For the survivors there was endless spoil, captive maidens, fertile vales, houses which they builded not, and wells which they digged not. Should they fall by the sword, there was the martyr's prize of paradise, and black-eyed Houries waiting impatiently for the happy hour. The soldiers' imagination was inflamed by tales of heaven opened on the very battle-field, and the expiring warrior tended by two virgins wiping away the sweat and dust from off his face, and with the wanton graces of paradise drawing him upwards in their fond embrace. Of an army, nerved by this strange combination of incentives, divine and human,—of the flesh and of the spirit, faith and rapine, heavenly devotion and passion for the sex even in the throes of death,—ten might chase a hundred of the half-hearted Greeks. The 40,000 Moslems were stronger far than the 240,000 of the enemy.

Moslem
army paralysed by
separate
commands.

The Byzantine army, swollen by its reinforcements, began to overlap the Arabian camp and force it back into straitened quarters. But Khalid's energy soon caused things to mend. In a series of encounters, the enemy, worsted, retired behind the ravine in front. Still the prospect otherwise was not encouraging. The battalions of the Moslem host were separately pitched; the conduct of public prayer (mark always of supreme command) was separate in each; the attacks, delivered independently, from want of combination, failed. The issue hung fire. A month passed, and Khalid became impatient. To secure



success, authority must be vested in a single hand. He saw the fault, and set himself to remedy it. A H. 12-13.

Opportunity soon offered. Unusual movement on the Roman side led to a council of the Moslem chiefs, and Khalid laid his views before them. The Caliph, it was true, had commissioned them to meet each a separate Byzantine army. But the enemy was now massed in one; and Abu Bekr would surely under the altered circumstances approve the assumption of command by a single general. The merit in the sight of the Lord would be the same; not less the merit in the Caliph's eyes. 'Come now,' he said, to disarm their jealousy, 'let us vary the supreme control, taking it each in succession for the day, and, if ye will, let mine be first.' The proposal thus adroitly made was by acclamation carried. All expected that, with the emergency, the change would likewise pass away: but once made, it proved itself so good, that the supreme command in Syria was ever after held by a single hand. Khalid obtains command in chief for the day.

Meanwhile Khalid had sown dissension in the enemy's camp, and gained over one of its leading men. The facts are obscure, and the episode strange. But so much appears, that a general, Jareja by name, perhaps of Arab blood and Bedouin sympathies, was persuaded to promise that, at the decisive moment, he would leave the Byzantine and join the Moslem side. A Greek general gained over.

The powers conferred on Khalid were soon used to purpose. His first care was to reorganise the army. 'The Greeks,' he said, 'are a vast host, and we but few to look at. Now no disposition swelleth numbers to the eye like that of squadrons.' So he divided the troops into forty squadrons, each about a thousand strong under a trusted leader. These he arranged so that one half formed the centre, under Abu Obeida. Ten squadrons were assigned to each wing, of which one was led by Amru, the other by Yezid. Abu Sofian, now well stricken in years, went about from troop to troop, and roused their ardour by martial declamation. Disposition of Moslem army.

It was soon manifest that the Byzantine captains were preparing to deliver a decisive charge. Issuing from their Greek army advances,



A.H. 12-13.

defences, they advanced in volume, darkening both sides of the plain. A bystander, gazing at the moving field, exclaimed, 'How many the Greeks, how few the Moslems!' 'Nay,' cried Khalid, 'rather "How many the Moslems, how few the Greeks!" for, if ye count aright, numbers wax by the help of the Lord, but wane if He withdraw His face. Would that the Greeks were double what ye see, had I but under me my good Arab!'—for the hoofs of his favourite bay had been worn down by rapid marching from Irac. And still the Greeks kept rolling on in dense columns. The fate of Syria depended on the day.

Moslems advance; tidings from Medina.

As the enemy drew near, Khalid called upon Ikrima with his column, and Cacao with the veterans from the east, to advance. Just then a messenger from Medina rode up in haste. To the inquiry of men who flocked around, he answered shortly:—'All is well; reinforcements on the way.' But for the general's ear he had a secret message, and he also handed to him a letter which, hastily glanced at, Khalid slipped into his quiver. Then, unruffled by the startling tidings it contained, and bidding the messenger keep close by him throughout the day, he rode forth to meet Jareja.

Battle of Wacusa on the Yermuk, viii. 13 A.H. Sept., 634 A.D.

The defection of that general was a calamity for the Greeks, but at the first it caused an unexpected issue. Followed by his escort, the traitor rode forth from the Byzantine ranks to meet Khalid. The unexpected advance was at the first mistaken for an attack upon the Moslems; and a Syrian battalion hastened to its support with such energetic charge that the Arab front was broken and thrown into confusion. Ikrima stood firm. He who in the 'days of Ignorance' had measured arms even with the Prophet of the Lord, should he flee before the infidel! 'Who now,' cried he, 'will join me in the covenant of death?' Four hundred, with his own son, and the hero Dhirar, took the fatal pledge. He charged, and the battalion which had created the surprise, bewildered now at the treachery of Jareja, fell back. The ground thus clear, Khalid ordered the whole line to move on. The Grecians too advanced, and both sides drew the sword.



All day the battle raged. Fortune varied ; and the carnage amongst the Moslems, as well as in the enemy's ranks, was great. Ikrima's gallant company, holding their ground firm as a rock, bore the brunt of the day ; they were slain or disabled almost to a man. So fierce were the Arabs, that even the women fought wildly in the field. A.H. 12-13.

Towards evening the enemy began to falter, and Khalid's quick eye perceived that their horse were declining from the infantry. Thereupon he launched his centre wedge-like between the two, and the cavalry, with nothing behind them but the precipice, made a fierce charge for their lives. The Moslem front opened to let them through, and so they gained the country, never to re-appear. The Arabs then drove down upon the remaining force hemmed in by the surrounding chasm ; and thus, pressed right and left, the Byzantine columns were 'toppled over the bank even as a wall is toppled over.' The battle drew on into the night, but opposition was in vain. Those that escaped the sword were hurled in living mass into the yawning gulf. 'One struggling would draw ten others with him, the free as well as chained.' And so, in dire confusion and dismay, the whole multitude perished. The fatal chasm engulfed, we are told, 100,000 men. The Byzantine general and his fellow-captains, unable to bear the sight, sat down, drew their togas around them, and, hiding their faces in despair and shame, awaited thus their fate. The Moslem victory.
Greeks driven over the chasm.

Morning found the Moslems in silent possession of the plain. They flocked into the Greek entrenchment, and Khalid took possession of Theodoric's pavilion. The camp and its rich equipage yielded a booty of 1,500 pieces to each horseman. More than this, the fearful fate of the army struck such terror into the Byzantine court as well as the people of the land, that the fate of Syria was sealed. The opposition that remained was poor and feeble. Importance of the victory.

But the victory was purchased at a heavy cost ;—three thousand buried on the field, besides a great multitude wounded, and among the fallen many a distinguished name. Of Ikrima's forlorn hope few survived. The famous Dhirar, badiy wounded, recovered to signalise himself on other



A.H. 12-
18.

fields. But Ikrima and his son sank under their wounds. In the morning, when near their end, they were both carried to the tent of Khalid. He laid the head of the father on his breast, and of the son upon his lap, tenderly wiped their faces and moistened their lips with water. As they passed away, he kept fondly saying: 'Alas, alas! the father and the son; who would have thought of a martyr's death for both!'

Khalid
superseded.

But Khalid was no longer in command. The messenger in the field had whispered in his ear the news of Abu Bekr's death; and the letter slipt into his quiver brought the new Caliph's order that Khalid should deliver up command into the hands of Abu Obeida.

Date of
battle.

The battle was fought about the middle of A. H. 13, that is, towards the end of August, or beginning of September, A. D. 634, little more than two years after the Prophet's death.

Before narrating the sequel of this great victory, we must turn for a little to what was passing elsewhere.



CHAPTER X.

CAMPAIGN IN IRAC—NEED OF REINFORCEMENTS.
MOTHANNA FINDS ABU BEKR ON HIS
DEATH-BED.

FIRST HALF OF 13 A. H. MARCH—AUGUST, A. D. 634.

BEFORE he left for Syria, Khalid, seeing that, with a diminished force, the situation in Irac would be somewhat insecure, sent away the sick with the women and children to their homes in Arabia. On his departure, Mothanna made the best disposition in his power to strengthen the line of defences towards the Persian capital. Fresh dangers threatened. A new prince had succeeded to the throne; and he thought to expel the invaders by an army under Hormuz 10,000 strong. Mothanna at once called in the outlying garrisons; but with every help, his force was in numbers much below the Persian. The king, confident of victory, wrote to Mothanna insultingly that 'he was about to drive him away by an army of fowl-men and swine-herds.' Mothanna answered: 'Thou art either a braggart or a liar. But if this be true, then blessed be the Lord that hath reduced thee to such defenders!' Having despatched this reply, he advanced to meet Hormuz. Leaving Hira, the little force crossed the Euphrates and encamped north of the shapeless mounds that mark the site of Babylon. There, some fifty miles from the capital, he chose the battle-ground; and, placing his two brothers in charge of either wing, himself at the head of the centre, awaited thus the attack of Hormuz. The Persian line was headed by an

Mothanna
attacked
by the
Persians.Battle of
Babylon.
Summer,
13 A. H.
634 A. D.



A.H. 13. elephant, which threw the Arab ranks into confusion, and for a while paralysed their action. Mothanna, followed by an adventurous band, surrounded the great creature, and brought it to the ground. Deprived of this help, the enemy gave way before the fierce onslaught of the Arabs, who pursued the fugitives to the very gates of Medain. The praises of 'the Hero of the Elephant' have been handed down in Arab verse.

Mothanna asks Abu Bekr for reinforcements.

The king did not long survive this defeat. His son, succeeding him, was killed in a rebellion caused by the attempt to give a princess of the royal blood in marriage to a favourite minister. The princess, saved from dishonour, succeeded to the throne. From a court weakened thus by continual change and treachery, there was little, one might think, to fear, but Mothanna had to guard a frontier of great extent, and for the task his army was inadequate. The inhabitants were at the best indifferent; the Syrian Bedouins distinctly hostile. Victories might be won, but could not be followed up. The position, with so small a force, was full of risk. Accordingly, Mothanna urged upon the Caliph the pressing need of reinforcements. He also pointed out the ease with which they might be raised: 'Remove the embargo from the apostate but now repentant tribes,' he wrote; 'they will flock to the war, and none more brave or eager.' Answer being long delayed, Mothanna ventured to Medina, there to urge his suit in person. He found Abu Bekr on his death-bed. The aged Caliph knew that his end was near; but the mind was clear, and he at once perceived the urgency of the appeal. 'Call Omar to me,' he said (for he had already named him his successor); and he then addressed him thus:—'Command a levy for Mothanna. Tarry not. If I die, as I may, this day, wait not till the evening; if I linger on to night, wait not till the morning. Let not sorrow for me divert thee from this service of the Lord. Ye saw what I myself did when the Prophet died (and there could be no greater sorrow for mankind than that); truly if grief had stayed me then from girding my loins in the cause of the Lord and of His Prophet, the Faith had fared badly; the flame of rebellion had surely kindled in the city. And, list thee,

Abu Bekr on his death-bed desires Omar to order levy.



Omar! when the Lord shall have given victory in Syria, A.H. 18.
then send back to Irac its army; for they are the proper
garrison thereof, and fittest to administer the same.

Omar was touched by the delicacy of these last words, Omar ac-
cepts the
charge.
and the allusion they contained; 'For,' said he, 'Abu Bekr
knew that it grieved me when he gave the command to
Khalid; therefore he bade me to send back his army to
Irac, but forbore to name the name of Khalid, or bid me
send him back.' He listened attentively to the dying
Caliph's words, and promised to fulfil them.



CHAPTER XI.

DEATH OF ABU BEKR.

AUGUST, A.H. 13. A.D. 634.

Abu Bekr
presides
over pil-
grimage,
A.H. 12 A.H.
February,
634.

AT the first yearly pilgrimage, Abu Bekr had been hindered by the pressure of rebellion from the journey to Mecca; but the following year he presided at the solemnity himself. As the party entered Mecca, the citizens hastened to tell his father, who, blind from great age, was seated at his door. On his son's approach, the old man arose to greet him. Abu Bekr made the camel on which he rode kneel down at the threshold, and alighting, embraced his father, who shed tears of delight, and kissed him between the eyes. The governor and other great men of Mecca approached and shook the Caliph by the hand. Then they did obeisance to him and to his father also, who said: 'These be our nobles; honour them, my Son, and make much of them.' 'Make much of them,' answered Abu Bekr,—'that I do; but (mindful of his Master's teaching) as for Honour, there is none save that which cometh from the Lord alone.' After bathing, he went forth in pilgrim garb, to kiss the Black stone, and encompass the Holy house. The people crowded round him; and as they made mention of the Prophet, Abu Bekr wept. It was but two years since Mahomet had been amongst them, celebrating the same rites, and how much of danger and deliverance had come to pass in that short space! And so they mourned his loss. At midday, he again went through the ceremonies of the Kaaba; then, sitting down under the



shadow of the Hall of assembly, he commanded the citizens that, if any had complaint to make, he should speak it out. All were silent; so he praised the people and their governor. Then he arose and celebrated the midday prayer. After a little, he bade them all farewell, and departed for Međina.

During the summer, Abu Bekr was busied with reinforcements for the Syrian campaign. Simple and temperate in habit, he was now, though over three-score years, hale and hearty. In the autumn, bathing incautiously on a cold day, fever laid him low and obliged him to make over the presidency at public prayer to Omar. When the illness had lasted a fortnight, his friends became anxious, and said: 'Shall we send for a physician?' 'The Physician hath been to me already,' was the solemn answer. 'And what said he?' 'He saith to me, *I am about to do that with thee which I purpose to do.*' They understood his meaning, and were silent. Aware that the end was near, he made preparation for a successor. The choice was fixed on Omar; but willing to fortify his own conviction by that of others, he first consulted Abd al Rahman, one of the Prophet's foremost councillors, who praised Omar as the fittest man, but withal inclined to be severe.—'Which,' responded the dying Caliph, 'is because he saw me soft and tender-hearted. When himself master, he will forego much of what thou sayest. I have watched him. If I were angry with one, he would intercede in his behalf; if over lenient, then he would be severe.' Othman, too, confirmed the choice;—'What is hidden of Omar,' said he, 'is better than that which doth appear; there is not his equal amongst us.' Talha, on the other hand, expostulated: 'If we have suffered this much from Omar, thou being yet with us, what will it be when thou art gone to thy Lord, there to answer for having left His people to the care of so hard a master?' 'Set me up,' cried the Caliph, much excited; 'seekest thou to frighten me? I swear that when I meet my Lord, I will say unto Him, "I have appointed as ruler over Thy people him that is the best amongst them."'

Falls sick,
vi. 13 A.H.
Aug.,
634 A.D.

Thereupon Abu Bekr called for Othman, and dictated an



A. H. 13.

Appoints
Omar his
successor.

ordinance appointing Omar his successor. He fainted while it was being written. Recovering, he bade Othman to read it over. Satisfied now, he praised the Lord; 'for,' said he, 'I saw thee apprehensive lest, if I passed away, the people had been left in doubt.' Upon this, he desired the ordinance to be read in the hearing of the citizens, who had assembled in the court of the Mosque. Omar himself was present, and hushed the noise, that they might hear. Then, desiring to obtain their assent, the dying Caliph bade his wife Asma raise him to the window (for the Caliph's house looked out upon the court); so she bore him, in her tattooed arms, to the window, from whence, with a great effort, he called out: 'Are ye satisfied with him whom I have appointed over you? None of mine own kin, but Omar son of Khattab. Verily I have done my best to choose the fittest. Wherefore, ye will obey him loyally.' The people answered with one voice, 'Yea, we will obey.'

To the end, the mind of Abu Bekr was clear and vigorous. On his last day, he gave audience, as we have seen, to Mothanna, and, grasping the crisis, commanded Omar to raise, with all despatch, a levy for Irac. During his illness one repeated verses from a heathen poet supposed to be appropriate. Abu Bekr was displeased, and said: 'Not so; say rather (quoting from the Coran)—*Then the agony of death shall come in truth. This, O man, is what thou*

His death;
21st vi.
13 A.H.
22nd Aug.,
634 A.D.,

soughtest to avoid.' His last act was to summon Omar to his bedside, and counsel him at great length to temper severity with mildness. Shortly after, he expired with these words on his lips:—'Lord, let me die a true believer, and make me to join the blessed ones on high!'

and burial.

Abu Bekr had reigned but two years and three months. According to his express desire, the body was laid out by the loving hands of Asma. He was wound in the clothes in which he died; 'for,' said he, 'new clothes befit the living, but old the mouldering body.' The same Companions that bore the Prophet's bier bore that of Abu Bekr: and they laid him in the same grave, the Caliph's head resting by his Master's shoulder. Omar performed



the funeral service, praying, as was customary, over the A.H. 18.
bier. The funeral procession had not far to go; it had only
to cross the open court of the Sanctuary; for Abu Bekr
died in the house appointed him by Mahomet opposite his
own¹.

During the greater part of his reign, he occupied that
house. For six months, indeed, after Mahomet's death, he
continued to live partly as before in Al Sunh, a suburb of
Upper Medina. There he inhabited a simple dwelling
with the family of the wife whom he married on coming to
Medina and who shortly after his death gave birth to a
daughter. Every morning he rode or walked to the Mosque,
where Mahomet had lived and ruled, to discharge business
of the day, and to perform the public prayers, Omar pre-
siding in his absence. For the more important service of
Friday, at which an address also was delivered, he stayed
in the early hours at home to dye his hair and beard, and
dress more carefully; and so did not appear till midday
prayer. Here, as elsewhere, he preserved the severe sim-
plicity of early life, and even fed and milked the household
goats. At the first he continued to maintain himself by
merchandise; but perceiving that it interfered with the
burdens of State, he consented to forego all other occupa-
tion, and to receive a yearly allowance of six thousand
dirhems for household charge.

Character.
Simple
life at
Al Sunh.

Finding Al Sunh too distant from the Mosque, where, Remove to
as in the time of Mahomet, public affairs were all transacted, the great
he transferred his residence thither. The exchequer was in Mosque.
those days but simple. It needed neither guard nor office of
account. The tithes as they came in were given to the poor,
or spent on military equipage and arms; the spoil of war also
was distributed just as received, or on the following morning.
All shared alike, the recent convert and the veteran, male
and female, bond and free. As claimant on the Moslem
treasury, every believing Arab was his brother's equal.
When urged to recognise precedence in the faith as ground of
preference, Abu Bekr would reply, 'That is for the Lord;
He will fulfil the reward of such, in the world to come.'

¹ *Life of Mahomet*, p. 185.



A. H. 13. These gifts are but an accident of the present life.' After his death, Omar had the treasury opened; they found but a solitary golden piece, slipped out of the bags; so they lifted up their voices and wept, and blessed his memory. The Caliph's conscience troubled him for having taken even what he did by way of stipend from the people's chest; and on his death-bed gave command that certain lands, his private property, should be sold, and a sum equal to all received, refunded.

Mild and gentle.

In disposition Abu Bekr was singularly mild and gentle. Omar used to say there was no man for whom the people would more readily have laid down their life. He had long been called 'the Sighing,' because of his tender-heartedness. He was severe in his treatment of the apostate tribes; but excepting the solitary case in which he committed a brigand to the flames, no act of cruelty stands out against him; and for that he expressed his sorrow. 'It was one of the three things which he would wish undone.' The others were, that he had pardoned Ashath, when he deserved death; and that when Khalid was transferred to Syria, he had not at the same time sent Omar to Irac. 'Then,' said he, 'I should have stretched out mine arms, both the right hand and the left, in the ways of the Lord.'

Wives and family.

Unlike his Master, he contented himself with but few wives. Two he had at Mecca before his conversion. On arrival at Medina, he married the daughter of a Citizen, and, later on, Asma, widow of Jafar, Aly's brother, slain at Muta. By all he left issue. There is no mention of any other wives, nor of any slave-girls in his harem. Of his children, he loved Ayesha best, and, in proof thereof, gave her a property for her own. On his death-bed, troubled at the seeming partiality, he said to her, 'I wish thee, my daughter, to return that property, to be divided with the rest of the inheritance amongst you all, not forgetting the one yet unborn.' His father survived him six months, reaching the great age of ninety-seven.

Simple, diligent, wise, and impartial.

At his court, Abu Bekr maintained the same simple and frugal life as Mahomet. Guards and servitors there were none, nor anything approaching pomp and circumstance.



Diligent in business, he leaned upon Omar as his counsellor, A. H. 13. whose judgment had such weight with him, that he might have been said to share the government. Abu Bekr never spared himself, and he personally descended to the minutest things. Thus, he would sally forth by night to seek for the destitute and oppressed. Omar found him one night inquiring into the affairs of a poor blind widow, whom Omar had himself gone forth to help. The department of justice was made over to Omar, but for a whole year 'hardly two suitors came before him.' The seal of State bore the legend, *God the best of Potentates*. The despatches were chiefly indited by Aly. Abu Bekr made use also of Zeid (the amanuensis of the Prophet and compiler of the Coran) and of Othman, or any other penman at hand. In the choice of agents for high office or command, he was altogether free from partiality, wise and discerning in his estimate of character.

But he had not Omar's strength and decision; nor was his sense of justice so keen and stern. This is illustrated in the matter of the two Khalids. Upon the one, though warned by Omar and Aly, he was prevailed to confer a command; the disaster in Syria was the consequence. Again, by refusing to condemn the other Khalid for injustice, cruelty, and the scandal of marrying Ibn Noweira's widow, he became responsible for his evil deeds. Yet to this unscrupulous agent is due, more than to any other, the survival and the triumph of Islam. But Abu Bekr was not wanting in firmness when occasion demanded; for example, the despatch of Osama's army when Medina lay defenceless, and all around was dark, showed a boldness and steadfastness of purpose that, more than anything else, helped to roll back the tide of rebellion and apostasy.

Abu Bekr had no thought of personal aggrandisement. Endowed with sovereign and irresponsible power, he used it simply for the interests of Islam and the people's good. But the grand secret of his strength was faith in Mahomet. 'Call me not *the Caliph of the Lord*,' he would say, 'I am but *the Caliph of the Prophet of the Lord*.' The question with him ever was, What did Mahomet command? or, What

Not so strong as Omar.

Faith in Mahomet, secret of strength.



A. H. 13. now would he have done? From this he never swerved a hair's-breadth. And so it was that he crushed apostasy, and laid secure the foundations of Islam. His reign was short, but, after Mahomet himself, there is no one to whom the Faith is more beholden.

Evidence of
Mahomet's
sincerity.

For this reason, and because his belief in the Prophet is itself a strong evidence of the sincerity of Mahomet himself, I have dwelt at some length upon his life and character. Had Mahomet begun his career a conscious impostor, he never could have won the faith and friendship of a man who was not only sagacious and wise, but throughout his life simple, consistent, and sincere.



CHAPTER XII.

ACCESSION OF OMAR—REINFORCEMENTS FOR IRAC.
CAMPAIGN UNDER ABU OBEID AND MOTHANNA.

AUGUST TO MARCH, 13-14 A.H. 634-5 A.D.

ON the morrow after Abu Bekr's death, Omar ascended the pulpit, and addressed the people assembled in the Mosque. 'The Arabs,' he said, 'are like a rebellious camel, and it pertaineth to the driver which way to lead it. By the Lord of the Kaaba! even thus will I guide you in the way that ye should go.'

Omar's
accession,
vi. 13 A.H.
Aug.,
634 A.D.

The first act of the new Caliph was to issue the despatch, already mentioned, deposing Khalid. The second was, in fulfilment of Abu Bekr's dying behest, to raise a fresh levy for Mothanna. A standard was accordingly planted in the court of the Mosque, and urgent proclamation made for soldiers to rally round it. Then followed the oath of fealty to Omar, taken by all who were in and around the city. Meanwhile, so great a fear of Persian prowess had fallen on the people, that none responded to the call. Seeing this, Mothanna, still at Medina, harangued them in stirring speech. He told of his victories, the endless plunder, the fair captives, and the fruitful fields of which they had already spoiled the enemy; 'and the Lord,' he added, 'waiteth but to give the rest into your hands.' Inflamed by his discourse, and stung by reproaches from Omar, men began at last to offer. The first to come forward was Abu Obeid, a citizen of Tayif; then, following him, numbers crowded to the

Fresh
levies for
Irac.

A. H. 13-
14.Abu Obeid
appointed
com-
mander.

standard. When a thousand were thus gathered, they said to Omar: 'Now choose thee, either from the Coreish or from the men of Medina, one of the chiefest to be commander.' 'That I will not,' replied the Caliph; 'wherein lies the glory of a Companion but in this, that he is the first to rally round the Prophet? But now ye are backward; ye come not to the help of the Lord. Such as be forward to bear the burden, whether light or whether heavy, have the better claim. Verily I will give the command to none other but to him that first came forth.' Then turning to Abu Obeid: 'I appoint thee over this force, because thou wast the first to offer; and in eagerness for battle is the Arab's glory.' With this emphatic declaration, he presented to him the standard; but, at the same time, earnestly enjoined upon him ever to take counsel with the other Companions, and associate them with himself in the conduct of affairs. So the force started for Irac. Now also Omar removed the ban against the employment of the once apostate tribes; and bade Abu Obeid to summon to his standard all, without distinction, who since their apostasy had made a good profession. Mothanna, with lightened heart, hastened back in advance of Abu Obeid, and re-entered Hira after the absence of a month.

Rustem
rouses
Persia
against the
invaders.

During this period further changes were transpiring at the unhappy court of Persia. Prince and princess succeeded one another amidst bloodshed and rebellion, till at last a royal lady, Buran, summoned the famous Rustem from Khorasan, and by his aid established herself upon the throne. Proclaimed supreme, the energy of Rustem was soon felt. The nobles rallied round him; great landholders rose against the invaders, and the whole country speedily cast off the Arabian yoke. Two columns were despatched from Medain, one under Jaban to cross the Euphrates and advance on Hira; the other under Narsa to occupy Kaskar on the nearer side. The people flocked to their standard, and the position of the Moslems grew precarious.

Abu
Obeid's
victory
over the

Mothanna called in his forces, still all too few, abandoned Hira to the enemy, and falling back on the desert road to Medina, there awaited Abu Obeid. But he had



some time to wait. Swelled by Bedouin tribes on the way, and burdened by their families, it was a month before he came up. After a few days' repose, Abu Obeid took command of the combined force, and, attacking Jaban, put him to flight. Then crossing the Euphrates, he surprised Narsa, strongly posted by a royal date-grove near Kaskar, routed his army and took his camp, in which, with much spoil, was great store of rare dates reserved for royal use. These were distributed among the army, as common food for all. With the Fifth, Abu Obeid sent some of them to Omar: 'Behold,' he wrote, 'the fruit wherewith the Lord hath fed us, eaten only by the kings of Persia; wilt thou see the same with thine own eyes, taste it with thine own lips, and praise the Lord for His goodness in giving us royal food to eat?' The unfortunate Delta, prey to alternate conquest and defeat, again acknowledged Moslem sway. The neighbouring chiefs brought in their tribute, and, in proof of loyalty, made a feast of good things for Abu Obeid. He declined to partake of it, unless shared equally with his soldiers. A further supply was furnished, and the army sat down with him to the repast.

A. H. 13-14.
Persians,
viii. 13 A. H.
Octr.,
634 A. D.

Enraged at the defeat, Rustem assembled a still larger force under another great warrior, Bahman. The imperial banner of panthers' skins was unfurled, and an array of elephants sent with the army. Before this imposing host, the Arabian army again fell back, and, re-crossing the Euphrates, took up ground on the western bank. Bahman encamped on the opposite shore. The field of battle was not far from Babylon, and a bridge of boats spanned the river. Bahman, in his pride, gave Abu Obeid the option of crossing unopposed, and thus of choosing either bank for the impending action. His advisers sought to dissuade him from quitting their more advantageous ground. But Abu Obeid made it a point of honour;—'Shall we fear death more than they?' he cried, as he gave the order at once to cross. They found the ground upon the farther side confined; and, though they were under 10,000, there was little room to manœuvre, and nothing but the bridge to fall back upon. The unwieldy elephants, with jingling bells and bar-

Bahman
advances
against
Abu Obeid.



A. H. 13-
14.

Battle of
the Bridge.
Abu Obeid
slain and
defeated,
A.H. 13 A.H.
Oct.,
634 A.D.

baric trappings, spread confusion among the Arab cavalry. The riders, however, dismounting, went bravely at them, and tried, with some success, to cut the bands of the litters, and drive them from the field. Abu Obeid himself singled out the fiercest, a white elephant with great tusks, and rushed at it sword in hand. Vainly endeavouring to reach some vulnerable part, the huge beast caught him with its trunk, and trampled him to death. Consternation seized the ranks at the horrid spectacle. One after another, the captains whom Abu Obeid had named to take command in case of disaster, were slain, and the troops began to waver. Just then a soldier, appalled at the fate of his leaders, ran to the bridge, and crying,—*Die, as your chiefs have died, or conquer*,—cut the first boat adrift. Retreat closed; the panic spread. The Moslems, hemmed in, were driven back upon the river. Many leaped into the deep swift stream, but few reached the other shore. At this eventful moment Mothanna rushed to the front. Backed by a few heroic spirits, among them a Christian chief of the Beni Tay, he seized the banner, and, planting himself between the enemy and the bewildered Arabs, called out that he would hold the ground till all had passed over. Then he chided the soldier, and commanded the bridge to be restored. ‘Destroy not your own selves,’ he cried; ‘retire in order, and I will defend you.’ While thus bravely holding the Persians at bay, the thrust of a lance imbedded the rings of his armour in a deep and dangerous wound. Heedless of it, he stood to his ground, endeavouring to calm the panic-stricken force. But in vain. The confusion increased, and before order could be restored, vast numbers had perished in the river. At last, the bridge repaired, a remnant escaped across; but 4,000 were swept off by the flood, left dead upon the field, or borne wounded away. Of the new levies, some 2,000, stung with remorse, fled from the terrible field back to Arabia; and Mothanna, again assuming the command, was left with only 3,000 of his men. After the battle, Bahman was on the point of crossing the river to follow up his victory. Had he done so, it would have fared badly with Mothanna and the disheartened



remnants still holding their ground on the opposite bank. A.H. 13-
 But fortunately at the moment, news reached Bahman of a ^{14.}
 revolt at Medain; and so, relinquishing his design, he has-
 tened back to the distracted capital. Mothanna fell back Mothanna
 retires with
 remnant
 to Allis.
 upon Allis, farther down the river, and fixing head-quarters
 there, bravely defended his early conquests amongst a people
 now not unfriendly to the cause. Jaban, unaware of Bah-
 man's hasty recall, fell into Mothanna's hands, and with his
 followers was beheaded. Things, no doubt, looked dark;
 but a hero like Mothanna was not one to despair. As on
 his first advance, so now he sought to recruit the diminished
 ranks from kindred tribes about him; and, before long,
 regained a firmer footing.

Omar received with calmness the unhappy tidings. Abu Omar's
 Obeid's levies kept on their flight till they reached home; calm recep-
 tion of the
 tidings.
 and some from Medina returning thither, covered their faces
 with shame. The Caliph spoke comfortably to them thus:—
 'Verily, I am a defence to every believer that faceth the
 enemy and misfortune overtaketh him. The Lord have
 mercy on Abu Obeid, and be gracious unto him. Had he
 survived, and taken refuge on some sandy mound, I surely
 would have been his advocate and his defender.' Muadz,
 famous as a reciter of the Coran, was among those who fled.
 Shortly after, in the course of recitation, he came to the
 verse: 'Whosoever in the field shall give his back to the
 enemy (excepting again to join in battle), or shall turn aside
 unto another party, verily he draweth the wrath of God
 upon him; his refuge shall be hell-fire—an evil end!' and
 he lifted up his voice and wept. Omar addressed him
 kindly:—'Weep not, O Muadz, thou hast not *turned aside
 unto another party*; thou hast turned aside to none but
 unto me.' Such was the spirit of these Moslem heroes,
 even in defeat. The reverse had no effect but to nerve the
 Caliph to redoubled effort. The fresh cry for a levy Summons
 for a fresh
 levy.
masse soon resounded over the peninsula. But reinforce-
 ments in response would have been too late to help
 Mothanna if (fortunately for Islam) earlier succour had
 not reached him.

For the previous call was still drawing. Levies, from



A.H. 13-
14.

Numerous
reinforce-
ments join
Mothanna,

all directions, daily reached Medina, eager—now the ban against apostasy was removed—to show the sincerity of their repentance, and share in the rewards of victory. Each band as it came in besought Omar to send them to the favoured land of Syria. But the late victory on the Yermuk had made him easy in that direction; and every available man must now be hurried forward to Irac. A brave levy raised under the banner of Jarir, urged that their ancestral relations were all with Syria; but Omar was firm, and, at last, reconciled them to set out at once for Persia by the promise that they should have one fourth of the royal Fifth of booty taken there. The fugitives also hastened back, seeking to retrieve their honour. But the most remarkable of all was a Christian tribe of the desert, which, without detriment to their faith, threw in their lot with Mothanna, and brought a contingent to his help. Thus, rapidly reinforced, he was soon stronger than ever, and ready for offensive movement. His troops were massed at first on the edge of the Arabian desert, near Khaffan. The women and children (for the practice was now common of carrying with them house and home) were placed in security at a distance behind; some were even left with friendly citizens in Hira, although, since the last retreat, the city had been re-occupied by a Persian satrap. Mothanna had also a trusty follower in hiding, to give him notice of what was passing there.

who
advances
against
Persian
army.

From this spy, Mothanna now learned that, matters having been settled at the Capital, a great army was in motion against him. Sending an urgent message to Jarir, now close at hand, to hurry on, he marched forward to Boweib, on the western branch of the Euphrates, and there, close by the future site of Kufa, and on ground approached by a bridge, awaited the enemy. Omar had cautioned him not again to risk his men by crossing the river before victory was secure; so he suffered the Persian undisturbed to defile his troops across the bridge. The Persians advanced in three columns, an elephant, defended by a company of footmen, at the head of each, and all with tumult and barbaric din. It was the fast of Ramadhan; but under



special dispensation the troops had been strengthened by a A.H. 13-
repast. Mothanna, on his favourite charger (humorously 14.
called *the Rebel*, from its docility in action), rode along the
lines, and exhorted his soldiers to quit them like men:
'Your valour this day shall be a proverb. Be still as death,
and if ye speak one to the other, speak it in a whisper.
None amongst us shall give way this day. I desire not
glory for myself, but glory for you all.' And they answered
him in like words; for he was beloved by his men.

The signal was the Takbir, or cry, *Great is the Lord*, Battle of
repeated thrice; then, on the fourth, the general advance. Boweib,
But Mothanna had barely shouted the first, when the IX. 13 A.H.
Persian myrmidons bore down; and the nearest column Nov.,
broke before them. Mothanna pulled his beard in trouble. 634 A.D.
Calling an officer, he bade him hasten with this message to
the wavering corps: 'The Ameer sendeth greeting, and
saith, *Ye will not this day shame the Moslems!*' They gave
answer, 'Yea, we shall not!' And, as the broken ranks
closed again in serried line, Mothanna smiled approvingly.
The battle raged long and equally. At last, Mothanna,
seeing that a desperate onset must be made, rode up to the
Christian chief, and said: 'Ye are one blood with us; come
now, and as I charge, charge ye with me.' The Persian
centre quivered before the fierce onslaught, and as the dust
cleared off it was seen to be giving way. The Moslem
wings, hitherto outflanked, now took heart, and charged.
Then the Persian army fell back, and made for the bridge.
Mothanna was before them. In despair, they turned on
their pursuers. But the fiery zeal of the Arabs, though a
handful in comparison, beat back the forlorn charge. 'The
enemy,' says an eye-witness, 'driven before us, were brought
up by the river, and finding no escape, re-formed, and
charged again. One cried to our leader to hold his banner
back; *My work*, he answered, *is to move the banner on.* So
forward we drove, and cut them up, not one reaching even
to the river bank.' Mothanna reproached himself afterwards
with having closed the bridge, and caused useless loss of his
men. 'I made a grievous error,' he confessed; 'follow not
my example herein; it behoveth us not to close the way

A.H. 13-
14Enemy
routed with
terrible
carnage.

against such as may be driven to turn upon us in despair.' The carnage was almost unparalleled even in the annals of Islam, and it went on into the night. A hundred warriors boasted that they slew each ten men to his lance; hence the battle has been called *The field of Tens*. No engagement left marks wider or more lasting. For ages bones of the slain bleached the plain; and the men of Kufa had here, at their very door, lasting proof at once of the prowess and the mercilessness of the first invaders.

Victory
helped by
Christian
Arabs.

The victory is remarkable as gained in part by the valour of a Christian tribe. And yet further, the gallantest feat of the day was achieved by one of another Christian clan; for a party of Bedouin merchants, with a string of horses for sale, arriving just as the ranks were being dressed, threw themselves into the battle on the Arab side. A youth from amongst them, darting into the centre of the Persians, slew the leader, and leaping on his richly caparisoned horse, rode back amidst the plaudits of the Moslem line, crying, as he passed in triumph: 'I am of the Beni Taghlib. I am he that hath slain the chief.'

Moslem
loss.

The loss on the Moslem side was considerable. Mothanna mourned the death of a brother, who, when borne from the field mortally wounded, cried: 'Exalt your banners, ye Beni Bekr, and the Lord will exalt you, my men; let not my fall disturb you!' The Christian chieftain met a similar fate. Mothanna affectionately tended the last moments of both—the Christian and the Moslem—an unwonted sight on these fanatic fields. He performed the funeral service over his brother and the other fallen Moslems, and said in his panegyric: 'It assuageth my grief that they stood steadfast; they yielded not a step; and now here they lie, the martyrs of Boweib.'

The spoil.

The spoil was great. Immense stores of grain and herds of cattle were captured; and supplies sent to the families in their retreat. As the convoy rode up, the women, mistaking it for a hostile raid, rushed out with their wild Arab scream, and attacked it with stones and staves. The leader soon made himself known, and praised their courageous bearing. 'It well becometh the wives of such an army,'



he said, 'thus to defend themselves.' Then he told of the victory; 'and lo,' pointing to the stores of grain, 'the first-fruits thereof!' A.H. 13-14.

The country was now ravished without let or hindrance to the very walls of Medain. The enemy's garrisons were driven back; and Lower Mesopotamia and the Delta occupied anew. Parties scoured the country higher up, and many rich markets were ransacked. They penetrated to Baghdad (then a mere village on the Tigris), and even as far north as Tekrit. Great booty was gathered in these plundering expeditions, to be divided in the usual way. Country re-occupied.

Mothanna lived but a few months after his last great victory. He never entirely recovered from the wounds received at the battle of the Bridge, and eventually succumbed. His merits have not been recognised as they deserve. That he did not belong to the nobility of Islam was the misfortune which kept him in the background. Jarir, as we shall see, declined to serve under him, a common Bedouin like himself, not even a Companion of the Prophet, and complained accordingly to the Caliph. Omar listened to the appeal; and eventually appointed another commander over both. But before entering on a new chapter in the Persian war, we must revert to the course of events in Syria.

The character of Mothanna, however, deserves more than a passing notice. Among the generals who secured the triumph of Islam, he was second only to one. Inferior to Khalid in dash and brilliancy of enterprise, he did not yield in vigour and strategic skill. Free from the unscrupulous cruelty of that great leader, we never hear of his using victory to gratify private ends. It was due alone to the cool and desperate stand which Mothanna made at the Bridge, that the Moslem force was not utterly annihilated there; while the formation so rapidly afterwards of a fresh army, by which, with the help of Christian tribes (rare mark of Moslem liberality, in contrast with the bigotry of later days), a prodigious host was overthrown, showed powers of administration and generalship far beyond his fellows. The repeated supersession of Mothanna cost the Caliphate much, Mothanna.



A. H. 13-14. — and at one time rendered the survival of Islam in Iraq doubtful; but it never affected his loyalty to Omar. The sentiment of the day may have rendered it difficult for the Caliph to place a Bedouin of obscure origin in command of men who, as Companions, had fought under the Prophet's banner. But it is strange that no historian, jealous for the honour of the heroes of Islam, has regretted the supersession of one so distinguished in its annals, or sought to give Mothanna his deserved place as one of the great generals of the world.



CHAPTER XIII.

CAMPAIGN IN SYRIA.—TAKING OF DAMASCUS.
BATTLE OF FIHL.

13-14 A. H. 634-635 A. D.

AFTER the terrible slaughter at Wacusa, we left the Army on the Moslem army on the banks of the Yermuk, burying their dead, tending the wounded, and dividing the spoil.

The country in which they were now encamped,—the land beyond Jordan on the east,—differed from any they had previously known. Away to the south were the pastoral tracts of the Belcaa, and again to the north the pasture lands of Jaulan. Between the two lay the hills and dales of Gilead, with fields of wheat and barley, dotted here and there with clumps of shady oak, olive, and sycamore, and thickets of arbutus, myrtle, and oleander. It was emphatically 'a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.' The landscape, diversified with green slopes and glens, is in season gay with carpeting of flowers and melody of birds. From the green expanse above the Yermuk may be descried the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee sparkling in the west, and away in the north the snow-capped peaks of Lebanon and Hermon;—striking contrast to the endless sands and stony plains of Arabia. Not less marked is the contrast with Chaldæa. There the marshy delta displays a tropical luxuriance; while the plains abound with sites of cities that flourished in early cycles of the world, strewn with fragments of pottery and bricks of



A.H. 13-
14.

strange device, mysterious records of bygone kingdoms. Here the pride of the Byzantine empire was yet alive. Skirting the Jordan were busy cities founded by the Romans, that boasted church and theatre and forum. Even naval contests of the naumachia might be witnessed in the land of Gilead. The country was populous and flourishing, inhabited by a mongrel race half Arab, half Syrian, who aspired to the privileges and aped the luxurious habits, without the chivalry or manliness, of the Roman citizen. It was altogether a civilisation forced and of exotic growth. No sooner was the western prop removed than the people returned to their Bedouin life, true sons of the desert; the chariot and waggon were banished for the camel; and nothing left of Roman rule but columns and peristyles, causeways and aqueducts, great masses of ruined masonry—which still startle the traveller, as if belonging to another world. But, at the time we write of, the age of so-called civilisation was still dominant there. Such was the beautiful country, strange to the southern Arab both in natural feature and busy urban life, which was now traversed by the Moslem armies, and soon became the beaten highway between Syria and Arabia.

Abu
Obeida
succeeds
Khalid,
viii. 13 A.H.
Sept.,
634 A.D.

Having achieved the victory of Wacusa, Khalid at once delivered to Abu Obeida the despatch from the new Caliph put into his hands at the commencement of the action, and with it surrendered the commission which he held from Abu Bekr. The other leaders were confirmed in their commands by Omar. The affront thus put upon Khalid did not damp his loyalty or zeal. He placed himself forthwith at the disposal of the new Commander, who published with reluctance the order of his deposition. Abu Obeida knew full well the rare military genius of Khalid; and, himself of a mild and unwarlike turn, was wise and magnanimous enough to ask, and as a rule implicitly to follow, his advice. Khalid, nobly putting aside the grievance, devoted his best energies to the service of the State; and, his supersession notwithstanding, remained virtually the chief captain of Islam in the west.

The course of Moslem victory in Syria advanced with



little let or hindrance. Persia's struggle was not for a limb, but for life itself. Here it was otherwise. Syria, indeed, contained the holy places and what was dear to the Greeks as the cradle of their faith. But, after all, it was, though fair and sacred, but an outlying province, of which a supine and selfish court could without vital injury afford the loss. There were no such mortal throes in Syria as on the plains of Chaldæa.

A.H. 13-14.

Byzantine opposition faint in Syria.

Leaving a strong detachment on the Yermuk to keep communications open, the invading army resumed its northward march. On the way news came that Damascus had been reinforced, and that in Palestine the scattered fragments of the defeated army had re-formed in the valley of the Jordan, thus threatening the Moslem rear. The moment was critical, and Abu Obeida wrote for orders to the Caliph. The answer was to strike a decisive blow at Damascus; the citadel of Syria gained, the rest was sure. Accordingly, a strong column was sent back to hold in check the enemy on the Jordan, while the main body advanced by the military road upon Damascus.

Advance on Damascus.

Damascus.

This city, the most ancient in the world, has, ever since the days of Abraham, survived through all vicissitudes the capital of Syria. The great plain on which it stands is watered by streams issuing from adjoining mountain ranges; and the beautiful groves and rich meadows around have given it (with more reason than the Chaldæan delta) the name of 'garden of the world.' An *entrepôt* of commerce between the east and west, it has been from age to age, with varying fortune, ever rich and populous. The city wall, twenty feet high and fifteen broad, still contains stones of cyclopean size that must have been builded in ages before our era. Over the gates and elsewhere there are turrets for defence, all of venerable structure. The traveller entering at the eastern gate may even in the present day pass through the narrow 'street which is called Straight,' as did St. Paul 1,800 years ago. The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist still rears its great dome, towering above all other buildings; and besides it there were, at the time of which we write, fifteen churches in the city and its suburbs. Not



A.H. 13-
14.

long before, Damascus had suffered severely from the alternating fortunes of the Persian war; but had now, in great measure, recovered its prosperity.

Damascus
bursts in
view of the
invading
army.

Such was the capital of Syria, 'Queen of Cities,' which, in all its radiance, surrounded far off by lofty mountains tipped with snow, now burst on the gaze of the Arab warriors. Some amongst them may perchance have visited it, trading to the north; but, as a whole, the army had heard of it only by report; and in beauty, richness, and repose, fancy could hardly have exceeded the scene now stretched before them.

City
invested,
x. 13 A.H.
Dec.,
634 A.D.

The Arab force was strong enough to invest the city. Abu Obeida pitched his headquarters on the western plain. Khalid took ground at the eastern entrance, where the gateway was strengthened by the remains of an ancient temple. The other gates were similarly guarded. Battering-rams were drawn up against the walls; but every attempt at a breach of the massive defences failed. At first the citizens, ignorant of the ardour and persistence inspired by the faith of Mahomet, regarded the attack as a desultory Bedouin raid, like many before it, and looked for succour. The city lies two thousand feet above the sea, and the severity of the cold in spring would, no doubt, drive away the Arab tribes, used to a more genial climate. But months passed, and the host still hung obstinately around the walls. The Emperor, indeed, from Hims, attempted a diversion; but Dzul Kelaa, posted with his Himyar horse to the north of the city, kept the enemy at bay; and another column covered the siege from annoyance on the side of Palestine. The summer was coming on, and no relief appeared. The Moslems, instead of retiring, pressed their attack with increasing vigour; and the hopes of the Damascenes melted in despair.

Storm and
capitula-
tion.
Summer,
14 A.H.
635 A.D.

On a certain day the Governor made a feast to the garrison. They ate and drank and, relaxing into merriment, began to quit their posts. Khalid knew of the entertainment, for nothing escaped his vigilance;—'he neither slept himself, nor suffered others to fall asleep.' And so, reckoning upon the season of revelry, he settled with Abu



Obeida to seize it as the occasion for a general assault. A.H. 18-14.
The defences on Khalid's side were by far the most formidable; the moat was deeper and the walls were stronger. The garrison at the spot, holding it impregnable, were less on the alert than elsewhere; and in their negligence Khalid found his opportunity. In concert with certain daring spirits, comrades from Irac, he planned an escalade. Ladders were got in readiness, and scaling ropes with nooses to catch the projections of the castellated wall. In the darkness preceding dawn, they stealthily crossed the well-filled moat upon inflated skins; then, casting up their tackle, caught the battlements. The way thus silently secured, others scaled rapidly. Right and left they surprised the slumbering pickets and put them to the sword. The gate from within was forced open, and the appointed cry '*Allah Akbar!*' resounded from the walls to the expectant troops without. The Byzantine soldiery, panic-struck, fled before their assailants; and now through the gateway Khalid's column poured in, slaying and sacking all around. They had already penetrated near to the centre of the city, when their progress was brought to an unwelcome end. For on the other side a very different scene was taking place. The Governor, seeing that resistance to a general assault was hopeless, had issued from the western gate, and already tendered his submission to Abu Obeida. Terms were made upon the spot, and capitulation signed. The gates were thrown open, and the Moslem force, unopposed, kept streaming in from the western camp. As they advanced, cries of despair and appeals to stay the carnage met the ears of Abu Obeida, who no sooner heard what had transpired in the eastern quarter than he sent orders to stay the onslaught. Khalid remonstrated that the city had been fairly carried by assault, and was at their mercy; but in vain. Abu Obeida, juster and more clement, pointed to the treaty, and insisted that its provisions should be fulfilled. Good faith was the best as well as fairest policy. The people were conciliated, and throughout Syria the capitulation of Damascus became the type of surrender.

One half of all property, both money and buildings,

A.H. 13-
14.Terms of
capitulation.

private and public, was by this capitulation surrendered to the conquerors. Besides the taxes levied under Byzantine rule, the tribute of one golden piece was imposed on every male adult who did not embrace Islam, and a measure of corn taken from every field. In this way the Arabs gained, not only large spoil and permanent revenue, without alienating the people, and even with a show of moderation, but obtained also possession of buildings sufficient for their own accommodation and for the conduct of public business. And so this beautiful city, 'the Eye of the East,' passed from the grasp of Heraclius into the hands of the Caliph, and became 'the Eden of Islam.'

Church of
St. John
turned into
a Mosque.

The churches of Damascus shared the common fate, and were equally divided between the Christians and the conquerors. The Cathedral church of St. John the Baptist was separated into two. In one half the rites of the ancient faith were still celebrated, and the gospel of Jesus read; in the other half, carefully detached, the Coran was recited, and the service of Islam observed; while from the dome the Muedzzin proclaimed daily the supremacy of the Arabian prophet. For some 80 years the great Cathedral continued thus to shelter under one friendly roof the symbols and practice of both religions. But that which was reasonable in the first beginnings of Islam, became intolerable in the rapid advance of arrogance and bigotry. One and another of the Caliphs sought, by offer of large payments, to obtain surrender of the entire Cathedral; but in vain. At last Welid, about the 90th year of the Hegira, took the law into his own hands, and summarily ejected the Christian worshippers. They complained against the injustice, and Omar II listened to their reclamation. But the doctors of Islam declared it impossible to restore to Christian worship a place once consecrated by the Idzan and prayers of the Faithful; and so at last the Christians consented to take, instead, the churches of the city and its suburbs which had been confiscated under the equal partition of Abu Obeida. All that appeared Christian, therefore, in the style or decoration of the Cathedral church was now removed or defaced. But this wonderful edifice retains to



the present hour marks of the different religions to which it has been devoted. In the massive foundations may be traced signs of a pagan Temple; these are surmounted by the architecture and embellishments of Byzantine art; and over the great entrance may still be deciphered the grand prophecy of the Psalmist, which may yet again be chanted within its walls, running thus:—

A.H. 13-14.

THY KINGDOM, O CHRIST, IS A KINGDOM OF
ALL AGES; AND THY DOMINION IS FROM
GENERATION

TO GENERATION¹.

All through the siege, Abul Aur guarded the army from attack on the south. He was pitched in the valley of the Jordan, near Fihl (the ancient Pella), which lay on the eastern slope of the valley, a few miles below the Lake of Tiberias. Ruins still mark the site 600 feet above the river bed. The basin of the Jordan is here broad and fertile, and the stream in many places fordable. Opposite Fihl the vale of Jezreel, branching off from the plain of Esdraelon, falls into the Jordan valley. The broad opening is guarded on one side by the mountains of Gilboa, the scene of Saul's disaster, and on the other by the frowning eminence of Beisan, to the walls of which the Philistines fastened his body². Mountain streams run along the valley, making it at times a sodden swamp. It was under the shadow of Beisan that the broken fragments of the Byzantine army took refuge, and were joined there by fresh supports. To secure their front, they dammed the streams, and so turned the whole vale into a marsh. At

Greeks in
valley of
Jordan
held in
check.
Spring,
13 A.H.
634 A.D.

¹ The following is the inscription, being the Septuagint version of Psalm cxlv. 13, with the addition only of the words, *O Christ*:—

Η ΒΑΧΙΑΕΙΑ . ΚΟΤ ΧΕ ΒΑΧΙΑΕΙΑ . ΠΑΝΤΩΝ . ΤΩΝ
ΑΙΩΝΩΝ . ΚΑΙ . Η . ΔΕΧΙΟΤΕΙΑ . ΚΟΤ . ΕΝ . ΗΑΧΙ .
ΓΕΝΕΑΙ

ΚΑΙ ΓΕΝΕΑΙ.

² 1 Samuel xxxi. 7, *et seq.* *Beth-Shan* by contraction *Beisan* (the ancient Scythopolis), once a noble city, the seat of a bishop and site of convents, the birth-place of Cyril and Basilides. Here Alexander had his interview with Cleopatra; and Pompey took it on his way from Damascus to Judæa. Pella has a special interest, as the refuge of the Christians when Titus attacked Judæa. Both Fihl and Beisan at the time of our history were populous and flourishing cities.



A.H. 13- first the Arabs chafed under the stratagem, for their horses
14. were disabled in the yielding ground. But they soon discovered that the enemy had shut himself in from exit, as well as from attack. Abul Aur securely posted, with his rear open to the fertile vale of the Jordan from which the Greeks were cut off, was content to wait till the summer heat should dry up the quagmire. Meanwhile the enemy, 80,000 strong, was held in check, if not virtually blockaded.

Attacked
by main
army,
Summer,
13 A.H.
634 A.D.,

The summer was well advanced when the Arabs broke up their camp at Damascus. They were eager to attack Heraclius at Hims (Emessa); but Omar forbade advance so long as an army was in the rear. Leaving, therefore, Yezid with a garrison of Yemen levies as governor of Damascus, Abu Obeida hastened back with the rest of his army to Fihl. The province of the Jordan was in command of Shorahbil; to him, therefore, Abu Obeida committed the conduct of the campaign within his jurisdiction. Khalid led the van, Abu Obeida himself commanded one of the wings, Amru the other, and the famous warrior Dhirar (of whom romance tells so many marvellous feats) directed the cavalry. Retracing their steps, they crossed the Yermuk near the hot springs of Omm Keis (the ancient Gadara), and marching down the valley of the Jordan encamped under Fihl. Abul Aur, who had held the enemy so long in check, was now detached towards Tiberias, to prevent diversion from that quarter. The main army, taking his place before Beisan, continued patiently the blockade.

and routed.
Battle of
Fihl.

Reduced to straits, and mistaking inaction for remissness, the Byzantine army thought to fall upon the Arabs unawares. They little knew the vigilance of Shorahbil, who night and day was on the watch. Fetching a circuit, the enemy suddenly appeared on the Moslem flank. They met a warm reception, and there ensued a battle as fierce and obstinate as any that had yet taken place. All day the Greeks held their ground; but by nightfall the impetuosity of the Arabs had its way. The Byzantine captain fell, and his army broke and fled. The greater part were caught in the marsh, and few escaped the sword. 'Thus the Lord wrought for His people,' writes the pious annalist;



‘and the morass which we thought a curse was turned into a blessing.’ The plain of Esdraelon again looked down upon another great and sanguinary conflict, which, following on the defeat of Wacusa, decided for many a long century the fate of Syria. The Moslem loss was trifling; the immense booty served but to sharpen the Arab appetite for further victory.

A.H. 13-
14

No enemy now was left in sight. Omar, therefore, remembering the behest of Abu Bekr, gave orders that the contingent of Khalid should return to Irac. Its ranks, thinned by hard fighting, were made up to former strength by transfer of volunteers from the Syrian army. Thus recruited, the troops (under command, not now of Khalid, but of Hashim, son of Otba) recrossed the desert just in time to take part in the great battle of Cadesiya. Abu Obeida, with Khalid, having now in view the advance on Hims, returned to Damascus. Shorahbil and Amru were left to reduce to order the province of the Jordan, and their task was easy. The fire of patriotism had never burned brightly anywhere in Syria; and what there might have been was now extinguished by the listless cowardice of the Byzantine court. To the Bedouin race, weary of Roman trammels, the prospect of Arabian rule was far from unwelcome. Neither were the Jews and Samaritans unfavourable to the invaders; indeed, we find them not infrequently giving aid and information to the enemy. Even the Christians cared little for the maintenance of a government which by courtly and ecclesiastical intolerance had done its best to alienate their affection.

Khalid's
contingent
returns to
Irac.

Province of
Jordan
reduced.

Beisan for some time held out; but the garrison, when their sallies had been repeatedly repulsed, at last capitulated. Tiberias followed, and both obtained the terms of Damascus. Jerash, Maab, Bostra, and other strongholds tendered submission. And so the whole tract from the Jordan eastward to the desert was brought under control, and safely garrisoned.

Tiberias
and district
east of
Jordan.

From Damascus Yezid extended his authority eastward as far as Tadmor. Toward the sea, his brother Muavia, meeting little opposition, reduced Sidon and Beyrut, and pushed his conquests to the north of Tripolis. Damascus

Rest of
Syria.



A.H. 13-14. — itself, largely occupied by Arabs, quickly assumed the garb of a Moslem city. Christian power and influence lingered longer on the coast. Once and again, from seaward, Byzantine arms retook what the Arabs had gained. It was not, indeed, until these had begun to cope with the naval forces of the Mediterranean, that their authority was riveted along the littoral, as it had long been in the interior.

Leaving Abu Obeida and Khalid to renew the campaign northward, we return for the present to stirring scenes on the plains of Chaldæa.



CHAPTER XIV.

YEZDEGIRD SUCCEEDS TO THE THRONE OF PERSIA.
BATTLE OF CADESIYA.

14 A.H. 635 A.D.

WE left Mothanna, after the great battle of Boweib, ravaging at will the terror-stricken coasts of Chaldæa. But another wave of war was about to sweep over the unhappy land. A new movement was taking place at Medain. The Persian nobles, chafing under the weakness of Rustem and the feeble Queen, began to cry out that these were dragging the empire down to ruin. The ladies of the court assembled to search whether any king might not yet be discovered of the royal blood. And so Yezdegird was found, saved as a child from the massacre of Siroes, now a youth of twenty-one. He was placed upon the throne. Around the young King the nobles rallied loyally, and something was re-kindled of the ancient fire of patriotism. Troops were gathered, Mesopotamia reoccupied, and the cities as far as Hira strongly garrisoned.

Yezdegird
king of
Persia.
End of
13 A.H.
Dec.,
634 A.D.

Revived
military
movement.

The people returned to their allegiance; and Mothanna, finding his diminished army unable to cope with the rising which in the Spring assumed such formidable dimensions, again withdrew behind the Euphrates. He sent an urgent message to Omar of the new perils threatening all around. The danger was met bravely by the Caliph. 'I swear by the Lord,' was his emphatic word, 'that I will smite down the proud princes of Persia with the sword of the princes of Arabia.' It was clearly impossible permanently to hold

Mothanna
again falls
back.



A.H. 14. Mesopotamia while it was dominated by the capital of Persia so close at hand. Medain must be taken at any cost, and a great army gathered for the purpose. Orders, more stringent than ever (as already told), went forth for a new and universal levy. 'Haste hither,' was the command sent everywhere, 'hasten speedily!' And forthwith Arabia again resounded with the call to arms. The tribes from the south were to assemble before the Caliph at Medina; those lying northward,—the demand being urgent and time precious,—were to march straight to Mothanna. So much arranged, Omar set out on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. This accomplished, he repaired to the camp outside Medina, where the contingents as they came in were marshalled. There it was debated whether the Caliph, as he proposed, and as the people wished, should in person lead the army to Irac. The chief Companions were against it. Defeat, if Omar were on the field, might be fatal; seated at Medina, even at the worst, he could launch column after column on the enemy. Omar yielded; but the readiness he had thus shown to bear in his own person the heat and burden of the day added a new impulse to the movement.

Omar
orders
another
levy.

Goes on
pilgrimage,
xiii. 13 A.H.
Feb.,
635 A.D.

Sad ap-
pointed
commander
in Irac.

Who now should be the leader of this great army in Irac? Mothanna and Jarir were but Bedouin chieftains. None but a peer could take command of the proud tribes now flocking to the field. The matter was at the moment under discussion, when there came a despatch from Sad, the Caliph's lieutenant with the Hawazin, reporting the levy of a thousand good lances from amongst that tribe. 'Here is the man!' cried out the assembly. 'Who?' asked the Caliph. 'None but the *Ravelling Lion*¹,' was the answer, —'Sad, the son of Malik.' The choice was sealed by acclamation; and Omar at once summoned Sad. Converted at Mecca while yet a boy, the new Ameer of Irac was now forty years of age. He is known as 'the first who drew blood in Islam,' and was a noted archer in the Prophet's wars². He took rank also as the nephew of Mahomet's mother. Short and dark, with large head and shaggy hair.

¹ A play upon the name *Sad*, or 'lion.'

² *Life of Mahomet*, pp. 63, 68.



Sad was brave, but not well-favoured. The Caliph gave him advice on the momentous issues of the campaign, and warned him not to trust in his extraction. 'The Lord,' he said, 'looketh to merit and good works, not to birth; for in His sight all men are equal.' Admonished thus, Sad set out for Irac, with 4,000 men, the first-fruits of the new levy. According to Arab custom, these marched now with their wives and children.

As the levies kept coming in, Omar sent them on, one after another, to join Sad. The numbers, swelling rapidly, embraced the chivalry of all Arabia. Toleiha, the *quondam* prophet, now an exemplary believer, and Amr ibn Madekerib, went in command of their respective tribes; and Omar wrote that each alone was worth a thousand men. Ashath, also, the apostate rebel of the south, now joined the army with a column of his tribe. In short, Omar 'left not a single person of any note or dignity in the land, whether warrior, poet, orator, or chieftain, nor any man possessed of horse or weapons; but he sent him off to Irac.' Thus reinforced, Sad found himself at the head of 20,000 men, so that, with the column now on its way from Syria, the numbers were over 30,000—by far the largest force yet mustered by the Arabs on the plains of Chaldæa. The new levies, with the veterans of Mothanna, drew together at Sheraf, on the borders of the desert, fifteen or twenty miles south of Hira.

Before Sad reached the appointed rendezvous, Mothanna had passed away. His brother Moanna was just returning from a mission to the Beni Bekr, whom the Court of Persia were endeavouring to gain over. He went out to meet Sad with intelligence of his having frustrated the attempt, as well as with the sad news of his brother's death. He delivered also Mothanna's dying message to the new commander, advising that the Arabs should hold to their ground on the confines of the desert. 'Fight there the enemy,' was his last behest;—'Ye will be the victors; and, even if worsted, ye will have the friendly desert wastes behind: there the Persians cannot enter, and from thence ye will again return to the attack.' Sad, as he received the message, blessed

A.H. 14.

Sad with
the new
levies
marches
to Irac.

Death of
Mothanna.
ii. 14 A.H.
April, 635.