



A.H. 126-- of opposing. He had also, for the same reason, to turn a  
130. deaf ear to Nasr's cry for help from Khorasan,—where  
events, as will be shown in the next chapter, were rapidly  
hastening the downfall of his dynasty.

Merwan  
retires to  
Harran,  
130 A.H.  
748 A.D.

On the restoration of order in Mesopotamia and Irac,  
Merwan returned to Harran, his residence in the desert, and  
there remained in dangerous and inopportune repose, till  
he was called away by the fatal campaign of the Zab.





## CHAPTER LVIII.

REMAINDER OF MERWAN'S REIGN.—ABBASSIDE RISING  
IN THE EAST UNDER ABU MUSLIM AND CAHTABA.  
—RECOGNITION OF ABBASSIDE CALIPH.—BATTLE  
OF ZAB.—DEFEAT AND DEATH OF MERWAN.

130-132 A. H. 748-50 A. D.

THE progress of events in the East has been kept for separate treatment. The same causes were there at work as elsewhere,—Kharejite risings and tribal jealousies. But there were besides special elements of weakness. The authority of the Court was felt less in Khorasan than elsewhere, and in fact was fast disappearing altogether. Hashimite treason, long secretly hatching its disloyal brood, was now coming to an open head: and powerful clubs in support of the same were appearing fearlessly everywhere. The body politic was falling to pieces; and the specious claim of the Prophet's house as against the ungodly Omeyyads, paved an easy way for the great change now looming in the future.

Growth of  
Abbasside  
influence  
in the East.

The position of Nasr, Viceroy in Khorasan, had become in the last degree critical. Kirmany, as already said, had drawn to his standard the Yemenite faction, that namely hostile to Nasr. Put in prison as a dangerous agitator, he effected his escape, and kept up an armed opposition. To increase the disorder, Harith, for whom Nasr had obtained amnesty from the Court, turned against him; and, confederate as he had been of the pagan Turk, assumed now a high religious profession, and raising the black

Nasr, the  
viceroy,  
surrounded  
by tribal  
and other  
difficulties,  
126-8 A. H.  
743-5 A. D.





A.H. 180-  
182.

flag, demanded a reform of government in accordance with 'the Book of the Lord.' After many fruitless negotiations, Nasr offered to help him if he would again depart and fight beyond the Oxus, but he preferred to remain and battle, now on the side of Kirmany, and now against him. In one of these engagements he was killed: but Kirmany maintained his ground against Nasr, and even seizing Merve, plundered the treasury. It was still the endless quarrel of Modhar and Yemen pitted one against the other, with no decisive result other than that Khorasan was left with hardly even the form of government.

Abu Muslim  
agent  
of the  
Hashim-  
ites.

Just then, towards the end of 129 A.H., the great black standard of the Abbassides was unfurled in Khorasan, by Abu Muslim. The origin of this famous man, who, though still young, was already the hero of the new dynasty, is obscure. Amidst much that is discordant, we may assume that he was born a slave. In the year 125 (743 A.D.) Mohammed, head of the Abbasside house, with a party of his adherents, visited Mecca; and anticipating his decease (he died the same year) bade his followers in that event to take his son Ibrahim as his successor. At the same time he purchased Abu Muslim, then not twenty years of age, as a likely agent for the service of the house. Abu Muslim fulfilling thus the office of confidential agent, was kept going to and fro between Khorasan and Homeima (the village in South Palestine where the family lived), to promote the cause, and to report its progress. At last, in 129 A.H., he gave so promising an account of the zeal of his adherents, of the impotence of Omeyyad rule in Khorasan, and of the distractions there, that he received from Ibrahim command to delay no longer, but raise at once the banner of the new dynasty. In the month of Ramzan accordingly, Abu Muslim proceeding to the far East, sent forth his emissaries in all directions with instructions when and how the rising was to take place. Before the month was over, contingents had begun to pour in from every quarter. In one night there arrived no fewer than sixty from as many different places. The Omeyyad garrisons were expelled from Herat and other cities in the far East. Elsewhere, Abu Muslim's

Raises  
black  
standard in  
the East.  
ix. 129 A.H.  
May, 747  
A.D.





agents sought to win over the Modhar, by abuse of the A.H. 130-  
Yemen tribes; and the Yemen by abuse of the Modhar. 132.  
Even Nasr and Kirmany were tampered with; and Nasr,  
fearing that Kirmany might go over, had him made away  
with. Then Abu Muslim, joined by the sons of that chief<sup>1</sup>, Takes  
drove Nasr out of Merve and took possession of the citadel. Merve.  
But this success at last united the Syrians of either party  
against the Hashimite rebellion; and if the Caliph had  
only been able to strengthen Nasr's hands, the event must  
have been very different. The unfortunate Viceroy appealed Nasr  
to Merwan in bitter terms that he was left without support; appeals for  
and quoting verses to the effect that beneath was a volcano help.  
ready at any moment to burst forth, he added the fateful  
words—*Is the house of Omeyya awake, or is it slumbering  
still?* On receiving this despairing cry, Merwan ordered  
Ibn Hobeira to hasten reinforcements to the East; but  
with disaffection around him in the West, it was little  
that general could do for Nasr. About the same time,  
the Caliph intercepted a letter from Ibrahim to Abu  
Muslim, upbraiding him for not making more rapid pro-  
gress in Khorasan, and warning him against the hostility of  
the Arabs and Syrians towards the rising cause. Startled Arrest and  
and alarmed at his rival's machinations, Merwan bade the death of  
governor of Belcaa arrest Ibrahim. He was accordingly Ibrahim.  
seized in his house at Homeima, and sent to Harran, where  
shortly after he died, but whether by a violent death, or a  
natural one, is uncertain<sup>2</sup>. On the arrest, his brothers Abul  
Abbas, and Abu Jafar, with the rest of the family, fled  
to Kufa, where they remained for the present in conceal-  
ment.

Meanwhile Abu Muslim was making steady progress in Abu Mus-  
the East. His open unassuming habits, with neither body- lim's able-  
guard nor courtly ceremony, attached men to him. He administra-  
tion.

<sup>1</sup> The two sons of Kirmany were, however, found by Abu Muslim, probably from their Syrian associations, to be inconvenient allies; and were, with their attendants, treacherously put to death. Abu Muslim made no scruple of assassinating by any underhand means those whom he found in his way.

<sup>2</sup> Some say he died of the plague; others that he was poisoned in a draught of milk; others that Merwan caused his prison house to fall upon him. The presumption is against a violent death.





A. H. 130-  
132.

committed the ordinary administration to a council of twelve, chosen from the earliest adherents of the cause. He was also wise enough to make his watch-word simply the *House of Hashim*, without declaring by name the master for whom he fought. There were still many who held by the line of Abu Talib, and wished to see one of his descendants rather than of Abbas, succeed; the cry, therefore, embraced all these branches, including that of Aly. At one time Abu Muslim opened friendly communications with Nasr, who, seeing no hope of help from Syria, had thoughts to throw in his lot with him; but fearing treachery, he at last resolved on flight, and so, with the troops still faithful to the Omeyyad cause, hastened south to Serakhs, and thence to Nisabur. There pursued by Cahtaba, Abu Muslim's famous general, he suffered a defeat in which he lost his son. Thence he fled to Jorjan, where was a strong force of friendly Syrians. But fortune had deserted the Caliph's cause, and Cahtaba again achieved a signal victory, slaying thousands of his enemy<sup>1</sup>. Nasr, again appealing bitterly but in vain for help, continued his flight westward to Rei. There he fell sick, and was carried on towards Hamadan, but he died upon the way. He was eighty-five years old, and his long and distinguished services as viceroy of Khorasan deserved a better fate.

Nasr flees  
south, is  
defeated by  
Cahtaba,  
end of  
130 A. H.

Death of  
Nasr,  
iii. 131 A. H.  
Nov., 748  
A. D.

Cahtaba  
advances  
on Kufa,  
131 A. H.  
749 A. D.

Cahtaba now advanced rapidly westward. Entering Rei, he restored order there, while his son, Ibn Cahtaba, with other generals, reduced the country all around,—the adherents of the Omeyyads, as well as the Kharejites, whose rebellion had recently been quelled, flying terrified before them. Ibn Cahtaba then laid siege to Nehavend. The Caliph's army from Kerman (now released by Ibn Muavia's defeat and flight) 100,000 strong, advancing to its relief, was intercepted by Cahtaba, who with 20,000 men, after a fierce battle, entirely routed his enemy, and took his camp, itself a little city filled with all the luxuries of the East. After a three months' siege, Nehavend fell, and then Cahtaba, fetching a circuit to avoid Ibn Hobeira, the Syrian general at Jalola, made direct for Kufa, where, with expect-

<sup>1</sup> The numbers slain are variously put at from 10,000 to 30,000.





ations raised by the tidings of recent success, the Hashimite party looked impatiently for his appearance. It was now the beginning of the year 132, when Cahtaba crossed the Euphrates, some thirty or forty miles above Kufa; but Ibn Hobeira was before him, and the two armies met somewhere in the vicinity of Kerbala. In this encounter the Syrians were worsted, but the Hashimites too suffered a loss, for Cahtaba fell upon the field. His son, Ibn Cahtaba, took command, and, following up his father's success, forced Ibn Hobeira, abandoning his camp and all its stores, to retire on Wasit. Kufa thus uncovered, the Hashimite force advanced, and after slight opposition,—for the Syrian troops deserted hastily the Omeyyad leader,—took possession of the city; and shortly after Abul Abbas with his family and relatives emerged from their hiding-place. In anticipation of the new order of things (reserved for another chapter), Abu Salma, who had been one of the busy agents of the Hashimites in Khorasan, was recognized provisionally as 'Wazeer of the house of Mahomet,' and Mohammed, son of Khalid (former governor of Kufa), as 'Ameer.'

Defeats Ibn Hobeira, who falls back on Wasit, 8th i. 132 A. H.

Takes Kufa; Abul Abbas emerges from hiding, 10th i. 132 A. H. 29 Aug., 749 A. D.

Meanwhile, stirring events were passing in Upper Mesopotamia. Cahtaba, in his victorious progress westward, had detached Abu Aun, an able general, from Nehavend to press forwards to Mesopotamia. Reaching Shahrzor, east of the Little Zab, towards the end of 131 A. H., he there defeated with great slaughter the troops of Abdallah, Merwan's son, and occupied the region east of Mosul. Merwan himself, since his campaign against the Kharejites, had remained inactive at Harran. He was now roused, by seeing the enemy at his very door, to take the field in person, which earlier done, the issue might have been very different, but now with rebellion, defeat, and disaffection around, the ground was sinking under foot. Crossing the Tigris, he advanced upon the Greater Zab with an army of 120,000, sufficiently strong in numbers to meet his enemy, but made up in great measure of lukewarm Yemen tribes and Kharejites. Meanwhile, Ibn Hobeira having retired on Wasit, Abul Abbas, the rival Caliph, was able from Kufa heavily to reinforce Abu Aun. To give the army

Abu Aun defeats Merwan's son on Little Zab, 20 xii. 131 A. H. Aug., 749 A. D.

Merwan II at last takes the field.





A.H. 130-  
132.

Battle of  
the Zab,  
11th vi.  
132 A.H.,  
25 Jan.,  
750 A.D.

Defeat and  
flight of  
Merwan II.

also an imperial bearing, he sent his uncle Abdallah as commander-in-chief: and to him accordingly Abu Aun resigned the state-pavilion, mark of supreme command. Abdallah found Merwan encamped with his great host on the right bank of the Zab, and Abu Aun with only 20,000 on the left. A party of the latter crossed, but after a skirmish retired. Next day, Merwan, against advice, threw a bridge across the river, and advanced to fight. His son at the first beat back a column of the enemy; and Abu Aun, lest the report should dishearten the army, resolved at once to bring on a general action. The historians tell us that Merwan did nothing that day to prosper; but the real truth is that the Syrians had lost both loyalty and heart. Abu Aun made his men dismount on the first attack, and plant their lances in the ground; while Abdallah incited them, as the heroes of Khorasan, to revenge the death of his nephew Ibrahim; he shouted, *Ya Mohammed! Ya Mansur!* and the battle-cry was taken up by all around. Merwan, on his side, called aloud to the Arab tribes, one after another by name, to advance, but none responded to the call. Then in an evil moment, expecting thereby to raise their zeal, he made known that he had treasure in the camp and would reward the brave: on which, some of the soldiers turned aside, hoping at once to secure the prize. To prevent this, Merwan detached his son; and as he turned back with guard and standard to protect the camp, the army took it for flight; and with the cry of *Defeat! Defeat!* broke and gave way. Merwan, to stay the flight, cut the bridge adrift; and more were drowned in the Zab than perished by the sword<sup>1</sup>. This battle, which foretold the fate of the Omeyyad Caliphate, took place in the year 132 A.H., or 750 A.D. Abdallah remained for a week on the field, and reported his victory to Abul Abbas, who,

<sup>1</sup> A grandson of Abd al Melik being seen struggling in the waves, Abdallah, the new Caliph's brother, is said to have cried, 'Let him alone,' quoting from the Coran the passage on the destruction of the Egyptians. 'Verily, when We divided the sea and saved you alive, but drowned the host of Pharaoh therein, while ye looked on.' *Sura ii. 47.*





overjoyed at the tidings, ordered 500 golden pieces, and A.H. 130-  
promise of increased pay, to be given to every combatant. 132.

Merwan fled. At Mosul, his followers cried out, 'It is the Caliph, let him cross.' 'A lie,' they answered from the other bank, 'the Caliph doth not fly;' and so they showered abuse upon the fallen monarch, and glorified the triumphant 'House of the Prophet.' Merwan then made the best of his way to Harran, where he spent some weeks in the vain endeavour to raise another army. But Abdallah was on his track, and so he hurried on to Hims, and thence, receiving no support, to Damascus. But neither could he safely make any stay there, and so desiring the governor, his son-in-law, to hold on, and raise another army, he fled to Palestine, where he found refuge with an Arab chief.

Flight of  
Merwan.

Meanwhile, under orders from Kufa, Abdallah had advanced from the Zab to Mosul, where they streamed forth to meet him with open arms, clad in the black colours of the new dynasty. At Harran, the governor, Merwan's nephew, came out in similar attire to make his submission; and there Abdallah avenged the death of Ibrahim, his nephew, by the unmeaning demonstration of demolishing the house which had formed his prison<sup>1</sup>. Passing onward to Syria, he received the adhesion of all the chief places by the way. At Damascus reinforcements joined him from Kufa under his brother Salih, raising the force to 80,000. The city closed its gates against him, but after a short resistance was stormed, and the governor slain. Thereupon the black standard of the Abbassides was unfurled in triumph on the citadel, the 5th Ramzan, 132 A.H., eight months from the entry into Kufa, and three from the battle of the Zab. After a short stay, Abdallah passed on to Palestine in pursuit of Merwan, but found that he had fled to Egypt. Here, under orders from the new Caliph, he despatched his brother Salih and Abu Aun with a force to follow up the fugitive. At Said he found that, to stay pursuit, Merwan's followers had burned all supplies of grass and fodder in

Damascus  
taken by  
Abdallah,  
brother of  
Abul  
Abbas.

18th April,  
750 A.D.

Merwan II  
pursued in  
Egypt,  
xi. 132 A.H.  
June,  
750 A.D.

<sup>1</sup> This action is in favour of the impression that Ibrahim did not die a violent death.





A. H. 130-  
132.

Slain,  
26 xii.  
132 A. H.  
5 Aug.,  
750 A. D.

Head sent  
to Abul  
Abbas.

His sons  
and daugh-  
ters.

His cha-  
racter.

the neighbourhood. Passing on to Fostat, Abu Aun was detached with a column, which took prisoners a troop of cavalry still attached to the fallen Caliph. Some they put to death; the rest were faithless enough to purchase their lives by disclosing their master's hiding-place. He had taken refuge in a church at Busîr, where surprised by a small party he was overpowered and slain, just as the year expired.

The head was sent to the commander Salih, who had the tongue cut out and thrown contemptuously to a cat. Thus disfigured it was despatched to Kufa. On seeing it, Abul Abbas bowed low in adoration. Then raising his head towards heaven, he praised the Lord who had given him the victory and his revenge over an ungodly race. He recited also a verse indicative of the fire that still burned within:—‘Had they quaffed my blood, it had not quenched their thirst; so neither is my wrath slaked by theirs.’ True to the sentiment, he named himself (as we shall see) *Saffâh*, the Blood-thirsty, and by that title he has ever since been known.

Two of Merwan's sons fled to Abyssinia, where, attacked by the natives, one was killed; the other escaped, and lived in concealment in Palestine, from whence he was sent many years after to the court of Mehdy. The ladies of Merwan's family had been placed for safety in a church, from whence they were dragged to the presence of Salih<sup>1</sup>. Before him the elder daughter pleaded for mercy. She was answered with reproaches for the cruel treatment by her people of the house of Hashim:—‘How,’ said the Caliph's uncle, ‘can I spare any of this wicked race?’ Again she pleaded for grace and mercy:—‘Nay,’ he replied, ‘but if thou wilt, thou mayest marry my son and save thyself.’ ‘What heart have I now for that?’ she answered; ‘but send us back to Harran again.’ And when they returned there, and saw the old home and palace of Merwah, they lifted up their voices and wept.

Merwan was over three-score years at his death, and

<sup>1</sup> The servant is said to have had instructions to put them to death if Merwan lost his life.





had reigned for nearly six. His mother was a Kurdish slave-girl, and from her he inherited a handsome countenance, with blue eyes and a ruddy complexion. He was called the *Ass of Mesopotamia*, not in derision, but in virtue of his great power of physical endurance. He was one of the bravest and best of his house, and deserved a better fate<sup>1</sup>. A.H. 130-132.

So perished the Omeyyad dynasty, and on its ruins rose the house of Hashim. End of  
Omeyyad  
dynasty.

<sup>1</sup> He was also called Al Jadi, from professing the heretical views of Jad, a theologian who held the doctrine of Freewill, and denied that the Coran was eternal and uncreate. But this may have been one of the calumnies heaped by the Abbasside courtiers on the house of Omeyya. His mother was the Omm Walad of Ibrahim al Ashtar, taken over by his father the day her master was slain.





## CHAPTER LIX.

## THE ABBASSIDE DYNASTY.

132-656 A.H. 750-1258 A.D.

IN passing from the Omeyyad to the Abbasside Caliphate we reach in many respects a fresh departure which justifies a pause and some words in explanation of the change.

New features in the Abbasside Caliphate.

The Caliphate no longer co-ordinate with Islam.

The first new feature is, that while the Omeyyad Caliphate, from first to last, was co-ordinate with the limits of Islam, this is no longer true of the Abbasside. The authority of the new dynasty was never acknowledged in Spain; and throughout Africa, excepting Egypt, it was but intermittent and for the most part nominal; while in the East, as time rolled on, independent dynasties arose. Islam thus broke up into many fragments, not necessarily in any way dependent on the Caliphate, each with its own separate history. But with all this, the Abbasside was the only dynasty that truly represented the proper Caliphate. Monarchs reigning in Cordova could only be recognized as 'Caliphs' in so far as every supreme ruler of Islam holds in his hand the spiritual as well as the secular authority, and may thus in some sense claim to be the Caliph or *Successor* of the Prophet. But the Abbassides alone had any colour of pretension to the name and dignity by virtue of legitimate succession<sup>1</sup>.

Remainder of this work.

It being, then, the author's sole object to trace the Caliphate, properly so called, to its close, the rest of this work

<sup>1</sup> The Spanish dynasty, though sprung from the line of Omeyyad Caliphs, did not at first venture to assume the title. Abd al Rahman (Abderame, 300-349 A. H.) was the first who did so.





will be restricted to a narrative of the dynasty of the Abbassides as they rose first to the crest of glory, and then sank gradually under the sway of Sultans and Grand Vizers till they ended a mere phantom, vanishing into the shadowy pageantry of attendants on the Mameluke kings of Egypt. Events outside the Caliphate will only so far be noticed as they bear upon the individual history of the dynasty. Thus alone will it be possible to keep the remainder of this book within reasonable dimensions.

A.H. 132-656.  
Restricted to Abbasside Caliphate.

Another marked feature in the era on which we enter is the change which comes over the Arabs and the attitude of the new dynasty towards them. To their hardy life and martial fire were mainly due the spread of Islam and material prosperity of the Caliphate. But the nation had by this time lost much of its early hardihood and vigour. Enriched with the spoil of conquered peoples, the temptations to pride and luxury had gradually sapped their warlike virtue, and so they either settled down with well-filled harems, living sumptuously at their ease; or, if they still preferred the field, yielded there to petulance and insubordination, preferring, too often, the interests of person, family, and tribe, to the interests of Islam. The fervour of religious enthusiasm had in great measure passed away, and self-aggrandisement had taken the place of passion for national glory and extension of the Faith. The Saracen was no longer the conqueror of the world.

Arab nation loses martial vigour.

Added to this, the Abbassides on their accession lost confidence in their own people; indeed, they had already done so for several years before. They were brought to the throne, and supported there, by levies from Persia and Khorasan; while of the Omeyyads, the Syrians were the last support, and the Arab tribes, whether Modhar or Yemen, were ranged upon their side. Ibrahim felt this so strongly, that in the letter intercepted by Merwan, in which he chided Abu Muslim for his delay in crushing Nasr and Kirmany, he added angrily,—‘See that there be not one left in Khorasan whose tongue is the tongue of the Arabian, but he be slain!’ It was among the Arabs of Syria and Mesopotamia that dangerous revolt repeatedly took place

Cast off by Abbassides,





A.H. 132-  
656.

who throw  
themselves  
into hands  
of Turks  
and Per-  
sians.

against the new dynasty, and so they continued to be looked askance upon. Before long the Caliphs drew their body-guard entirely from the Turks about the Oxus; and that barbarous race, scenting from afar the delights of the south, were not slow to follow. Before long these began to overshadow the noble Arab chieftains; and so we soon find the imperial forces officered almost entirely by Turcomans, freedmen or slaves, of strange descent and uncouth name. In the end the Caliphs became the helpless tools of their protectors: and the Arabs, where not already denationalized by city life, retired to roam at will in their desert wilds.

With the rise of Persian influence, the roughness of Arab life was softened; and there opened an era of culture, toleration, and scientific research. The practice of oral tradition was also giving place to recorded statement and historical narrative,—a change hastened by the scholarly tendencies introduced from the East.

Persian  
influences.

To the same source may be attributed the ever increasing laxity at Court of manners and morality; and also those transcendental views that now sprang up, of the divine Imamat or spiritual leadership of some member of the house of Aly; as well as the rapid growth of free thought.

These things will be developed as we go on. But I have thought it well to draw attention at this point to the important changes wrought by the closer connection of the Caliphate with Persia and Khorasan, caused by the accession of the Abbassides.





## CHAPTER LX.

ABUL ABBAS, SAFFAH.

132-136 A. H. 749-54 A. D.

A BRIEF review may here be necessary, to recall the circumstances attending the establishment of the new Caliphate at Kufa.

In a previous chapter we have seen that while Merwan still tarried at Harran, Ibn Hobeira was defeated in the vicinity of Kufa by the army of Cahtaba, and obliged to fall back on Wasit. Abu Salma, heretofore a busy leader and agent of the Hashimite cause in Khorasan, now encamped at Kufa, meeting with little opposition, took possession of the city in the beginning of the year 132, and for a time carried on the government under the title of 'Wazeer of the house of Mahomet.' On the arrest of Ibrahim, two or three years before, his two brothers, and all their relatives of the house of Hashim, fled from Homeima to Kufa, where they had remained ever since in concealment; they were now taken charge of by Abu Salma, but for several weeks were still kept by him in the strictest privacy. When urged to declare the advent of the new dynasty, he said that it would be premature and dangerous so long as Ibn Hobeira maintained his stand at Wasit. Some suspected him of favouring that branch of Hashimite stock which had descended from Aly, but of these none had the ambition or the courage to come forward. However that may be, the Abbasside party were impatient at the delay, and learning that Ibrahim had declared his younger brother Abul Abbas (son of a noble mother, while his brother Abu Jafar was son of a slave-

Abul  
Abbas,  
*Saffah*,  
132 A.H.  
749 A.D.

Abbasside  
family  
brought  
into Kufa,  
ii. 132 A.H.  
Oct.,  
749 A.D.





A.H. 132-136. girl) his successor, they brought him out openly; and finding the people with them, proceeded on a public demonstration. It was about three months after the occupation of Kufa by the Hashimite troops that, apparently with the consent of Abu Salma, they mounted Abul Abbas upon a piebald horse, entered the palace, and thence proceeded to the Great Mosque. There Abul Abbas ascended the pulpit and made his first address. He magnified the virtues and claims of the descendants of the Prophet, denounced the usurpation and crimes of the Omeyyads and their Syrian followers, praised the Kufans for their fidelity to his family, which he promised to reward by an increase of their stipends; and ended by declaring it his mission to root out all opposition, for, said he, 'I am the Great Revenger, and my name *Saffāh*, the Shedder of Blood<sup>1</sup>.' His uncle Daud followed with still fiercer words. He styled Merwan 'the enemy of the Lord, and Caliph of the Devil,' and affirmed that the only real successors of the Prophet were two—Aly his son-in-law, who had stood in that very pulpit, and now another standing in the same, even Abul Abbas—the true Commander of the Faithful. 'Delay not then,' he said, 'to take the oath of fealty. The dominion is ours, and with us it will remain, till the day when we shall render it up to Jesus Son of Mary.' Having thus delivered themselves, they both descended from the pulpit, and entered the castle, whither the people flocked till it was dark, doing homage to the new Caliph. Abul Abbas then returned to the encampment of Abu Salma, where for some months he occupied the same abode<sup>2</sup>.

Abul  
Abbas done  
homage to,  
12 iii.  
132 A.H.  
20 Oct.,  
749 A.D.

Caliph  
retires to  
Hashimiya.

By and by Abul Abbas became alienated from Abu Salma, whether from any well-grounded suspicion against him, Alyite, or otherwise, cannot be said. But, whatever

<sup>1</sup> His usual name, *Saffāh*, was given on account of his many bloody executions, which of course were yet in the future. It is not unlikely that the name may have been imported into his first harangue by anticipation; but I give the speech as I find it. Abul Abbas was suffering from an attack of fever, which made him cut short his address.

<sup>2</sup> The 'same apartment,' we are told, separated by a simple curtain between the two. This does not look as if suspicion existed, at any rate at this time, against Abu Salma, of Alyite tendencies or other disloyalty.





the cause, now quitting his house at Kufa, the new Caliph repaired to Anbar, in the neighbourhood of which he laid the foundation of a courtly residence, and called it after his family *Hashimiya*. From thence he despatched his uncles and other relatives, among whom were several men of sufficient ability, with commands in various directions to replace the officers of the fallen dynasty. Acting under his direction, these soon earned for Abul Abbas a solid claim to the sanguinary title he aspired after.

A.H. 132-136.

His earliest care was to sweep from the face of the earth the entire Omeyyad race. Such wholesale butcheries cast into the shade anything the previous dynasty had ever been accused of. The cruellest of them was that perpetrated by the Caliph's uncle in Palestine. An amnesty was offered to the numerous branches of the family congregated there; and to confirm it they were invited, some ninety in number, to a feast. Suddenly a bard arose reciting in verse the evil deeds of the Omeyyads, and on signal given, the attendants fell on the unsuspecting guests, and put them all to death. A carpet was drawn across the ghastly spectacle, and the tyrant resumed his feast over the still quivering limbs of the dying. All in whose veins ran the blood of Omeyyad princes were relentlessly pursued, and only such as were of tender years<sup>1</sup>, or successfully effected flight, escaped. At Bussorah, the like scene was soon after enacted; the miserable victims were slain and their remains cast into the streets to be devoured of dogs. Those that escaped wandered about in terror, seeking vainly in disguise some place of secrecy. One such, a descendant of Abu Sofian, finding his life a burden, cast himself at the feet of an uncle of the Caliph, who, touched with pity, obtained a rescript not only sparing him, but granting a general amnesty to such as still survived. Nevertheless in the following year, we find another less merciful uncle of Saffah initiating a fresh slaughter of those that had taken shelter in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Omeyyad house pursued to death.

Wholesale butchery in Palestine, 133 A.H. 751 A.D.

Nor did it suffice that they should vent their rage on the living, the fear of whose machinations might possibly be dead.

Deseccration of dead.

<sup>1</sup> The phrase used by the historian is 'succubings.'





A.H. 132-  
136.

Rebellion  
in Syria  
and Meso-  
potamia.

pleaded in feeble excuse. The tombs of the Caliphs were unearthed. Of the great Muavia there was nothing that remained but dust; and of the other Caliphs little more, excepting only Hisham, whose frame was found in singular preservation. This they scourged with whips, hung up for a while, and then burned, scattering the ashes to the winds. Such outrage raised indignation throughout Syria and Mesopotamia. Omeyyad households also were treated with indignity by the creatures of the new dynasty. One of their minions, caught in the act of carrying off as slaves the harem of the distinguished warrior Maslama, was slain by the governor of Kinnesrin, which forthwith rose in rebellion. All Syria, with Damascus at its head, followed suit. The Caliph's uncle Abdallah, at that moment quelling a rising in the Hauran, came to terms with the insurgents, and hastened to the north, where he was met by a defiant force of 40,000 men. After much fighting and various fortune, he defeated his enemy and restored order. A still more dangerous revolt threatened Hashimite rule in Mesopotamia, where an army of 60,000 Syrians in the field laid siege to Harran. To meet the emergency, Abul Abbas detached a column under command of his brother Abu Jafar, from the army then besieging Ibn Hobeira in Wasit. This force advancing to the northern coasts of the Euphrates, dispersed the insurgents, but with some difficulty, for Someisat was not recovered till after a siege of seven months. Bussorah also resisted all the attempts of the Hashimite general, supported by a column from Khorasan. That unfortunate city was also distracted within itself, apart altogether from the Abbasside attack; for the Modharite party, having gotten the ascendancy after severe fighting, overthrew the opposite faction; and the city,—suffering thus whichever party conquered,—was for three days given up to pillage and outrage. The Omeyyad leaders, however, kept possession of it until Wasit fell.

These risings, if guided by an able leader with united interest and common design, might have changed the order of events, and raised the fallen dynasty, which still had Syria for its support. It failed mainly from the fatal step





of Ibn Hobeira, who, as we have seen, instead of hastening north at his call to the support of Merwan, fell back on Wasit, and there shut himself up with the flower of the Omeyyad troops. He was afraid, we are told, of Merwan, because he had not obeyed the order to detach troops for the support of Nasr in Khorasan; but whatever the cause, it proved fatal to his master; for defeat in Syria was beyond comparison more to be dreaded than the loss of Wasit, important as it was. The siege of that cantonment was pressed vigorously by Ibn Cahtaba. The powerful garrison made no way against it, partly owing to the depressing influences of a failing cause, and partly to the tribal jealousies that still paralyzed the Syrian soldiery. Thus things went on for eleven months, during which the Omeyyad cause was being lost in Syria. At last, the Caliph, recalling his brother Abu Jafar from the north, sent him to take the command at Wasit; and the tidings of Merwan's death having meanwhile reached Ibn Hobeira, he thereupon offered to capitulate<sup>1</sup>. A full amnesty concluded by Abu Jafar, was ratified by the Caliph under solemn oath; and Abu Jafar, who received Ibn Hobeira graciously, was intent upon respecting it. But the Caliph, having consulted Abu Muslim then at Merve, and received his counsel to get Ibn Hobeira 'as a stumbling-stone out of his way,' persistently urged his death. At last Abul Abbas sent two creatures of his own to do the deed, if Abu Jafar should still decline. Abu Jafar gave way; and summoning two-and-twenty of the leading Modhar chiefs to an interview, had them bound two and two, by a party concealed in an adjoining apartment, and, spite of their appeal to the Caliph's solemn oath, beheaded. Ibn Hobeira and his son were at the same time slain by the two emissaries of the Caliph, who repaired to his house under pretence of taking over the treasure. The historian adds pathos to the cruel tale of perfidy; for he tells us

A.H. 132-133.

Ibn Hobeira capitulates at Wasit.

Treacherously put to death with followers.

<sup>1</sup> When he heard of Merwan's defeat and death, he is said to have written to Mohammed ibn Abdallah, a grandson of Hasan son of Aly, offering to support his claim to the throne, but waiting long for a reply, and the Caliph's emissaries beginning to tamper with the Yemenite party in his army, he capitulated; of this Ibn Abdallah we shall hear more in the next reign.





A.H. 132- that Ibn Hobeira, suspecting no treachery, had at the mo-  
136. ment, on his knee, a little son, whom they snatched from  
his embrace as he fell on his knees imploring mercy<sup>1</sup>.

Bloodshed  
in Mosul.

Notwithstanding that the Hashimite banner everywhere prevailed, outrage still survived in many parts of the empire. A terrible calamity overtook Mosul. The people refusing obedience to the new governor as a low-born stranger, expelled him from their city. On this, the Caliph sent his brother Yahya, who proved himself worthy of his relationship to the 'Shedder of blood.' The townsmen were persuaded to gather in the court of the mosque, under promise of full security, but the gates were no sooner closed upon them, than they were massacred to a man<sup>2</sup>. The city, deprived thus of its protectors, was given up for three days to sack and outrage. Besides the regular soldiery, there were with the troops 4000 negroes who shamelessly violated the women, till one of these, bolder than the rest, appealed to Yahya, the reins of whose horse she seized, and asked whether followers of the Prophet were now abandoned to the embrace of slaves. To appease the outcry, the entire body of the negroes was put to the sword. The Caliph removed his brother for his cruelty, but nevertheless put him over another province.

Fighting  
elsewhere.

Elsewhere troubles prevailed to the end of the reign. The viceroy of Sind and India refused to recognise Hashimite rule; after heavy fighting, he was beaten, and died of thirst in his flight through the desert. Bussorah being at last reduced by a force of veterans from Khorasan, the adherents of the old dynasty fled to Oman, where they were joined by a vast host of Kharejites. They were in the end defeated by the imperial troops, and incredible numbers slain or burned to death. In Khorasan there were similar outbreaks with even greater slaughter. The

<sup>1</sup> The Caliph's oath of amnesty was couched in the most stringent and solemn terms, and condign punishment from 'the Searcher of hearts' was invoked on him who might violate its conditions. The historian adds (but hardly by way of justification) that Ibn Hobeira once addressed Abu Jafar as 'O man' or by some such term; but immediately apologised for it as a slip of the tongue.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers are given at 10,000, but probably with the usual exaggeration of the slaughter made in the reign of Saffah.





rebels of Bokhara, Soghd, and Ferghana, were aided by 'the king of China,' but put to flight by Ziad, governor of Samarcand, with terrible carnage<sup>1</sup>.

A.H. 132-136.

We have seen that the Caliph on his accession, after living for some time in closest intimacy with Abu Salma, one of the leading supporters of the Hashimite cause in Khorasan and their 'Vizier' at Kufa, became alienated from him, and departed from his residence to Anbar. It is said that Abu Salma had a favour for the house of Aly, which stirred the Caliph's jealousy. Whether this be so or no, Abul Abbas cherished enmity against him in his heart, and wrote to Abu Muslim at Merve for his advice, which came to put him to death. The Caliph was dissuaded from ordering the execution, by an uncle who dwelt on the danger of revenge by Abu Salma's influential followers from Khorasan; and suggested that Abu Muslim should be asked to send an assassin for the purpose. This was done. Abul Abbas then ordered a crier to go forth and proclaim Abu Salma as 'the man whom the Caliph delighteth to honour.' So he was called and arrayed in a robe of honour, and entertained by the Caliph till night was far advanced. As he wended his way home alone, he was waylaid and assassinated. Report was diligently spread that the Kharejites had done the deed; but all well knew where the motive lay<sup>2</sup>.

Abu Salma treacherously put to death.

Shortly after, Abu Jafar was deputed to Merve, with the view of feeling the pulse and attitude of Abu Muslim himself; and there conceived towards him a bitter animosity. As viceroy of Khorasan, Abu Muslim exercised an

Abu Muslim in Khorasan.

<sup>1</sup> 50,000 slain beyond the Oxus, and 20,000 taken prisoners. In Oman, 900 Kharejites were killed in battle, and ninety burned alive. Then the troops attacked the town, which was built of wood, and pouring naphtha on the houses, set them thus ablaze; then rushing sword in hand on the terrified inhabitants, they slew 10,000,—all counted and the heads sent to Bussorah.' One may hope that these butcheries are vastly exaggerated; but they point to the lamentable disregard for human life that now prevailed.

<sup>2</sup> This is the most received report. Another is that the Caliph, fearing that Abu Muslim shared the Alyite tendencies of which Abu Salma was suspected, sent Abu Jafar to sound Abu Muslim; and that the latter, to prove his loyalty, despatched an assassin who committed the deed as above narrated.

Abu Muslim at the same time sent agents to put to death all the governors who had been appointed by Abu Salma while he ruled in Fars.





A.H. 132—unlimited, and, as Abu Jafar thought, a dangerous supremacy.  
136.

Attempt to  
assassinate  
him,

135 A.H.

Thus for an imprudent word, and on slight and arbitrary suspicion, he put to death Ibn Kethir, one of the earliest and most valuable advocates of the Hashimite mission in Khorasan<sup>1</sup>. This was done openly before Abu Jafar, who as we shall see never forgot the crime, and on his return to Irac told his brother that he was no longer Caliph unless he got rid of this wilful autocrat. The Caliph took it to heart, but bade his brother for the present keep the matter secret. A year or two later, Ziad the governor of Samarcand, which had recently been strongly fortified, set up for himself, and Abu Muslim went to fight him. On the way he discovered that an emissary of the Caliph (who is accused of having himself instigated the rebellion in order to weaken the too powerful Viceroy) was in his camp in league with Ziad, and that he had instructions to compass his death. The plot thus coming to light miscarried. Ziad was deposed and put to death by his own subjects; and the would-be assassin was beheaded.

Abu Mus-  
lim's pil-  
grimage  
with Abu  
Jafar,  
136 A.H.

In the following year, Abu Muslim, undeterred by the machinations at Court, asked permission to visit the Caliph at Anbar, and thence proceed on pilgrimage to Mecca. Leave was granted, but his following limited to 1000 men. He started with 8000, but left 7000 at Rei. The Caliph received him with every mark of honour, and gave permission to proceed to Mecca; but informed him that his brother Abu Jafar would probably be appointed to preside at the pilgrimage, a dignity Abu Muslim apparently expected for himself. Meanwhile Abu Jafar, who now resided at the Court, and both hated and feared the Viceroy, persuaded his brother to order his execution; he was to be cut down from behind as he was conversing with the Caliph. But the Caliph changed his mind. Dreading the revenge of the Khorasan troops, should he put their favourite to death, he withdrew the order. The pilgrimage

<sup>1</sup> Abu Muslim was jealous of this man's influence: and had conceived a hatred for him, because when Ibrahim first selected Abu Muslim as the Hashimite plenipotentiary in Khorasan, Ibn Kethir had sought to dissuade him on account of his extreme youth. Abu Muslim never forgave him, and now took advantage of the incautious speech to put him to death.





accordingly was undertaken by Abu Jafar and Abu Muslim both together. But though the former led the ceremonial, he was outshone by the splendour of Abu Muslim's equipage and his princely liberality. The pilgrimage completed, tidings of the Caliph's death reached the returning caravan. Abu Jafar had Abu Muslim now entirely in his power, but he was obliged, as will be explained in the following chapter, to veil his hatred for a time.

Abul Abbas died of small-pox in his palace at Anbar, a few days after the pilgrimage at Mecca was ended. His age is given at from twenty-eight to thirty-five years. He left a daughter<sup>1</sup>, afterwards married to her cousin the Caliph Mehdy. Abul Abbas was vain of his appearance, and little is said by the annalists of his death, beyond a description of the varied wardrobe which he left behind. It is also related of him, that as he stood looking at himself in a mirror, he exclaimed,—‘I do not say, as Soleiman, *Behold the kingly youth*; but I say, *Lord, give me long life and health to enjoy the same*.’ As he spake, he heard a slave say to his fellow hard by, regarding some mutual concern,—‘The term between us two months and five days.’ He took it as an evil augury; and so he sickened, and death overtook him as the term expired.

A.H. 132-136.

Abul Abbas dies on 13 xii. 136 A.H. 9 June, 754 A.D.

Thus closed the sanguinary reign of Abul Abbas, which lasted a little less than five years, during the last two of which he resided in the palace now completed at Anbar. Of public undertakings, the only thing we are told is that he had towers constructed for protection of the pilgrims at convenient distances all the way from Kufa to Mecca, and also mile-stones. Khalid the son of Barmek (the ‘Barmecide’), of whom mention has been already made, accompanied Cahtaba from Balkh, and being a man of singular ability was promoted by the Caliph to be chief of the Exchequer, and with the rest of the family attained a high position at Court. In the last year of his reign Abu Abbas nominated his nephew Isa, to be heir-apparent after

Palace of Hashimiya, and public works.

<sup>1</sup> Only a daughter, we are told. A son indeed is mentioned as accompanying Isa in the expedition against the Alyites, 145 A.H.; but as he is not spoken of elsewhere, he was probably of ignoble birth.





A.H. 132-  
136.

Isa nomin-  
ated heir-  
apparent  
after Abu  
Jafar.  
Saffāh the  
Blood-  
thirsty.

his brother Abu Jafar. The patent, inscribed upon a silken sheet, and sealed with the signets of the Caliph and of the chief heads of the royal family, was placed in custody of Isa himself, now governor of Kufa.

The name by which Abul Abbas is most commonly known is Saffāh, the Blood-thirsty, and he is well so called; for as such he is distinguished beyond all others in a dynasty that had small respect for human life. He intensified his cruelty and guilt, if that were possible, by treachery in face of solemn oaths, and also by ingratitude, for amongst his victims were those who had spent their lives in helping him to the throne. That the attempt should have been made to extenuate his crimes is strange; and is thus referred to by the impartial Weil, in whose judgment I concur;—

‘We can but marvel,’ he says, ‘that many Europeans have sought to defend this Caliph who was worse than any Omeyyad,—as if he did not deserve the name of Blood-shedder, which indeed he himself assumed. He may not with his own hands have strangled victims; but not the less was it by his express mandate that the Omeyyads in Syria, and Soleiman in his very presence, were perfidiously slain. At his command must Abu Muslim hire the assassin of Abu Salma, to whom the Abbassides owed so much. It was at his repeated requisition that Abu Jafar, in treacherous disregard of solemn oaths, slew Ibn Hobeira and his fellows; and it certainly is not due to his innocence that the fate of Abu Salma did not during his own reign overtake Abu Muslim also. Abul Abbas was not merely a barbarous tyrant; he was a perjured and ungrateful traitor.’

Such is the not overdrawn character of the first of the Abbassides, Abul Abbas, Saffāh, the ‘Blood-shedder.’





## CHAPTER LXI.

ABU JAFAR, MANSUR.

136-158 A. H. 754-75 A. D.

AT the death of Abul Abbas, Abu Jafar, as we have seen, was on pilgrimage at Mecca. His cousin, Isa, whom the late Caliph had nominated as second in succession, caused Abu Jafar to be at once proclaimed at Kufa, and the oath of allegiance was taken accordingly. On receiving tidings of his brother's death, Abu Jafar returned immediately to Kufa, and inaugurated his succession by leading prayers in the Great Mosque with the usual address; and then went on to the palace at Anbar. He assumed the name of Mansûr, the Victorious.

Abu Jafar  
Dzul Hiji,  
136 A.H.  
June, 754  
A.D.

Abu Muslim, as already said, was also on pilgrimage with him. Abu Jafar, directly on hearing of his brother's death while on the homeward route, sent for him and told him that he feared the attitude of his uncle Abdallah. Abu Muslim bade him set his mind at ease, promising in the event of Abdallah's rebellion to proceed at once against him. There was ground for the alarm. Abdallah was in command of a powerful force on the border of Asia Minor. He now asserted that the late Caliph had promised him the succession, in reward for his campaign against Merwan; and so, persuading the army to do homage to him as Caliph, he set siege to Harran. Abu Jafar was the more anxious for the services of Abu Muslim, as there were in the rebel army 17,000 men of Khorasan devoted to their old leader. On Abu Muslim's approach, Abdallah

Rebellion  
of Abdal-  
lah, the  
Caliph's  
uncle.





A.H. 136-  
158.

Defeated  
by Abu  
Muslim,

il. 137 A.H.  
Nov.,  
754 A.D.

raised the siege, and marched north to Nisibin, where he entrenched himself in a strong position; but on his way, fearing the Khorasanies, he cruelly put the whole of them to the sword<sup>1</sup>. To decoy him from his stronghold, Abu Muslim made as if he would march for Syria; on which the rebel army, mostly Syrians, alarmed for their families, insisted on following the same course; whereupon Abu Muslim returning occupied the deserted vantage-ground. Fighting went on for five months with various success, till in the end, through Abu Muslim's able tactics, the Syrian army was totally discomfited. Abdallah fled, but was eventually placed under charge of his brother Soleiman, governor of Bussorah.

Fall and  
death of  
Abu  
Muslim,  
137 A.H.

The thankless Caliph, instead of rewarding a man who had founded, and now had saved, his throne, was bent on the death of one for whom, having served his purpose, he had no farther need, and whom he both feared and hated. While yet on the field of battle, the great warrior divined the temper of his master, who, much to his mortification, sent a courier to take count of the spoil; and bethought him of retiring to Khorasan. This, in fact, was what the Caliph dreaded; and so with many fair words that he wished to keep him near his person, he offered him the government of Syria and Egypt. Abu Muslim replied that there was ever danger in a powerful subject being near the Court; at a distance he would be the Caliph's devoted servant; but otherwise he would have no alternative but to break allegiance. An angry correspondence ensued, and Abu Muslim began his march to Khorasan. At Holwan, he received a peremptory mandate to repair to Medain, where the Caliph waited for him. Distracted by various counsel,—friends, once faithful but now won over to deceive, advised him to obey; and so, trusting to fair promises, he proceeded to the Court. As he drew near, Abu Ayub, the Vizier, fearing the warrior and his followers

<sup>1</sup> The enormous butchery of 17,000 soldiers is narrated without comment. Cruelty and treachery seem innate in the whole family. On two occasions in this march, Abdallah sent chiefs whom he was afraid of, to his creatures elsewhere, with letters which they unsuspectingly carried containing orders for their assassination. One of them had occasion to open his missive, and so escaped.





if he came in wrath, bribed one to meet and assure him of the Caliph's favour and good will. Abu Muslim's apprehensions thus disarmed, he entered the palace, and was graciously welcomed; kissing the Caliph's hand, he was bidden to rest awhile and refresh himself with a bath. The following day, again summoned to the Court, the Caliph at first addressed him softly thus;—'Tell me of the two daggers that Abdallah had.' 'Here,' said he, 'is one of them,' and he handed it to the Caliph, who put it under his pillow. Then with some warmth,—'And the girl of his whom thou tookest?' 'Not so,' replied Abu Muslim; 'but I feared for her, and so carrying her to a tent left her in safe custody.' On this, with growing warmth Abu Jafar brought charge upon charge against the ill-fated man,—Why had he slighted him on the pilgrimage? set out for Khorasan against his orders? made himself out, though a mere slave, as if of Abbasside descent, and sought the hand of the Caliph's aunt? and worst of all, why had he slain Ibn Kathir, long before him the early and faithful supporter of the dynasty<sup>1</sup>? As he waxed fiercer at every charge, Abu Muslim could but urge his life-long service to the throne, kiss the Caliph's hand, and plead for pardon. But in vain. Abu Jafar clapped his hands, and at the signal five armed men stepped from behind the curtain, and as the victim screamed for mercy, cut him in pieces, while the Caliph cursed. To calm the crowd without, it was told them that 'the Caliph was in conclave with his Ameer'; and believing it to be so, Isa, the heir-apparent, entered and asked where Abu Muslim was. 'He was here but now,' answered the Caliph. 'Ah,' replied Isa, 'I knew that he was loyal and would obey thy call.' 'Fool that thou art!' cried Abu Jafar;—'thou hadst not in all the world a worse enemy than he; look there!' he said, as the carpet was raised revealing the mangled corpse. Isa horrified retired. Shortly after Abu

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 440. The charge of making himself out of Abbasside descent was true enough. When in the zenith of his glory, there were not wanting creatures who, to cover his servile origin, invented a story of Abbasside descent; a fatal adulation that only added fuel to the Caliph's jealousy.





A.H. 136-158. Ishac, one of Abu Muslim's staff, was summoned; 'What hast thou now to say about thy master,' asked the Caliph, 'and his intended move to Khorasan?' Terrified, he glanced first to the right and then to the left, as if fearing lest Abu Muslim might be near to overhear. 'No need for fear!' exclaimed the Caliph; and the covering was again removed. 'Thanks be to the Lord!' cried Abu Ishac, as he bowed low and long in worship; and, gazing at the corpse exclaimed,—'Thanks for my deliverance from thee, O tyrant!' Then turning to the Caliph,—'I swear, not a day passed that I felt my life my own for fear of him, nor came into his presence but prepared for death.' So saying, he drew aside his robe and disclosed a winding-sheet beneath. Moved with pity, the Caliph spared him the fate awaiting an adherent of his fallen chief.

Character  
of Abu  
Muslim.

Having received the congratulations of his courtiers, who wished him joy that now at last he was the real king, Abu Jafar went forth and harangued the multitudes brought together by the startling news:—'It was,' he said, 'a lesson to be laid to heart; the man began well, but ended ill, and now by pride and rebellion had forfeited his life.' The scene is one the annalists dwell much upon; and rightly so. For Abu Muslim is without doubt the leading figure of the age. Hardly thirty-five years old, he had by his rare wisdom, zeal, and generalship, changed the whole outlook of Islam, and raised the house of Abbas upon the ruins of the house of Omeyya. He deserved his fate, no doubt,—for the blood of multitudes was on his head, but not at the hand of Abu Jafar, who owed his all to him. It was jealousy of Abu Muslim's influence that had fed the Caliph's hatred. The estimate of Isa was the truer; for there is nothing in the acts or attitude of Abu Muslim to show that he was other than a loyal supporter of the dynasty which owed its existence to himself<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 600,000, we are told, 'met their death at his hands in cold blood, besides those slain in battle:—a wild estimate, no doubt, but significant of his contempt of life. Apart from this, his character was popular, and gave him the supreme command of men. Hospitable and generous, he held in Khorasan a court of great magnificence. Simple in respect of his harem, he was yet strangely





The story of Abu Nasr, whom Abu Muslim had left in charge of his camp at Holwan, is also worth recording. Abu Jafar, desirous to have this able officer in his power, sent him a summons, as if from Abu Muslim, to come at once to him at Court with all his goods, and sealed it with his master's seal. But Abu Muslim had warned his friends not to hold any letter from him genuine unless it bore but half his seal. Detecting the deception thus, Abu Nasr fled to Hamadan. To calm suspicion, the Caliph then sent a patent appointing him governor of Shahrzör; but at the same time also a letter to the governor of Hamadan to take his life as he passed. The former first arrived, and so starting at once, Abu Nasr escaped the intended fate. At last, seeing no security anywhere, he sought the Caliph's presence, and confessing that he had advised his master to seek refuge in Khorasan, threw himself on his Sovereign's mercy, and promised faithful service. Abu Jafar let him go; and his clemency, as we shall see, had its reward.

A.H. 136-158.

Story of Abu Nasr.

It was not for another year or two that peace was restored either in Mesopotamia or Persia. In the latter, serious rising threatened the empire under a singular leader, Sinbad the Magian, who stepped forth as the avenger of Abu Muslim, and with a large following gained possession of the country from Rei to Nisabur<sup>1</sup>. A similar rebellion followed in Mesopotamia, where the imperial forces were repeatedly defeated. In the following year, however, victory crowned the army of the Caliph, and peace was restored both there and in Persia.

Peace restored in Persia and Mesopotamia, 138 A.H. 756 A.D.

The Caliph, relieved thus of all the dangers that had threatened him, might now have left his uncle Abdallah alone at Bussorah; but hearing that he had, mistrusting his nephew, retired for safety into hiding, he sent to his uncles, Soleiman and Aly, to bring him to court. Relying

Caliph imprisons his uncle Abdallah. End of 139 A.H. 757 A.D.

jealous. The mule that brought his bride was slain and the saddle burnt, that none might ride again upon it.

<sup>1</sup> Whether the Magian counted Abu Muslim one of his followers, is not quite clear. There must apparently have been something more than mere regard for his memory. The rising was serious, as multitudes of women were carried off, and in the end 60,000 of his followers (so we are told) were killed, besides captives. He was two and a half months in the field,





A.H. 136-  
158. on his solemn promise of a full pardon, they brought him, and presented themselves before the Caliph. He received them graciously, and engaged them in conversation, while Abdallah, who remained without, was carried off a prisoner to the castle. After a little while he bade them go and rejoin Abdallah. Thus overreached, they returned to expostulate, but were denied admittance. Their followers, enraged at the perfidy, would have offered resistance, but were disarmed, several put to death, and the rest sent to Khorasan, where they met the same fate. The wonder is that in so faithless, treacherous, and cruel a monarch any confidence anywhere was left. The reason no doubt is that such shameless breach of faith was only practised when personal or dynastic danger threatened. Apart from this, as a whole, the administration of Abu Jafar was wise and just.

Fighting in  
Asia  
Minor,  
138-9 A.H.

During 138 A.H. Constantine waged war with the Syrian army, and took Malatia, destroying its fortifications. The following year it was retaken, repaired, and heavily garrisoned. The campaign is remarkable for the presence of two princesses, cousins of the Caliph, who joined the army in fulfilment of a vow taken some years before, that if Merwan fell they would serve in the holy war against the infidels. The Caliph now entered on an exchange of prisoners with the Emperor, and a truce of seven years was agreed to; for events at home began to occupy every resource at his disposal.

Pilgrim-  
age,  
140 A.H.  
758 A.D.

Rising of  
Rawendies  
at Ha-  
shimiya,  
141 A.H.

In 140 A.H. the Caliph performed the yearly pilgrimage, visited Jerusalem, and made a progress through Syria and Mesopotamia. On his return a strange rising placed him in imminent personal danger. A Persian sect, called Rawendies (from the name of their town), holding such doctrines as the immanence of divinity and transmigration of souls, visited Hashimiya. The commandant of the Body-guard, they held, was inhabited by the soul of Adam; another courtier by that of Gabriel, and so on; and the Caliph, the adumbration of Deity itself. Surrounding the palace, they shouted, 'It is the house of our Lord, he that giveth us food to eat and water to drink.' The Caliph had 200 of their leaders imprisoned, which so enraged the rest that they





stormed the prison and rioted all round. Abu Jafar ventured forth without an escort to quell the uproar; but the wild sectaries, no longer regarding him divine, made an onset, and had it not been for Abu Nasr (already mentioned), and an Omeyyad adherent,—who thus secured grace—both throwing themselves between the rioters and the Caliph's person, it would have gone hard with him. Troops fortunately came up at the moment, and the Rwendies, on whom the people shut the city gates, fled in confusion<sup>1</sup>.

A.H. 136-158.

Soon after, the governor of Khorasan rebelled, and Abu Jafar sent Ibn Khozeima, a general of note, to put the outbreak down, and with him his son, Mehdy, now about twenty years of age. On their approach, the rebel was attacked by his own people, who, mounting him backward on an ass, sent him thus to the Caliph. Both he and his followers were treated with horrid cruelty, and tortured till they gave up all they possessed. The hands and feet of the rebel governor were cut off, he was then beheaded, and his son sent in banishment to an island in the Red Sea.

Mehdy's campaign in Khorasan, 141 A.H.

The Moslem arms were now directed against Tabaristan, the ruling Ispahend of which had cast off subordination to Islam. The campaign was prosperous. In the following year, however, the prince again rebelled, and in his impregnable fortress defied attack. But a pretended deserter having ingratiated himself and gained his confidence, opened the gates to the Moslem force. The fortress taken thus, the fighting men were put to the sword, and their families made captive. Mehdy chose two of the maidens for himself, and the Ispahend's daughter was taken by his uncle<sup>2</sup>. The army then turned towards Deilem; but here the insurrection was so serious, that a fresh levy was ordered from Irac and Mosul, which was kept in the field all the following year. Meanwhile, Mehdy returned to court;

and Tabaristan, 141-3 A.H. 758-760 A.D.

<sup>1</sup> The Caliph could not find a horse to mount, till he picked up one on his way. Stables were now attached to the palace, for there had been none before.

<sup>2</sup> Such slave-girls are only mentioned in connection with issue borne to their masters, otherwise they were taken as the conquerors might fancy into their harems as a matter of course, and without any special notice.





A.H. 136-  
158.

Mehdy  
returns,  
144 A. H.  
761 A. D.

Moham-  
med and  
Ibrahim,  
descend-  
ants of  
Hasan,  
rebel,  
144 A. H.

and being now twenty-three years of age, married Rita, the only child of his uncle, the late Caliph. He then returned to Khorasan, where he remained for some time longer. The Caliph went this year, as he did several other times, on pilgrimage.

A new danger now threatened the dynasty. It was from the house of Hasan son of Aly. The head of this family was Hasan's grandson Abdallah, whose two sons Mohammed and Ibrahim had for some time held ambitious designs<sup>1</sup>. Abu Jafar entertained suspicions against them ever since his first pilgrimage, when they failed to present themselves. As usual, he proceeded by stratagem. A creature of his, by feigned communications from Khorasan, where there ever was a strong faction for any scion of the house of Aly, gained the father's confidence, and succeeded in so implicating him that with all the family he was cast into prison. The two sons, however, escaped to Aden and Sind, and returning secretly to Irac,—now at Medina, now among the Bedouin tribes,—were hunted everywhere by the Caliph's emissaries. On his pilgrimage in the present year, Abu Jafar demanded of the father and relatives, who were still in prison, that they should deliver up the two sons now in hiding. On failing, they were carried off to Kufa, and treated with shocking barbarity. The son of Ibrahim, a fine youth, was told by the cruel Abu Jafar that he would die a death worse than any he had ever heard of; and the tyrant was as good as his word, for he was built up alive into the prison wall<sup>2</sup>. Of the rest, some were slain and some poisoned; but few were spared. The head of one was sent round Khorasan as that of Mohammed the elder brother, in the hope of disheartening the party there.

Rising at  
Medina and  
Bussorah,  
145 A. H.  
762 A. D.

These atrocities, followed by stringent measures for the discovery of Mohammed, then in hiding at Medina, precipitated his rebellion there, while his brother Ibrahim canvassed for him at Bussorah. At Medina, the city rose, the governor was cast into prison, and the administration was proclaimed in the name of Mohammed; around whom

<sup>1</sup> See table, p. 391. Mohammed is the one with whom Ibn Hobeira tried to communicate when besieged in Wasit. *Supra*, p. 437.

<sup>2</sup> I give the story as I find it, though hardly credible.





rallied the great body of the citizens, though many held back from fear of the Caliph. On tidings reaching the Court<sup>1</sup>, Abu Jafar was much concerned, for although Alyite disturbances had hitherto been mainly on the side of Hosein's descendants, the claims of the house of Hasan (Aly's elder son) were, to say the least, not inferior. He at once addressed to Mohammed a despatch, in which, after various threats, he offered pardon and ample maintenance to the whole family. The rebel sent an indignant answer; it was rather for him, he said, to offer pardon to Abu Jafar, who had usurped the rights of the progeny of Aly by the Prophet's daughter, in virtue alone of whom the Hashimite cause had any ground whatever to stand upon. And, even so, what trust could be placed on the word of one who had so flagrantly broken it already with Ibn Hobeira, Abu Muslim, and his own uncle? The Caliph replied in a despatch of weary length, in which, dwelling on the inferiority of woman, he scorned the claim of Fatima and of female descent in general, and extolled the Abbassides as the male, and therefore ruling, line of the Prophet's house<sup>2</sup>.

A.H. 136-158.

Correspondence between Caliph and Mohammed.

Nothing gained by argument, Abu Jafar had recourse to the sword. He was the more alarmed as it had become a popular cry at Kufa, that 'Khorasan was with the Abbassides, Irac with the Alyites, and the Syrians infidels who would readily follow any rebel.' In fact, however, the emissaries of Mohammed found no support in Syria, where, after so much suffering, the people were glad to be at rest; and his chief following was at Mecca, Medina, and Bussorah. Against Medina, the present centre of rebellion, the Caliph now sent his nephew Isa, with a Syrian army. And it is characteristic of his treacherous instincts, that he told a familiar he would be equally

Isa discomfits Mohammed at Medina, 145 A.H. 762 A.D.

<sup>1</sup> The messenger was nine days on the road, and received from the Caliph 9000 dirhams, i. e. 1000 for each day.

<sup>2</sup> A very lengthy and curious document it is, elaborately reviewing the history of the house: e. g. Fatima's not inheriting the property of her father, Aly not succeeding till after three other Caliphs, the insignificant part taken by Aly's family in the rôle of Islam, &c. It is very unlike a document written under the circumstances, and probably a bit of servile pleading to please the Abbassides.



A.H. 138-  
158.14 ix.  
145 A.H.Rising of  
slaves.Ibrahim  
continues  
the rebel-  
lion at  
Bussorah.

pleased whichever fell, *Mohammed* or *Isa*, whom he was now scheming to supplant, as heir-apparent, in favour of his own son *Mehdy*. Apart from the prevailing sentiment of sacrilege in fighting against a descendant of Mahomet, *Isa* had no very difficult task. Mohammed, following the example of his namesake the Prophet, set to digging a trench about the city: but on the approach of *Isa*, the inhabitants fled in crowds, and Mohammed was left with but a small body of faithful followers. Rejecting an amnesty, he girded on him the Prophet's sword, *Dzulficar*<sup>1</sup>, and went forth to fight, but fell pierced by an arrow. His head, sent to the Caliph, was paraded about Kufa and other cities. At Medina, the bodies of the slain were hung up along the Syrian road for three days, when they were cast into the Jewish burying-ground; but at the intercession of his sister, that of Mohammed was buried in the ancient grave-yard of *Backie*. Medina suffered severely in consequence of the rebellion. The Syrian troops were so overbearing that the slaves rose *en masse*; the governor had to fly; and it was only the fear that Abu Jafar would utterly destroy the city, that led the insurgents to call him back. The hands of the leaders were cut off, and peace at last restored. To mark his displeasure, the Caliph stopped the supplies on which the city depended by sea, and the embargo was not removed till the accession of his son<sup>2</sup>.

A still graver danger threatened from Bussorah. There, Ibrahim, after canvassing in secret, had already raised the standard of rebellion in his brother's name. Ever inclined to insurrection, Bussorah now with ardour embraced the cause; and numbers of the learned,—amongst them the great doctor *Malik ibn Anas*<sup>3</sup>,—gave in their adhesion to the same. The imperial troops were defeated, the palace stormed, and the treasure distributed amongst Ibrahim's supporters. Fars, Ahwaz, and Wasit were occupied by the rebels, and other places where the cause was rife. On receiving tidings of his brother's death, Ibrahim set up on his

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Mahomet*, p. 238.<sup>2</sup> Supplied from Egypt since the reign of Omar, *supra*, p. 171.<sup>3</sup> One of the four great heads of Moslem jurisprudence.





own account, and started for Kufa, where he had expectations of a general rising. Though here and elsewhere there were 100,000 on his roll, he was followed now but by 10,000. Nevertheless the crisis was sufficiently grave to alarm the Caliph. He was at the moment laying out the new capital of Bagdad; but on receiving tidings of Ibrahim's advance, he hastily retired to Kufa, where the populace were ready to break out and join the descendant of 'their own Caliph Aly.' The troops were all away in Persia, Africa, and Arabia, and but a small garrison left at head quarters. News kept coming in of defection all around, while at Kufa '100,000 of the Kufa rabble were ready to rush against the Caliph with their swords.' In the utmost distress Abu Jafar swore that if he got over the crisis, he would never leave the capital with less than 30,000 men. For seven weeks he kept curtained in his closet, sleeping on his carpet of prayer, and never once changing dress but for the black robes at public prayer. Two damsels were sent as a gift to him: 'They will feel slighted,' his attendant said, 'if thou wilt not go in unto them.' 'That I will not,' he answered, 'it is no day for women this: I will not go in unto any maiden, until I see at my feet the head of Ibrahim, —or mine be cast at his.' At last the tide turned. Mehdy sent troops from Rei which put down the rising in Fars and Ahwaz, while Isa hastened from Medina to anticipate Ibrahim's attack on Kufa. The two armies encountered each other sixteen leagues from that city. The vanguard of Isa's army at first beaten back, carried part of the main body with it, and for the moment, the Alyite banner seemed in the ascendant; but shortly after, Ibrahim was shot by an arrow, and his army fled. Thus after holding the empire for three months in terror, the Alyite rebellion came to a close.

A.H. 186-158.

Kufa rises.

Abu Jafar alarmed.

Ibrahim defeated and slain. 24 xi. 145 A. H.

At the first tidings of Isa's army giving way, the heart of Abu Jafar failed, and he was on the point of flying to his son at Rei. Correspondingly his joy was unbounded when the head of Ibrahim was cast at his feet. It was 'like the delight,' he said (quoting from the poet), 'of the thirsty wayfarer coming on a living stream.' But, before

Abu Jafar's joy at the intelligence.





A.H. 136-  
158.

the world, he veiled his joy; and as in public he took the gory head of the rebel in his hands, he wept and spake well of him. His indignation fell terribly upon the city which had supported the claims of the pretender. Not only were houses confiscated and demolished, but, what was a more lasting calamity, the date-groves around Medina were all cut down.

Bagdad  
founded,  
145 A. H.  
762 A. D.

When this cloud had passed away, Abu Jafar returned to the site of his new capital, whose foundations had been laid in the previous year. It was the danger he was exposed to from the onset of the Rawendies that first convinced him of the need of a more secure residence for his court. Hashimiya was also too near the fickle and restless Kufa, the disloyal factions of which and of Bussorah might sap the faithfulness of his guards. Searching as far as Mosul for a likely spot, he found one on the right bank of the Tigris, some fifteen miles above Medain, mentioned in the wars of Mothanna as 'old Baghdad'.<sup>1</sup> A monastery was near, and the Patriarch and monks spake well of the climate, water, and surroundings. Here, accordingly, Abu Jafar resolved to found the new capital of Islam. The lines of the city wall and chief places were dug<sup>2</sup>, vast stores of material collected, bricks burned, and artificers summoned from all parts of the empire. The first brick was laid by the Caliph's own hand with these words,—'In the name of the Lord! praise belongeth unto Him and the earth is His: He causeth such of His servants as He pleaseth to inherit the same. Success attend the pious! Now, with the blessing of the Lord, build on!' The walls were but a few feet high when news of Ibrahim's rebellion made the Caliph hasten back to Kufa; and the intendant left in charge, fearing lest the mass of stores should fall into the enemy's hands, set them on fire, much to his master's disappointment. No sooner was Ibrahim discomfited, than Abu Jafar returned to the work. Khalid the Barmecide, now

146 A. H.  
763 A. D.

<sup>1</sup> P. 95.

<sup>2</sup> As a perpetual evidence of the city line at cotton rags mingled with sand were buried in the foundations; a mode familiar in the East, as the rain causes the cotton ash indelibly to stain the soil all round.





put in charge, remonstrated against the demolition of Medain,—with its ancient memories of Seleucia and Ctesiphon,—to provide material for the new capital. ‘The great Iwan of the Chosroes,’ he urged, ‘is one of the wonders of the world; and there, too, Aly had his place of prayer.’ ‘Ah!’ replied the unconvinced Caliph, ‘it is naught but thine old love for the Persians!’ The noble arch, however, hard as iron, withstood the pick-axe. ‘Now,’ said Khalid, ‘I advised thee against it; but as thou hast begun, go on, lest men should upbraid thee, saying that the Caliph began but could not pull down that which another had built up!’ But it was of no use; and there still stands the grand monument in majesty, while all around is now a bare and sandy plain. For the portals, Kufa, Wasit, and even Damascus, were robbed of their iron gates. The walls were built in a circle so that none of the courtiers might be far from the palace, which with the great mosque lay in the centre; while the bazaars were thrust outside. The cost of the whole was four million of dirhems<sup>1</sup>.

A.H. 136-158.

Lying on the west bank of the Tigris, with deep canals in rear, and ready access to the Persian Gulf,—as well as to Arabia, Syria, Armenia and the East,—Bagdad, besides holding Kufa, Wasit, and Bussorah, in immediate check, was admirably situated as the heart of the empire. The eastern shore, more open to attack, was provided with accommodation for a large force, which was thus further cut off from the heated influence of Kufa and Bussorah. Separate cantonments were here planted for the Yemen and for the Modhar clans, as also for the Khorasan levies. While there was safety in the diverse interests of the three, it was to the Khorasan levies that Abu Jafar mainly looked for his own protection; and also as a countervailing power to lower the pretensions of the Arab soldiery, who still

Bagdad as a military position.

<sup>1</sup> The iron gates from Wasit were cast by Hajjaj, and of Kufa by Khalid ibn Abdallah. The Greek ambassador having been taken round the city, said: ‘It is beautiful; but thine enemies are with thee in the market-places.’ Whereupon the Caliph had all the bazaars removed outside towards Kerakh, saying that they invited attack for plunder, and also a lodgement for spies. The initial cost was about £200,000. An overseer (ustad) got every day a kirat of silver, and the common labourer two pence (hubbas).





A.H. 136-  
158.

Rusāfa,  
151 A.H.  
769 A.D.

lorded it over the nations as the flower and chivalry of Islam; and in this unwise design the Abbassides (as already noticed) too soon and too well succeeded. A few years later, a palace was built also on the eastern bank for Mehdy, called Rusāfa, and there on his return from Khorasan, he welcomed and fêted his friends and kinsmen.

Rafica  
and other  
defences.

It was hardly in the mind of Abu Jafar that his new capital should become the grand and populous emporium which it speedily did. Rather he founded it purely for his Court as a strong military position, and enjoined it on his son not to permit the growth of any suburbs, especially on the left bank. The same policy led him to establish on the upper reaches of the Euphrates a strong citadel, Rafica, opposite Ricca, which should hold the country on either side of the river under control. He is said to have attributed (and with reason) the sudden fall of Merwan to his having had no such stronghold to fly to after his defeat on the Zab, and hence to have spent the more pains in this direction. The defences of Kufa and Bussorah were also strengthened<sup>1</sup>.

Mehdy  
appointed  
heir-appa-  
rent,  
147 A.H.  
764 A.D.

In the eleventh year of his reign, Abu Jafar resolved on a project long in his mind of making his son Mehdy, now twenty-five years of age, heir-apparent in place of Isa. On the latter refusing, Abu Jafar was much displeased, degraded him from the seat of honour on his right, and treated him with contumely. Failing in his endeavours, he told Isa that he knew it was for his son Musa he was desirous of the succession; on which some of the courtiers set upon Musa as if to strangle him; and Isa, alarmed at his cries, thereupon consented that Mehdy should precede him as heir-apparent<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Both cities were assessed with a poll-tax to defray the expense, for which purpose Abu Jafar resorted to a characteristic device. He first distributed a largess of five dirhems to all comers; then taking the numbers of the recipients, he assessed each at forty dirhems. A squib was in everyone's mouth:—

Mark, my friends, the Caliph's bounty,  
He gives us five, and then takes forty.

<sup>2</sup> The Caliph is even said to have given Isa a poisonous drink, from which, however, retiring for a while to his government at Kufa, he recovered. Another story is that the Caliph got Khalid the Barmecide to suborn witnesses





But Abu Jafar hated Isa the more, and contrived a plot, A.H. 136-158.  
 —more cruel and cunning than can well be conceived,—to be rid at once of him and of his uncle Abdallah, who still lingered on in prison. He made Abdallah over to Isa, with the private command to put him to death, while he himself was away on pilgrimage to Mecca. On the journey, he wrote asking whether the order had been carried out, and was assured that it had. But Isa here told an untruth; he had not put his uncle to death. On the advice of his secretary, who suspected treachery, he had only put him away in hiding. And so it turned out. For on the Caliph's return, the friends of Abdallah were set up to beg for his pardon. This the Caliph granted, and Isa was bidden to make Abdallah over to them. 'Didst thou not bid me put him to death?' said Isa; 'and I have done as thou biddedst me.' 'Thou liest,' replied the Caliph; and he made Isa over to Abdallah's brethren to wreak their vengeance on. But as they were carrying him off, Isa upbraided the Caliph; 'Thou commandedst me to put him to death, that thou mightest be rid both of him and of me; but here he is alive;' and forthwith Abdallah was brought out, to the mortification of the Caliph. It was, however, of little avail; for Abdallah was cast into a cellar with a damp and deadly saline floor, and so at last expiated his rebellion by a virtually violent death. Isa in disgrace was deposed from the government of Kufa, which he had for thirteen years ably administered.

Caliph's double plot against Isa and Abdallah, 147 A.H. 764 A.D.

Turning now to the dependencies of the empire, we note Spain. that Spain was during this reign finally detached from the eastern Caliphate. Even under the former dynasty it had got much out of hand. In a long intestine struggle, the Modhar had at last triumphed over the Yemen faction, and set up Yusuf as ruler. A son of the Omeyyads was now to take the throne. This was Abd al Rahman, grandson of Hisham. He escaped the massacre of his house in Palestine, and we have a touching story of his flight and

Abd al Rahman escaping from Syria,

who swore that Isa had resigned his right. Such traitorous traditions, right or wrong, show what a wretched character for deception Abu Jafar bore, to let them get abroad.





A.H. 136-  
158.

lands in  
Spain,  
iii. 138 A.H.  
Aug.,  
755 A.D.

148-157  
A.H. 765-  
774 A.D.

Africa.

wanderings. Hiding in a village by the Euphrates, his little boy rushed to him with the terrified cry, 'The black flags! the black flags coming!' Abd al Rahman got off with a cousin of thirteen, and swam the river; the lad, unable to stem the tide, turned back on the cry of an amnesty, but was put to death by the cruel soldiers. Hiding in the forest by day, and journeying stealthily by night, Abd al Rahman at last reached Africa, where he was joined by his sister, and a faithful servant Bedr with the family jewels. He narrowly escaped the governor of Africa, father of Yusuf, and succeeded in sending Bedr across the sea to tell the Omeyyad adherents of his arrival. These sent a ship for him, and he landed in Spain early in 138 A.H. With the help of the Yemenites, who rallied enthusiastically round him, he entered in triumph the palace of Cordova. The whole Peninsula was against the Abbassides. As Syrians they favoured the Omeyyads. The Kharejites, a numerous faction, who would have preferred an Alyite to the Abbasside branch of the Hashimite house, made no opposition. And so the nation, weary of discord, after several ineffectual risings, fell under the unquestioned sway of Abd al Rahman. The Caliph of Bagdad, indeed, once and again sought to gain a footing by his emissaries. Failing in his endeavours, he sent an embassy to King Pepin, which, after remaining several years at the Gallic court, came back with a deputation from the Franks. These eventually returned to Europe laden with rich Oriental gifts. Nothing, however, came of the negotiation, excepting, perhaps, that apprehension of attack from the Christian monarch may have forestalled any hostile intention of Abd al Rahman against the Caliph of Bagdad. The Abbasside suffered the Omeyyad to remain in peace; and so Spain henceforward falls altogether out of our view.

Africa, though for a time, unlike Spain, independent neither in name nor in fact, was for the greater part of this reign almost equally out of hand. Both Berbers and Arabs, leaning towards the Kharejite heresy, disowned the Abbasside succession. Over and again, generals were sent to fight against them, but with little success. Among





these was Aghlab, father of the founder of the dynasty of A.H. 136-158. that name; he was killed near Tunis, where his grave was honoured as a martyr's. Cairowan was repeatedly taken and retaken. Rebellion ruled until, near the close of his 155 A.H. reign, the Caliph, now relieved of his other adversaries, was able to send a great army which for the time restored Abbasside authority over the whole province.

There were troubles also at different times elsewhere, Armenia, but not such as seriously to threaten the empire. In 145 A.H. Armenia, the Khizr hordes issuing from their passes, made great havoc, and carried away multitudes of men and women prisoners. An army sent to punish them was cut to pieces; Tiflis was taken, and Armenia remained long in revolt. In the East, a serious rebellion was led by the ruler of Herat, Ustad Sis, who set up as a prophet, and, followed by an immense army, possessed himself of great part of Khorasan and Sejestan. Beating the imperial troops, he carried everything before him, till he was overcome by the tactics of Ibn Khozeima, who made great slaughter in the field, and put 14,000 prisoners to the sword<sup>1</sup>. The rebel fled; but afterwards gave himself up, and with the remainder of his followers was spared. Kheizran, daughter of this chief, was taken by the Caliph's son Mehdy into his harem, and became the mother of Hady and Harun.

Rising at  
Herat,  
150 A.H.

Another rising took place, about the middle of the reign, in the country round about Mosul. It caused the greater alarm, because a strong Alyite feeling prevailed in Hama- and Mosul, dan, from whence the revolt was led. The rebels, supported 148 A.H. by the Kurds, spread over Persia and reached as far as Sind. They were eventually put down; but Abu Jafar was so incensed against Mosul, that he thought of utterly demolishing it; and was only dissuaded by the advice of the great doctor, Abu Hanifa, who declared the project opposed to the law of Islam<sup>2</sup>.

The riots in Mosul led to Khalid the Barmecide being

<sup>1</sup> The numbers are no doubt exaggerated. The rebel's army is put at 300,000, of whom 70,000 fell in the battle, besides the prisoners slain.

<sup>2</sup> The opinion is not embodied in very edifying language. It is to the effect that a woman who has gone astray is not on that ground open to outrage; neither was Mosul. Abu Hanifa died two years later.





A.H. 136-158. promoted to the command of that city, with which is connected a curious episode. For some cause, the Caliph demanded of him three millions, to be made good in three days (so the tale runs), on pain of his life. His son Yahya begged all round of his friends, but on the third day there was still short a tenth of the sum, when fortunately the alarming news from Mosul led to the choice of Khalid for the post. The Caliph started with him at once, as if for Ricca on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem; then turning suddenly north, he arrived at Mosul unexpected, and so taking the governor unawares, deposed him and installed Khalid in his room. Khalid's administration, severe, but tempered with kindness, was much appreciated, and he remained there till the Caliph's death. His son, Yahya, at the same time was appointed to Azerbaijan. At Rei there was born to Yahya a son named Fadhl, simultaneously with Mehdy's son Harun, whose mother suckled both; and so Harun and Fadhl were reckoned foster-brothers<sup>1</sup>.

Abu Jafar's son at Mosul.

A romantic tale of the early life of Abu Jafar while a refugee at Mosul, illustrates at once his character and the manners of the age. While in concealment in the city he married an Arab maiden. Leaving her with child, he gave her a document which he bade her present at court whenever the family should come to power. In due time, the lady's son, Jafar by name, went to Bagdad, and became secretary to Abu Ayub, the Vizier. In that capacity he served the Caliph as a scribe, who took a liking for him, found out his history, and saw the note he had left with his mother. Accordingly he despatched the youth to Mosul, bidding him bring his mother to Bagdad. But Abu Ayub, who was now jealous of the favourite, sent men to assassinate him on the road. Days passed, and getting no tidings, the Caliph set on foot a search for Jafar. The facts transpired; and the crime brought home to the Vizier, he was not only put to the death he deserved, but the same

Vizier put to death for his murder, 153-4 A.H.

<sup>1</sup> The demand from a faithful servant of three millions on pain of death, seems almost incredible; but it is chronicled without any expression of surprise, nor is any imputation of embezzlement mentioned. It is curious that Ibn Athir repeats the incident 158 A.H., just before the Caliph's death; but no doubt the earlier date is the right one.





fate was meted out to his brother and nephews, who were also executed with barbarous cruelty<sup>1</sup>. A.H. 136-158.

The last few years of the Caliph's reign were free from anxiety, domestic or foreign. In a raid on Laodiceæ, 6000 women and children were taken captive. Shortly after the Emperor asked for peace, and submitted to the payment of a yearly tribute. Asia Minor, 158 A.H.

Towards the close of 158 A.H., Abu Jafar, who had already gone several times on pilgrimage, prepared to assist at the annual ceremonial. On the road to Kufa, he fell sick, and rested in a castle by the way with his son Mehdy, to whom, apprehending that his end was near, he gave much wholesome advice on the obligations that would devolve upon him. He warned him against allowing Bagdad to spread on the eastern bank; bade him return to their owners various properties he had unjustly confiscated; 'it will make thee liked,' he said, 'and will strengthen thy hands: and see,' he added, 'that thou make much of the men of Khorasan, for they verily have expended their lives and means on our behalf.' After several days thus passed, he bade his son a sorrowful farewell, and proceeded onwards. As he journeyed, the illness increased, and he said to his servants:—'Haste thee with thy master, who now fleeth from his sins, unto the sacred territory of his Lord!' While yet three miles from Mecca he died in his camp, and was buried in the holy city<sup>2</sup>. He reigned nearly twenty-two years, and was aged about sixty-five. He had issue by three wives: and also by three slave-girls, of whom one was a Kurd, and one a Greek. Illness and pilgrimage of Caliph, 158 A.H.  
His death. End of 158 A.H. Oct., 775 A.D.

If we could forget his perfidy in compassing the death of such as he feared and hated, our estimate of Abu Jafar would be very different. As a Moslem, his life was religious and exemplary. Nothing profane or unseemly was ever seen at his court. He was diligent in the business of the state, to which he devoted the first part of every day: the Character of Abu Jafar, Mansur.

<sup>1</sup> Their hands and feet were cut off while still alive. It is possible, but not so stated, that they also may have been implicated in the crime.

<sup>2</sup> One hundred graves were dug: but he was buried in another, that no enemy might know and desecrate the spot.





A.H. 136-  
158.

afternoon he spent with his family: and again, after evening prayer, he heard the despatches of the day and took counsel with his ministers, retiring late to rest and rising with the dayspring for morning prayer. The army was fitted throughout with improved weapons and armour; and the minister employed in this department relates, that so hard was he worked by the Caliph, that though he began with not a white hair in his head, in nine months he had not a black one left. His hand was light, yet firm, upon his governors, and the administration consequently good. But he was parsimonious, and hoarded his revenues to such an extent that, as he told Mehdy, he had amassed treasure sufficient for ten years' expenditure. With all his good qualities, nevertheless, the verdict must be against Abu Jafar as a treacherous and cruel man. His victims, it is true, did not approach in numbers those of Saffâh the Bloody; but he was not less unscrupulous in taking life wherever personal interests were concerned, and even exceeded him, though on comparatively rare occasions, in refinement of perfidy, and heartless cruelty.

Influence  
of Persia;  
political,  
social, and  
literary.

During this reign the East began to exercise a marked effect on the manners and habits of the people. Persian costume became the fashion and, with the tall Zoroastrian hat<sup>1</sup>, the dress at court. Scholars from the East held high and influential place. Magians came over in large numbers to the faith, and brought with them the learning and philosophy at once of India and of Persia. The Arabs lost their pre-eminence not only in the army and at court, but in society at large. Hitherto the dominant east, looking down with contempt on nations every way their superiors in science, art, and culture, they were now fast sinking to a lower level. As already observed, tradition, no longer oral, began to be embodied by the great doctors of the law in elaborate systems of jurisprudence adapted to the expanding range of Islam and the necessities of an advancing civilization<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Calansua.

<sup>2</sup> Two of the four great founders of the recognised systems of law, Abu Hanifa and Malik ibn Anas, flourished in this reign. Neither was much esteemed at court; the former, as we have seen, supported the claims of Ibrahim at Bussorah; and the latter declined to be judge of Bagdad, to which office





Literature, history, medicine, and especially astronomy (for A.H. 136-  
Abu Jafar was given to astrology) began to be studied; and 158.  
the foundations were thus laid for the development of intellectual life in subsequent reigns; all of which is mainly due to the encouragement given to the people of Khorasan and Persia, and in some degree also to the more liberal intercourse that grew up with the Grecian empire in the present reign.

the Caliph desired to put him at its foundation, and so Abu Hanifa accepted the humbler charge of looking after the bricks and labour. The popular tradition is that he ended his life in prison for his refusal to be Cazeer.





## CHAPTER LXII.

MEHDY, SON OF MANSUR.

158-169 A.H. 775-785 A.D.

Mehdy,  
158 A.H.  
775 A.D.

Favour-  
able reign.

Growing  
laxity of  
manners.

THE ten years' reign of Mehdy, who immediately succeeded his father Abu Jafar, is mainly noticeable as a mean between the rough and rigorous rule of the first Abbassides, and the palmy days which followed,—a kind of preparation, as it were. Mehdy was by nature mild and generous. He inaugurated his accession by opening the prison doors to all but the worst and most dangerous class of felons. The treasure accumulated by his father gave ample means for profuse liberality. He enlarged and beautified the mosques of the Holy cities, and of the capital towns elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. The pilgrim caravanserais, provided now with fountains and establishments, were made commodious and secure. The postal service, accelerated on mules and camels, was greatly developed. Imperial agents<sup>2</sup>, located at the provincial centres, kept the court informed of the progress of public affairs, which throughout the empire were administered, upon the whole, with justice and moderation. Cities were put in good defence; and especially Rūsāfa, the eastern suburb of Bagdad. The capital became already an emporium of trade with all parts of the world. Music, poetry, literature, and philosophy refined the age; while the example of the court both as

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Athir tells us that 630 A.H. he saw in the court of the mosque of Mosul a slab with an inscription ascribing its extension to Mehdy.

<sup>2</sup> 'Ameens.'





to wine and the fair sex tended to laxity of manners. A.H. 158-169.  
 Princely progresses were repeatedly made by Mehdy with his court to Jerusalem and the holy cities, and the cortege was supplied with ice from the mountains, all the way to Mecca. There he clothed the poor and distributed among the citizens largesses of almost fabulous amount. The coverings of the Kaaba sent yearly by the Caliphs had hitherto been draped one over the other; and, being of rich brocade, had latterly become so weighty as to endanger the edifice. They were now removed, and their place supplied by the single covering sent every year by Mehdy—a precedent followed by succeeding Caliphs. Five hundred *Ansars*, or Citizens of Medina, followed the Caliph, as an imperial guard to Bagdad, where lands were assigned for their support;—a wise measure, which if maintained might have checked the insolent and dangerous pretensions of the Turkish soldiery; but the practice must have been given up, for we hear no more of these Medina men. Guard of Medina men.

But there was another side to the reign of Mehdy, marked occasionally by outbursts of hideous cruelty<sup>1</sup>. Early in his reign a dangerous rebellion was raised by one Yusuf in Khorasan. He was taken prisoner, carried with his comrades, face backwards, on a camel, and thus brought into Rusâfa. There the Caliph had the rebel's hands and feet cut off, and then with all his fellows decapitated. Cruel treatment of a rebel, 160 A.H. The case of the Vizier Yacub is also illustrative of his mode of life. He had been arraigned as an adherent of the house of Aly, and as such imprisoned by Abu Jafar. Released by Mehdy, he became his favourite, the boon companion of nightly revels, and a minister of unbounded power throughout the empire. His prosperity at last raised enemies, who poisoned the ear of the Caliph against him, as still devoted to the Alyite faction. To test his loyalty, Mehdy had recourse to stratagem. Invited to spend the and of his Vizier,

<sup>1</sup> Weil extenuates such barbarities by the prevailing contempt of life amongst Mahometans of the day, and the consequent necessity for adding pains and penalties to simple death; also by the statute of the Coran for punishing robbers with the loss of limb. But the extenuation is altogether inadequate.





A.H. 158-  
169.

and of a  
minister's  
son.

Persecu-  
tion of  
Manichæ-  
ans.

evening in a beautiful garden, Yacub found the Caliph seated in the company of a slave-girl of surpassing charms. The minister was overpowered by the enchanting scene. 'Ah!' said the Caliph, 'it is indeed a paradise of delights; and I will give all to thee, and this damsel with it, if thou wilt rid me of that Alyite,'—naming one he had doomed to death. Yacub embraced the offer with transport, and became at once the happy master of the fairy scene. The Alyite was summoned to his fate; but he pleaded his case so warmly that Yacub was softened, and bade him fly the place. The maiden, curtained close by, heard it all, and let the Caliph know. And so, when Yacub assured his master that he had carried out his wish, the truth came to light, and Yacub was cast into a pitch-dark prison, where he remained so long that he lost his sight<sup>1</sup>. Another minister, who had faithfully attended Mehdy throughout the campaigns in Khorasan, incurred the resentment of a courtier named Rabie, who finding no other ground, accused his rival's son of being a Manichæan heretic. The Caliph called the son, and examining him on the Coran found him ignorant of its contents, and thereupon judging the imputation proved, had him beheaded. The father was deposed, and Rabie succeeded to his office.

Hatred of the *Zendics*, or Manichæan heretics, indeed, and their cruel persecution, is one of the chief traits of Mehdy's life, and of his son Hady's short reign. During the stay of Mehdy in Khorasan, he had imbibed an intense abhorrence of their tenets, which not only contravened Islam, but loosened the bonds of social and domestic morals. Suspicion whispered into the Caliph's ready ear, led often without trial to a fatal end. Thus a blind poet, ninety years of age, was arraigned by enemies, smarting under his satires, on charge of heresy, and notwithstanding his poems being free of the taint, put to death. At Aleppo, on his

<sup>1</sup> Yacub relates that after he had remained in utter darkness, he knew not how many years, he was summoned to the presence, and desired to make obeisance to the Caliph, who asked, 'Knowest thou who I am?' 'Surely it is Mehdy,' he replied. 'Ah,' said the Caliph, 'he has long ago been dead.' 'Then Hady.' 'He too is dead.' 'Then Harun.' 'That I am,' answered the Caliph, who thereupon granted his request of permission to retire to Mecca.





way to Syria, Mehdy had a gathering of Manichæans, A.H. 158-  
 hunted out from all that neighbourhood. They were all 169.  
 beheaded, and their bodies cut in pieces. Thereafter he Inquisi-  
 established a department of state with a minister whose tion,  
 duty it was to put down the heresy—a kind of inquisition; 167 A.H.  
 and accordingly we read in the following year of 'a great  
 multitude' being apprehended as heretics and put to  
 death.

Another strange but ephemeral heresy gave trouble Mocanna  
 beyond the Oxus. It was led by a fanatic, who, from claims  
 masking his ill-favoured countenance, was called *Mocanna*, divine  
 the Veiled one. He taught the immanence of the Deity in honours in  
 Adam, in Abu Muslim, and lastly in himself. Vast multi- Central  
 tudes of Turks, as well as Moslems, followed and worshipped Asia,  
 him as god. For four years, in Bokhara and surrounding 158-161  
 provinces, they beat back column after column of the A.H.  
 Moslem troops. At last fortune turned against the  
 impostor, who, deserted by the rest, found refuge with  
 but 2000 of his followers in a fort. Then reduced to  
 straits, he set fire to the place, and calling on his women  
 and all who would ascend with him to heaven to follow his  
 example, cast himself with them into the flames, and  
 perished. The report of this scene gave fresh impulse to  
 the sect, and though practised secretly, it was long before  
 it died out in the East.

War was waged with Greece throughout the greater part War in  
 of the reign. Inroads into Asia Minor as far as Ancyra, Asia  
 led to reprisals by Michael<sup>1</sup>, who ravaged the Syrian border Minor,  
 and inflicted a serious defeat on the Moslem arms. To 159-162  
 avenge the injury, Mehdy marshalled an army of 100,000 A.H.  
 men, and with it crossed the Euphrates to Aleppo. Thence 775-778  
 he sent forward in command his son Harun, though hardly A.D.  
 twenty years of age, accompanied by Khalid the Barmecide, Campaign  
 as guardian; and, supported by able generals, he made a of Harun  
 victorious march along the coast as far as the Bosphorus, to the  
 Bosphorus,  
 156 A.H.

<sup>1</sup> Lachanodrakon. It is illustrative of the Caliph's arbitrary rule that on one  
 of the generals retiring before Michael's superior force (164 A.H.) he was on  
 the point of punishing him by death: but on the intercession of his friends cast  
 him instead into prison.





A.H. 158-169. — There the regent, Queen Irene, was obliged, on payment of heavy ransom, to conclude a peace, and moreover, to provide for the safe return to the frontier of Harun, who had got entangled in defiles. The spoil was immense, and the number slain incredible<sup>1</sup>. It is interesting to note that in the early part of this reign, a descent from Africa to restore Spain to the Caliphate ended in disaster; and that, on the other hand, the Ruler of Spain<sup>2</sup> had in preparation an expedition against the Abbassides in Syria, but was hindered therefrom by troubles at home.

Spain,  
161-3 A.H.

India,  
160 A.H.

There were expeditions in other quarters, but none requiring notice, excepting perhaps that to India, which stormed the city of Barbad, and burned the image of Budd, with a company of its worshippers. But the end was disastrous: the army lost 1000 men by a 'mouth disease,' and the fleet was wrecked by a storm on the Persian shore.

Mehdy  
marries  
Kheizran,  
159 A.H.

Shortly after his accession, Mehdy gave her freedom to Kheizran, mother of his sons, Hady and Harun, whose influence over him even in affairs of state was great, and married her. The unfortunate Isa, whom Abu Jafar had forced to postpone his claim to Mehdy, was now compelled altogether to relinquish his title to the throne, which he had now held for three-and-twenty years; and Musa, surnamed *Hady* (the Guide), was proclaimed heir-apparent. With Harun, the younger son, his father was so pleased after the expedition to the Bosphorus, that he placed him in charge of all the Western provinces with Azerbaijan, though still quite a youth; and two years later proclaimed him, under the title of *Rashid* (the Upright<sup>3</sup>), second in succession. But Harun was so much the favourite of his mother, and was also so preferred by his father, that Mehdy went a step farther, and a year or two after called on Hady to waive his claim of precedence in his favour. Hady, at the time prosecuting a campaign in Jorjan, naturally resisted the demand, and

Hady heir-  
apparent,  
160 A.H.  
and Ha-  
run,  
166 A.H.

<sup>1</sup> 54,000 Greeks slain; 5000 taken prisoners, of whom 2090 were 'executed in cold blood'; 20,000 cattle driven off, and 100,000 slain.

<sup>2</sup> He is called simply the Omeyyad 'Ruler' (Sahib) of Spain.

<sup>3</sup> Or 'rightly directed.' Pronounced Hârûn ar Rashid.





treated contumeliously a second messenger, summoning him to Bagdad. Mehdy thereupon, accompanied by Harun, set out with an army to reduce his contumacious son, but died on the way from eating a poisoned pear intended by one of his slave-girls for a favoured rival<sup>1</sup>. He was buried on the spot, aged forty-three, in the beginning of the year 169, Harun performing the service over the bier.

A.H. 158-169.

Mehdy's death, 22 i. 169 A.H. July, 785 A.D.

Little more need be said of the character of Mehdy. His administration was upon the whole such as to promote the welfare of the nation, and usher in the brilliant era that followed; but his life was stained by many acts of tyranny and cruelty, nor was it altogether even in private such as a rigid Mahometan would approve. Naturally soft and amiable, he maintained his attachment to Kheizran, the princess of Herat, who it will be remembered was taken as a slave-girl into his youthful harem, unabated to the end. It is also told of him that he so doted on a young daughter Yacuta (the Ruby), that he could not let her out of his sight even when in public. He had her dressed in male attire, and as such she rode by his side. He was disconsolate when she died a year before him; but in the end was comforted by the condolence of his friends.

Character of Mehdy.

Attachment to Kheizran and a favourite daughter.

<sup>1</sup> Another account is that out hunting his horse rushed after the hounds and game into a ruin, and that, struck by the lintel, he was killed. But this is hardly consistent with the mystery that plainly surrounded his death, of which the army accompanying him only knew on their return to Bagdad.





## CHAPTER LXIII.

## HADY AND HARUN AL RASHID.

169-193 A.H. 785-809 A.D.

Hady,  
169 A.H.  
785 A.D.

HARUN wisely recognized the succession of his brother, and at once despatched to him in Jorjan the imperial seal and sceptre. The army that had accompanied his father was dismissed to Bagdad, where they broke out into mutiny, stormed the Vizier's house, and demanded largess. Kheizran summoned the Vizier, and Yahya son of Khalid the Barmecide; but the latter, knowing Hady's jealousy of his mother, took upon him, without waiting on her, to satisfy the troops by a two years' grant. The Vizier, who obeyed her call, nearly forfeited his life for doing so; but by the offer of large gifts regained the Caliph's favour.

Alyite  
rising at  
Medina.

In the short reign of Hady few events occur of interest outside the capital. There was a Kharejite rising in Mesopotamia, and also an Alyite in Mecca and Medina. Strange to say, this last arose from the intemperance of some members of the saintly house of Aly, who for drinking wine were paraded with halters about their necks in the streets of the Holy cities. The family thereupon broke out into rebellion, and some hard fighting was needed before peace could be restored. Among those who escaped was Idris, great-grandson of Aly. Aided by postal relays, he made his escape through Egypt to Tangier, where he was welcomed by the Berbers, and laid the foundation of the Idrisite dynasty. The postmaster of Egypt was beheaded for having connived at his flight<sup>1</sup>.

Idris  
escapes to  
Africa.

<sup>1</sup> Some authorities lay this at the door of Harun, and Weil charges it against that Caliph as one of his cruel acts.





Resembling his father in most things, in one he differed, for he would not allow Kheizran to have any hand in the affairs of state. Accustomed as that lady had been to crowds of suitors seeking influence with her husband, when she attempted the like with her son, he bade her mind her own concerns, withdrew her escort, and forbade the courtiers to wait upon her<sup>1</sup>. The proud woman smarted under the insult, and watched the opportunity for revenge.

A.H. 169-193.

Hady resents interference of Kheizran.

In his treatment of the Manichæans, Hady followed too closely at once the counsel and example of his father. Strange to say, there were amongst these heretics several of Hashimite descent, whom Mehdy, who had sworn never to take the life of any of his own house, left to his son with the fatal injunction to put them to death. How this pestilent heresy found adherents amongst the faithful of Arabia and Irac, is difficult to understand, and one may hope that of many sins laid to their charge, they were falsely accused<sup>2</sup>. Shortly before his death Mehdy declared that he would destroy the whole brood of Zendics, root and branch; and he is said to have ordered a thousand palm-stakes to be erected, on which as many heretics should be impaled.—a report, the existence of which shows at any rate the prevailing belief in the intensity of his hatred towards the sect.

His cruel treatment of heretics.

Following his father also in another respect, Hady formed the project of setting his brother aside, and proclaiming his young son heir-apparent. He was supported by all the court, excepting Yahya the Barmecide, who succeeded once and again in dissuading him from so precipitate and unwise a step. Harun, now treated with indignity, retired into private life. At last, after much vacillation, the Caliph, at the instigation of the creatures around him, who were forward to take the oath, proclaimed his son successor, and cast Yahya into prison. Hady was just then at his country seat near Mosul; and there he fell sick and died. His end

Hady endeavours to supersede Harun.

<sup>1</sup> He is even said to have attempted to poison her, but the imputation is doubtful. Weil thinks it was fabricated to justify the Queen Mother's unnatural conduct towards Hady.

<sup>2</sup> Thus the daughter of one of these condemned Hashimites is said to have confessed that she was with child by her own father, and when carried before the Caliph, died of fright.





A.H. 169-193. is obscure. The ordinary version is that when he sickened, his mother induced certain of his slave-girls to smother him.

His death. We are told further that she had despatches in readiness for the various governors to recognize the succession of Harun, which would imply complicity of some kind in the death of Hady. We hear little more of her; and she herself died shortly after.

Harun succeeds,  
170 A.H.  
786 A.D.

Instance of  
capricious  
cruelty.

On his brother's death, Harun, now nearly twenty-five years of age, hastened to the spot, performed the funeral obsequies, and was saluted Caliph without opposition. Hady's young son was easily persuaded to drop his claim; but a circumstance connected therewith showed thus early that Harun, though called *Rashid*, was as prone to vindictive cruelty, when moved to hate or jealousy, as any of his predecessors. When some time before Harun was about to cross the Tigris, the courtier in charge of Hady's son called out from the other side of the bridge to 'stay until the heir-apparent had passed over'; and Harun answered,—'The Ameer's humble servant!' The incident rankled in his breast, and on his accession he had the unlucky courtier put to death. On the same day his son Mamun was born, and Amin some little time later;—the latter, as son of Zobeida, grand-daughter of Mansur, taking precedence over the former, whose mother was an eastern slave-girl. As Harun crossed the bridge re-entering Bagdad, he bade divers to search in the river for the 'Mountain,' a famous ring worth 100,000 golden pieces, given to him by his father. On Hady's demanding this ring, he had flung it into the Tigris; and now as he pointed out the spot, it was discovered by the divers, to his great delight.

Recovers  
his ring in  
the Tigris.

The Barmecides.

Yahya the Barmecide, whom Hady had imprisoned and threatened with death, was now brought to court, and installed as Vizier. His two sons, Fadhl and Jafar, also exercised unbounded power;—the former, foster-brother of the Caliph, and a statesman of unrivalled ability<sup>1</sup>; the latter, the favourite of Harun and boon companion of his privacy. These were the three leading men of the Barmecide

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 460. The two mothers suckled each other's babes. The relation of foster-mother is much esteemed in the East.





house, the fall of which, seventeen years later, has left an indelible stigma on the Caliph's name.

A.H. 169-193.

Harun is noted for his careful observance of the ritual of Islam: daily he performed one hundred prostrations, and distributed 1000 dirhems in alms. In the very first year of his reign he performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, and repeated it afterwards in some nine different years. On every occasion he scattered munificent largesses amongst the people, and carried in his train crowds of indigent pilgrims. He was surrounded also by a magnificent court, both when on pilgrimage and on other journeys, and by a host of learned men, doctors of the law, poets and philosophers; and it is in part these princely progresses that have shed so great a lustre on this reign.

Harun's religious life.

Magnificent court.

Harun was perhaps the ablest ruler of the Abbasside race. He is likened to Abu Jafar, but without his parsimony. If we except some flagrant instances of tyrannous cruelty, his government was wise and just; as without doubt, it was grand and prosperous. Bold and active in his habits, he followed up his early campaign against the Greeks, by repeatedly himself again appearing in the field. Eight or nine years after his accession, he forsook Bagdad and set up his court at Ricca, in the north of Syria. This he did ostensibly to hold disloyal Syria in check, in spite (as he said) of his loving Bagdad better than any other place in the whole world. But it seems likelier that he had contracted an aversion towards Bagdad, for he never again resided there, and seldom even visited it.

Wise, and, on the whole, just.

Dislikes Bagdad, and retires to Ricca.

In the second year of this reign, a serious rising under a Kharejite leader stirred the whole province of Mosul into insurrection. Abu Horeira, the governor of Mesopotamia, was discomfited by the rebel, who gained possession of the city. Fresh troops were despatched, and in the end peace was restored. But the Caliph was so displeased with the failure of Abu Horeira, that he was in consequence brought to Bagdad, and there put to death.

Rising at Mosul, 171 A.H.

The security of the Syrian frontier was the early care of Harun, both on the side of Armenia, threatened by the Khizr hordes, and of Asia Minor, by the Greeks. One of

Asia Minor.





A.H. 169-  
193.

Created  
separate  
govern-  
ment,  
170 A.H.

Naval  
operations,  
175 A.H.

Harun  
takes the  
field,  
181 A.H.

Irene  
tributary,  
186 A.H.

Insulting  
letter of  
Nice-  
phorus,  
187 A.H.  
803 A.D.

Harun's  
reply.

his first acts was to create a new change towards the west, under a Turkish general<sup>1</sup>, with Tarsus strongly fortified its headquarters. War was waged almost every year with the Greeks, and Harun over and again either joined his forces, or watched their progress on the frontier, for which his residence at Ricca gave him easy opportunity. The Moslems also began to be successful at sea; Crete and Cyprus were attacked and the Greek admiral taken prisoner<sup>2</sup>. In the raids on the frontier, a multitude of captives and vast booty were secured. But fortune varied; there were serious reverses, and on one occasion, severe loss and suffering from cold in the passes. In 181 A.H., Harun headed a large force in person, and Constantinople being distracted at home, great victories were achieved as far as Ephesus and Ancyra. Prisoners were thereafter exchanged; 4000 Moslems were recovered amid great rejoicings; and Irene, on payment of tribute, obtained a four years' truce. An advance was subsequently made by Casim, the Caliph's third son; but withdrawn on the Greeks sending in several hundred prisoners. Soon after, Nicephorus having succeeded to the throne, sent this insulting epistle to the Caliph:—'From Nicephorus, king of the Greeks, to Harun, king of the Arabs. Irene hath parted with the castle, and contented herself with the pawn. She hath paid thee moneys, the double of which thou shouldest have paid to her. It was but a woman's weakness. Wherefore, return what thou hast taken, or the sword shall decide.' Harun reading the letter fell into a rage, and calling for pen and ink wrote on the back of the letter:—'From Harun, Commander of the Faithful, to Nicephorus, dog of the Greeks. I have read thy letter, son of an unbelieving mother. The answer is for thine eye to see, not for thine ear to hear.' And Harun was as good as his word; at once he started and ravaged the land as far as Heraclea, before the Emperor, hampered by rebels, had stirred a step; and

<sup>1</sup> The first notice of a Turkish chief placed in a military command. We shall soon find them coming to the front in all departments, and especially at the head of the Moslem armies.

<sup>2</sup> This from Greek authorities, who state that on refusing to embrace Islam, Harun had him beheaded. Moslem writers do not mention him.





so an ignominious peace, and renewed tribute, were the end of that foolish boasting. Over and again when Harun was engaged elsewhere, Nicephorus broke his treaty, and as often was beaten. At last, near the close of his reign, the Caliph marched again with 135,000 men, took possession of Heraclea, and besides tribute, reduced Nicephorus to the contempt of a personal impost on himself and on each member of the imperial house. Cyprus was anew overrun; 17,000 prisoners carried off to Syria; and for the ransom of its Bishop alone, 2000 golden pieces had to be paid. But in the following year the Greeks once more advanced, and inflicted severe loss on the enemy both at Marash and Tarsus, which Harun, having trouble elsewhere on his hands, was not in a position to retrieve. The end of it all,—the bitter end of all such wars,—was to inflame religious hate. The Caliph caused all churches in the border-lands to be cast down, and the obnoxious distinctions of dress and equipage to be enforced with the utmost rigour upon the Christian population.

A.H. 169-193.

Disasters of Nicephorus, 190 A.H. 806 A.D.

191 A.H.

Africa continued farther and farther to drift from Abbasside control. After various fortune of victory and defeat, Harthama, an able general, was despatched with a large force, who succeeded in beating down opposition; but a short experience convinced him that hostile interests throughout the land were so inveterate as to leave little hope of eventual success; and, anxious now for the more attractive field of the East, he resigned. Thereafter the Agglabite dynasty, though at first nominally subordinate to Bagdad, became eventually independent at Cairowan; as already was the Idrisite at Tangier in the farther West.

Africa: opposition of native tribes, 178-81 A.H.

Harthama retires.

Western kingdoms.

In 176 A.H., the ancient Syrian jealousies between the two Arab stocks broke out into open feud, and kept Damascus for two years in continual ferment; a state of things, however, which gave the Caliph little concern, as it simply weakened the power of the disloyal Syrians. Ten years afterwards they began again to fight against each other; but this time Harun interfered to compose their differences. Somewhat later Mosul was the scene of a rebellion, which lasted

Syria: tribal fighting, 176-7 A.H.

Mosul, 178-80 A.H.





A.H. 169--  
193.

Kharejite  
rising in  
Armenia  
and  
Holwan,  
177 A.H.

two years, until Harun himself took possession of the city, razed its walls, and was again with difficulty dissuaded from destroying it altogether. A still more alarming outbreak occurred at Nisibin under a Kharejite leader, who, after ravaging Armenia and Azerbaijan, descended on Mesopotamia, and crossing the Tigris to Holwan, held the whole province in terror. In the end he was defeated and slain. This campaign is notable for the beautiful elegy of Leila on the death of her brother, the rebel,—to avenge which she had ridden forth disguised in armour, but retired in maidenly confusion on being recognized by the general of the Caliph's army. Harun was so alarmed at the near approach of this danger, that to commemorate the victory, he performed in thanksgiving both the Lesser and the Greater pilgrimage, visiting on foot the various holy stations.

Treacher-  
ous dealing  
with the  
Hasanite  
prince of  
Deilem,  
176 A.H.

Passing over various outbreaks on the outskirts of the empire, there is one in the north which deserves notice as illustrating the faithlessness of the Caliph. Yahya, a descendant of the prophet's grandson Hasan, gained possession of Deilem, and grew so mightily in power as to extend his kingdom on the borders of the Caspian, and attract to his brilliant court followers from all parts of the world. Harun, jealous at once of his influence and of his distinguished birth, sent Fadhl the Barmecide, then governor of Persia and Jorjan, with a great army to oppose him. Yahya was drawn into an apparently friendly communication with Fadhl, and agreed that he should submit to the Caliph a proposal for presenting himself at Bagdad under a covenant of honourable treatment, the bond to be witnessed not only by doctors of the law but by representatives of the Hashimite house. Harun, overjoyed at the prospect of being rid of his rival, confirmed the covenant, and in due course received him with much distinction and princely gifts; but shortly after he allowed his jealousy to override his conscience. The chief Cazee was obsequious enough to discover a flaw in the document; but an equally distinguished doctor declared that the covenant made with a power backed by an army in the field was indefeasible.





Harun, nevertheless, supported by the former, cast Yahya A.H. 169-193. into prison; and having called for the solemnly attested document, tore it into shreds.

While yet but five years old, Harun's son by Zobeida, preferred in virtue of his noble birth, was nominated heir-apparent, under the title of Amin. Some years later, his other son, Abdallah, several months older, was declared the next successor, both being now twelve years of age. The latter, surnamed Mamun<sup>1</sup>, was placed under the guardianship of Jafar the Barmecide, and at an early age given charge of Khorasan and all the countries from Hamadan to farthest East. On a brilliant pilgrimage to Mecca, the Caliph presented each of these sons with the munificent gift of a million golden pieces, and caused two documents, witnessed by the chief ministers of state, to be hung up with solemn ceremony in the Kaaba, inscribed, one in favour of Amin, the other of Mamun. He also gave Mesopotamia and the Greek frontier in charge of Casim, the youngest son, who might, but only at the discretion of Mamun, succeed to its eventual sovereignty. Further still, some years later, when on a journey to the East, he willed (a singular condition) that the army, with all its treasure and munitions of war, should fall to the lot of Mamun; and he caused oaths of allegiance to the three sons to be renewed both at Bagdad and throughout the empire in accordance with these arrangements. People marvelled that so wise a ruler should so soon forget the lessons of the past, and from such strange provisions foreboded evil in the future. It is not often that our annalists indulge in reflections such as these; but here we have the proverb applied by them to Harun, 'Self-conceit makes a man both blind and deaf.'

Amin heir-apparent, 175 A.H.

and Mamun, 182 A.H.

Harun's arrangements at pilgrimage, 186 A.H. 802 A.D.

189 A.H.

Fall of the Barmecides.

We now come to the startling narrative of the fall of the Barmecides. The course of this distinguished family has been already traced, from its rise in Balkh, through successive generations to the highest posts of honour and influence in the state. Yahya, son of Khalid, now advanced in years, had resigned office into the hands of his sons Fadhl and

<sup>1</sup> One in whom faith is placed, 'the Trusted': Amin signifying 'the Faithful'; grand epithets, if they had only been true.





A.H. 169—  
198.

Jafar. The former, possessed of boundless authority, and regarded by the people with love and esteem, was virtual ruler of the empire. The latter, more given to indulgence, was the constant companion of Harun's hours of pleasure and amusement; yet even he must have inherited the ability of the house, having had charge of the youthful Mamun with the whole government of the East, and though only thirty-seven years of age having held the Vizierate for seventeen years. Poets were never weary of extolling the Barmecides, nor historians of narrating their virtues, munificence and power. Suddenly Jafar was put to death, and the family disappears from the scene. The cause assigned was this:—

Story of  
Jafar's  
disgrace,

and death,  
187 A.H.

and fall of  
whole Bar-  
mecide  
family.

Jafar, as said above, was the boon companion of the Caliph, who loved to have his sister Abbasa also with him at times of recreation and carousal. But Moslem etiquette forbade their common presence; and, to allow of this, Harun had the marriage ceremony performed between them, on the understanding that it was purely nominal. But the ban was too weak for Abbasa. A child given secret birth to was sent by her to Mecca; while a maid, quarrelling with her mistress, made known the scandal. Harun when on pilgrimage ascertained that the tale was but too true. On his return to Ricca, shortly after, he sent a eunuch to slay Jafar, whose body was despatched to Bagdad, and there, divided in two, impaled on either side of the bridge. It continued so for three years, when Harun, happening to pass through Bagdad from the East, gave command for the miserable remains to be taken down and burned. On the death of Jafar, his father and brother were both cast into prison at Ricca, and orders passed all over the empire to confiscate the property of any member of the family, wherever found. Both Yahya, an aged and now heart-broken man, and Fadhl, yet young but paralyzed from the shock, died in confinement shortly before Harun himself. Men grieved at their death; poets sang the praises of Fadhl, and annalists fill their pages with tales of his princely generosity, and laud his memory as of one of the most distinguished of mankind. The





grandeur, power, and popularity of the house, as well as the services it had rendered to the dynasty, both in the conduct of the empire and upbringing of the minor princes, intensified the tragedy and the scandal before the public; and although other causes have been assigned, the fact of Jafar's violent end leaves little doubt upon the general accuracy of the outline given above. Harun himself kept a mysterious silence. Once questioned by his beautiful and accomplished sister Oleiya, he is said to have stayed her with these words:—'Life of my soul! if but my innermost garment knew of it, I would tear it into shreds <sup>1</sup>.'

A.H. 169-193.

The painful episode was followed by the murder of Ibrahim, a faithful friend of Jafar, who mourned over his loss, and in private spoke bitterly of his miserable end. The Caliph hearing of this, invited him to a convivial bout alone, and having plied him with wine, pretended to mourn the loss of Jafar, whom, he said, he would now willingly part with half his kingdom to have back again. Ibrahim thus deceived, began in his cups to unbosom himself to the apparently repentant monarch, in praise of Jafar and grief at his death. Whereupon Harun cast him out, cursing him as a traitor, and shortly after had him put to death. <sup>Another murder.</sup>

We turn with relief to notice what was passing on the outskirts of the empire. The East was fast becoming firmly consolidated under the strong Turkish interest at court. There was, indeed, a serious rebellion under a <sup>Persia and Khorasan, 180 A.H.</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Weil has gone very fully into the question, and leaves little room to doubt the outline as a whole. The story is one eminently fitted to excite the Oriental imagination. Thus Ibn Khallican, in his gossiping way, tells us that Abbasa, conceiving an uncontrollable passion for her husband, persuaded his mother (who used to send a slave-girl every Friday as her son's companion for the night) to make use of her for once instead. She was sent accordingly in disguise, and Jafar, under the influence of wine (*na'idh*), discovered the deception but too late, and then was overcome by terror at the possible results. It may be a tale, but even so, it points to the popular belief, and the notices both in prose and verse are entirely in accord therewith. Some authorities pass the matter by in silence, or attribute it to other causes,—as, escape of an Alyite offender by Jafar's connivance; his princely palace exciting Harun's jealousy; Yahya's entering the presence without authority; Alyite tendency of the family, &c.; but all are inadequate for the execution of Jafar and downfall of the family.

Abbasa and her child are also said to have been made away with, but this is doubtful.





A.H. 169-  
198.

Harun  
visits Rei,  
189 A.H.

Kharejite leader, who ravaged Persia and the outlying provinces as far as Herat, but it was at last put down by the governor, Aly ibn Isa. Some years after, the Caliph, hearing unfavourable reports of his lieutenant's tyranny, marched with Mamun to Rei. There, to answer the charges against him, he summoned Aly, who by splendid gifts to the Caliph and to the court rendered his position again secure. Harun stayed four months at Rei, which he loved, as his birth-place, and there receiving duty in person from the native chiefs to the North,—who still retained something of their ancient power under the suzerainty of the Caliphate,—he settled the affairs of Tabaristan, Deilem and other provinces in that direction. He then returned by Bagdad to his court at Ricca.

Rebellion  
of Rafi in  
Samar-  
cand,  
197 A.H.

Some little time later a serious rebellion arose in the East out of a strange origin. A wealthy lady in Samarcand, whose husband had been long absent in Bagdad, bethought herself of another, and being told that it was the easiest way of dissolving the knot, abjured Islam and then married her suitor, one Rafi. The first husband complained to the Caliph, who, scandalized at the affront on the Moslem faith, not only ordered that Rafi should divorce the lady, but be paraded on an ass and cast into prison. Thence he effected his escape, and after wandering about the country, returned to Samarcand, slew the governor, and raised the standard of rebellion. Aly ibn Isa, alarmed lest Rafi should steal a march on Merve, quitted Balkh, and set out thither; thereupon Rafi rapidly gained possession of all the country beyond the Oxus. Meanwhile reports again reached the Caliph of the tyranny and rapacity of Aly, and so, with the double view of superseding him, and subduing the rebellion, he sent Harthama, now returned from his African command, with a large force, and secret orders to assume the government. Arrived at Merve, Harthama at first received Aly graciously, but shortly after, showing his patent of command, confiscated the vast wealth of the tyrant, and despatched it on 1500 camels to the avaricious Caliph. Aly himself, seated on a bare-backed camel, was

Harthama  
supersedes  
governor,  
192 A.H.





sent in disgrace to Ricca,—the common fate of rulers of A.H. 189-193.

Harthama lost no time in attacking Rafi, and having beaten him in the field besieged him in Samarcand; but it was several years before the rebellion was quelled. Meanwhile the Kharejites, taking advantage of the disturbances beyond the Oxus, rose on the south of the river, and threatened the eastern provinces of Persia. Things looked so serious that Harun resolved himself on a progress thither, and towards the end of 192 A.H. set out from his residence at Ricca for the purpose. Leaving Casim there to control Syria and the West, he journeyed to Bagdad, in charge of which he placed Amin. He would also have left Mamun behind; but Mamun, dreading lest his father, who had already sickened, should die by the way, in which event Amin might, with the help of his royal mother, depose him from the government of the East,—asked permission to join his father on the march, which after some demur Harun granted. Travelling slowly over the mountain range into Persia, Harun one day called his physician aside, and, alone under the shelter of a tree, unfolding a silken kerchief that girded his loins, disclosed the fatal disease he laboured under. 'But have a care,' he said, 'that thou keep it secret; for my sons' (and he named them all and their guardians) 'are watching the hour of my decease, as thou mayest see by the shuffling steed they will now mount me on, adding thus to mine infirmity.' There is something touching in these plaintive words of the great monarch, now alone in the world, and bereft of the support even of those who were bound to rally round him in his hour of weakness. Early in the following year he reached Jorjan, where, becoming worse, he sent on Mamun with a portion of the army to Merve; and himself, journeying slowly, reached Tus, where, despairing of life, he had his grave dug close by his dwelling-place. The brother of Rafi was brought in a prisoner when Harun was near his end; 'If I had no more breath left,' he said, 'but to say a single word, it should be *Slay him*'; and so the dismembered wretch was slain before the dying monarch. Shortly after,

Harthama's campaign against Rafi, 192-5 A.H.

Harun himself takes the field, 192 A.H. 808 A.D.

Sickens on the way, ii. 193 A.H. End of 808 A.D.