AMERICAN QUARTERLY REVIEW.

No. XIII.

MARCH, 1830.

ART. I.—*The Loves of the Poets. By the Author of the "Diary of an Ennuyée."* 2 vols. London: 1829.

IT was a fine idea of the Ancients, that the mind resembles the eye, capable of discerning every object around it, yet remaining invisible to itself. With a few shining exceptions, mankind are denied the faculty to turn thought inwards; and the individual not privileged beyond the ordinary lot, who by this means would investigate his own nature, must fail in the attempt. Fortunately, however, this inability may be obviated by the exercise of powers granted in common to all: as in the above simile, the eye is impressed from the exterior world, with the image and structure of organs resembling itself, in like manner we may become acquainted with our own mental texture and capacity, from observing the phenomena of thought in others. The most pleasant mode known to us, of conducting this inquiry, is to select a single master passion, and watch its effects on the various temperaments and dispositions subjected to its influence; to detect it in a thousand disguises, conflicting, perhaps, with impulses the most opposite; and frequently displaying results as essentially different as happiness and misery. Modern novel writers derive the interest of their romances from this source. We have prefixed to this article, the name of a work by the authoress of the *Diary of an Ennuyée*, which contains an exhibition of this nature, though on a limited scale, and without the aid of fiction. We must be permitted, however, at the very outset, to find fault with the title. "The Loves of the Poets" conveys an impression of effeminacy, which is foreign to the graceful dignity pervading her volumes. We proceed, in our author's language, to unfold the design of her "Sketches."

conqueror. If it had strength to commence the recent struggle, it has, in the present treaty of peace, resigned every hope of future successful resistance. Indeed the whole empire of Turkey is as decidedly prostrated before the czar, as Persia has been since the termination of its late war with Russia. The influence of Nicholas prevails from the frozen sources of the Torneo to the Persian Gulf. His ships ride triumphantly in all the Turkish waters; the lives of his subjects are charmed against every aggression and violence throughout the Ottoman dominion. He has won every thing which was essential to the prosperity of the provinces which acknowledge his sway. He has done something for the cause of humanity. But now the world has a yet deeper interest in the wise administration of the internal concerns of Russia, and in the personal character of her sovereign. Since it would be idle to wish for her many provinces that highest good which comes from the conflict of free opinions, we will hope, that the mild virtues of an Antonine may be emulated by her sovereign, rather than the less arduous and less rare distinction which follows on extensive conquest.

Art. III.—MOHAMMEDAN HISTORY.

1. —*Réponse à la question, quelle a été, pendant les trois premiers siècles de l'hégire, l'influence du Mahométisme sur l'esprit, les mœurs, et le gouvernement des peuples chez lesquels il s'est établi?* Par M. de Hammer: Vienna.
2. —*Memoirs of the principal events in Mohammedan History, from the death of the Arabian Legislator, to the accession of the Emperor Akbar, and the establishment of the Mogul Empire.* London: 4 vols. 4to.
3. —*Histoire des Arabes sous le gouvernement des Califfs.* Par M. Marigny. Paris: 4 vols. 12mo.

Few names upon the roll of kings have more associations in their favour, than that of the eccentric Caliph Harun Alrashid; and fewer still, have owed their reputation to an humbler source. Notwithstanding the extent of his dominions, and the splendour of his court, his sagacious policy, his military prowess, and, above all, his munificent encouragement of learning and the arts, we doubt whether he would ever have attained the posthumous celebrity which he enjoys in Europe, had not accident, tradition, or caprice, created him the hero of the Thousand and One Nights. On the history and merits of this celebrated story-

book, we have dwelt at length, in a former article; nor have we the least wish to obtrude any further disquisition, in relation to that subject, on the patience of the reader. We mean merely to avail ourselves of the associations which the previous discussion cannot fail to have suggested, as a pretext for passing, by a natural transition, from the enchanted ground of Oriental romance, into the adjacent fields of Oriental history. We are too well aware of the interest which mixed or historical romance imparts to the realities which serve as its foundation, not to seize with eagerness on every opportunity to press the one into the service of the other. We have recurred, therefore, to the Arabian Nights, not with any thought of continuing our observations on those captivating fictions, but merely for the purpose of enlisting the attention of our readers to the corresponding portion of authentic history. No one can read these tales without forming, as it were, an intimate acquaintance with the whimsical and violent, yet generous Alrashid; and we may add, without feeling some curiosity to view the same figure in the less glaring and illusive light of historic verity. In reviewing Dr. Scott's translation of the Thousand and One Nights, we had occasion to bestow a passing notice on this point. But as the design of that article forbade any minute attention to the subject, and as the subject itself is sufficiently interesting to deserve a separate discussion, we make no apology for once more bringing Alrashid into view. All that we have to say of the Thousand and One Nights at present, will be said in reference to him.

We have spoken of Alrashid as the hero of these tales. The expression is, of course, not to be understood too strictly. The Thousand and One Nights, if brought to the standard of our popular romance, will be found to have no hero. The characters who figure at the commencement and the close, are by no means the most interesting in the dramatis personæ. It is also true, that a large proportion, even of the stories in our popular translations, (which, as we have said before, contain but a small part of the whole,) have nothing ostensibly to do with Harun or the age in which he lived. The scene is laid, sometimes in Tartary, sometimes in China, and sometimes in regions altogether fabulous. All that we mean, then, is, that amidst this variety of heterogeneous dates, scenes, and characters, the reign of Alrashid, the city of Alrashid, and Alrashid himself, are decidedly most prominent. In the wildest tales, the author judiciously selects a distant spot, and lets the date alone; but when he comes home to real life, he almost always uses this incipient formula, "In the reign of the Caliph Harun Alrashid at Bagdad." It is worthy of observation, too, that these last are almost the only cases, in which there is any apparent disposition to paint character and manners, any further than is necessarily involved in the

process of the narrative. In these Bagdad stories, there is manifested a personal familiarity with topographical details and local customs, which would seem to indicate the Bagdad origin of these parts of the work at least; while the constant disposition to make Harun act a part in every bye-play, comic, farcical, or tragic, appears to justify the inference, that they were first conceived, if not first written, in that caliph's reign. On any other supposition, it is hard to account for this exclusive preference of him and his times, to all that went before and followed after him. In particular qualities, many other monarchs of the house of Abbas far surpassed him. His own son, Almamun, was a better soldier and a wiser man; and more than one of his lineal descendants quite eclipsed him, by their romantic heroism and profuse munificence. To romancers of a distant age, these would have offered more attractions. But Harun was a favourite with his own dependants. The compound of strange qualities which formed his character, particularly the eccentric turn which led him into acts and situations more romantic than dignified, endeared him to the imaginative and vulgar of his capital. His adventures became the theme of conversation in their makâmât, or popular conversazioni, and, as a necessary consequence, of their traditionary tales. His name was handed down in the bazar and in the harem, as the name of the best of kings and the merriest of wags. The practical jokes which he perpetrated or witnessed in disguise, became heirlooms in every family, and at length, his title to the hero's place in every story, new or old, that had Bagdad for its scene, was established so completely by prescription, that none of his successors, by dint of merit, extravagance, or wickedness, could supplant or supersede him.

This may be thought a sufficient explanation of the prominence given to this caliph in the Thousand and One Nights; but another reason yet remains, consistent with the supposition, that the tales themselves were of a later date; and it is to this that we wish more particularly to direct the attention of the reader. The truth is, that the accession of Alrashid to the throne of Bagdad, was a most important era in the annals of the Moslem empire; a point at which a change came over the aspect of affairs, and the current of events began to set in a new direction. During the century and a half which intervened between the flight of Mohammed and the birth of Harun, an essential change had been effected in the tenure by which the Moslem pontiffs held their office, in the principles upon which that office was administered, in the views entertained of public policy, religion, learning, and the arts. These mutations were, of course, not without their influence upon the manners of the people, and the relations which subsisted between the caliphat and foreign powers. The Arabs had, in fact, now reached the point, where

the details of history and public biography begin to become interesting. The increase of wealth and knowledge had quickened the progress of refinement on the one hand; while, on the other, the period had not yet come, when this mighty empire, at once weakened and corrupted, was to be dismembered by its want of principle, and prostrated by its want of strength. At this point, nothing seemed wanting but a prince wise enough to know the worth of learning, and both liberal and rich enough to patronise it, with sufficient popularity to sanction his proceedings—nothing else seemed wanting to open a new scene in this imposing drama. Such a prince was Harun, and such a scene was opened upon his accession. In his reign, a wise and liberal foreign policy was first introduced into the counsels of the caliphat. While his pacific envoys exchanged tokens of amity with those of Charlemagne, his armies carried a successful war into the heart of the empire of the East; and while his military missionaries preached the Koran from the Atlantic to the Indus, Christianity was wisely tolerated even at the palace gates in Bagdad.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the legends of the East should set forth Harun in such strong relief as a hero of romance; and without attempting further explanation of a circumstance so natural, we shall proceed to view the subject in another light. A history of the Eastern Caliphs, derived immediately from Oriental sources, and so constructed as to exhibit and illustrate the influence of the Mohammedan religion, upon political society and the condition of the world, is still a desideratum, though there is no unexecuted work for which the materials exist in more abundance. The philosophy of history is wholly unknown to Oriental writers. Their historians may be divided into two great classes. The first, of which Ibn Arabshah* is a very favourable and imposing specimen, are florid and verbose declaimers, who delight in lashing up the peaceful and majestic stream of historical truth, into an ocean of rhetorical foam and froth. The other, and we believe by far the more numerous, are laborious retailers of minutiæ, without the least pretensions to original reflection, or philosophy of any sort. It seems as if these indefatigable chroniclers could be satisfied with nothing short of a precise and scrupulous detail of all matters of fact, whatever their relative importance, which could possibly be scraped into connexion with their subject. Such microscopic fidelity to fact is, of course, incompatible with the higher qualities of historical composition. Accordingly, we find, in the works to which we have alluded, no attempts either at rhetorical embellishment, or philosophical disquisition. They present

* Author of the celebrated History of Timur.

a mere chaos of detached particulars, connected by no series but that of time, and often thrown together in absurd and fantastic combinations.* It is indeed surprising to observe how steadfastly these writers persevered in stringing facts upon the bare thread of their narrative, without once appearing to conceive the possibility of forming other and more useful combinations by a different arrangement. The result is, that though their volumes furnish an abundance of the raw material, the working of it into an agreeable or useful shape has been left to other hands. We are not only carefully informed of the length of every caliph's reign, but are told upon what day of the week it began and ended. Besides the usual details respecting the personal appearance and domestic habits of these princes, we are favoured with a minute description of their beards and whiskers; a complete list of their household officers, the inscriptions on their signets at full length, and sometimes an enumeration of their favourite dishes;—while the causes and effects of the most serious events are left to be conjectured or enucleated elsewhere. It is evident, therefore, that these works are to be looked upon as nothing more than public memorandum-books, from which, with proper care, a history may be elaborated, but which are any thing but histories themselves. There are, no doubt, some exceptions to this sweeping censure. Of these, Abulfedd and Abulfaraj are among the most respectable.

In the absence of such a digest of these Oriental crudities as we could wish to see, we shall make no apology for trespassing upon the reader's patience with a rapid sketch of the progress of affairs antecedent to the times of Harun. We trust we shall be able to inform the minds of some, and refresh the memory of others, with respect to a most interesting chapter in the history of man, and one which has never been expounded clearly in few words. By those of our readers, therefore, who are fond of such inquiries, we hope to be accompanied, at least with patience, while we go back for a moment to the first foundation of the caliphat.

The Arabic word caliph, in its proper sense, denotes simply a successor. It implies neither royal rank nor hereditary right; and for that very reason, we presume, was fixed upon as an

* A reader familiar with the best, or even the inferior, historians of Europe, might well be excused for smiling at the exquisite taste sometimes displayed by these Oriental annalists in the arrangement of their matter. To take an example at venture—Makrîzi, an historian of high authority and great repute, holds this language in relation to Hakem Biamriuah: "He commanded that all dogs should be killed, in consequence of which a great number lost their lives. He founded a college, called the House of Wisdom, to which he transferred the royal library. He was very cruel to his running footmen, many of whom he put to death," &c. What a circumflective climax! so to speak—dead dogs, colleges, and running footmen!

official title for the first successors of Mohammed. It is a singular fact, that in all the writings of that extraordinary character, there is no indication of his having spent a thought upon the probable state of things posterior to his own decease. The Koran never alludes even indirectly to the earthly prospects of the spiritual kingdom. The Prophet himself, from want of foresight or excess of selfishness, made no provision for perpetuating the pontifical authority. His followers did not venture to remind him of his mortality, and he died at last, without prescribing any public measures, or making any transfer of his own prerogatives. The Faithful now found themselves reduced to a dilemma. The necessity of some chief magistrate, to keep the discordant elements of Islam in a state of combination, was self-evident. But what was he to be? A prophet, priest, or king? He must partake of the attributes of each, without being absolutely either. Neither of these titles, therefore, was admissible. Questions still more serious arose as to the manner in which the office should be filled, and the succession of incumbents permanently regulated. Upon these points the Faithful were divided. It was necessary, therefore, to adopt a title, which, without assuming any answer to these questions, should yet be sufficiently significant and appropriate. These conditions seemed to be answered better by no word than that in question, which was also recommended by the consecrated use made of it in the Koran, to express the official dignity bestowed upon the first man by his maker.* Abubekr accordingly assumed the name in all his public acts; after which it was handed down, through every revolution and convulsion of the Moslem empire, till lost in the final downfall of the Bagdad dynasty.

From these circumstances, we not only learn the origin of the official title of the Moslem princes, but are also enabled to infer the curious fact, that the vast system of combined pontifical and civil power, which eventually sprang from the imposture of Mohammed, owed much of its success to the want of any fixed principle or plan in its first establishment. Had the Prophet been possessed of enlarged and profound views in politics—as we have reason to believe that he was not—he would, no doubt, have laid plans which must have been frustrated by their very ingenuity. In a vast, unsettled, heterogeneous body, like that which constituted the empire of the caliphs, any attempt to introduce an artificial and refined scheme of policy at first, would have thrown all its elements into confusion. The numberless tribes of ungovernable Arabs, who had been duped into a blind profession of the faith, would have revolted, to a

* "And the Lord said to the angels, I am about to constitute a caliph upon earth." Al Koran, Ch. II. v. 28.

man, from the assumption of any political authority by the spiritual chiefs. Their belief in Mohammed's prophetic character reconciled them to his acts, however arbitrary and encroaching; and yet even he thought it prudent to disclaim, by seasonable revelations, all pretensions to the character of a mere civil chief, though without in fact relaxing his efforts to obtain political supremacy. The same bold measures, in his converts and successors, would by no means have been tolerated had they been attempted. Abubekr, Omar, Othman, the immediate successors of Mohammed, discharged their functions with extreme simplicity. They assumed no royal state; they exercised no authority purely political. In obedience to that favourite dogma of the Koran, "Fight for God's religion!"* they carried an exterminating war into the heart of every circumjacent country. But they showed no disposition to avail themselves either of their armies or their victories, as a means of self-aggrandizement. The venerable Abubekr exulted, on his death-bed, in the conquest of Damascus. Yet he left no legacy to his children: he had gained nothing for himself. The stern Omar was himself a soldier; but no sooner was he invested with the sacred office, than he ceased to fight the battles of the faith, and employed himself in performing the canonical prostrations in the grand mosque at Medina. These circumstances, viewed in combination with the plainness, and even meanness of exterior equipage displayed by the first caliphs, seem to place it beyond doubt, that they do not deserve the character, which has sometimes been imputed to them, of selfish political aspirants.

For our own part, we are of opinion, that in forming an estimate of these extraordinary characters, a careful distinction should be drawn between Mohammed himself and his successors. We dissent in toto from the vulgar theory which admits that impostor to have been a brilliant genius, though it brands him as a monster of depravity. In his boasted Book of Wisdom, there is not, in our opinion, the slightest indication, of enthusiasm on the one hand, or artifice on the other. It is the offspring of an intellect too dull to be extravagant, and too feeble to be crafty. The miserable shreds of sacred history, which are clumsily interwoven with his own insipid follies, are the best clue to the secret of his imposture. They are evidently not derived immediately from any authentic source; nor on the other hand, have they the aspect of intentional distortions, or of garbled fragments, selected and combined to answer any purpose. The misnomers and anachronisms are too ludicrous; and, notwithstanding all the pious frauds of Sale, too palpable to be interpreted on any such

* Kâtilu-fî-sebîl-Allah! This phrase occurs repeatedly, with some modification.

hypothesis. So far is the author from appearing to derive either argument or illustration, in his own behalf, from these sorry caricatures, that he actually passes over many instances, in which, with a little ingenuity, he might have drawn a sophistical conclusion in support of his pretensions. Let any man read this mass of nonsense, so preposterously celebrated in its original dress, without Sale's interpolations and vindicatory glosses;* and we have no doubt that he will see it with our eyes.†

Our theory in relation to Mohammed may be summed up in few words. That he was uneducated, is a dogma in his system, and one which we heartily embrace. That he was silly, is our own conclusion from his history and writings. That he was imaginative, may be readily inferred from the character of his countrymen in every age. That he was subject to a malady which might have tended to disturb his reason, is a disputed fact; we therefore waive it. Now let us imagine such a character arrived in Syria, on his first mercantile expedition. To the novelties of a country so unlike his own native Hejaz, he would of course be all attention. Passionately fond, like all his countrymen, of legendary lore, he would naturally be surprised and charmed with the portions of sacred history which were topics of popular discourse, or which he might have gathered from the offices of the church. Among these, none would be so apt to strike the fancy of an untutored Arab, as the magnificent displays of divine power, in the miracles of the prophets. We may readily imagine the effect of these impressive narratives, upon a mind just active enough to be struck with admiration at any exhibition of the wild and wonderful. Nor can we be surprised at the scheme which he afterwards conceived, of playing the prophet *in propria persona.* That he believed himself a prophet, is in itself scarcely credible, and is rendered more unlikely by the absence of any thing like fanatical extravagance in

* A few words in explanation of this sentence may be necessary. The character of Sale's translation of the Koran is somewhat extraordinary. It is very literal, and yet not faithful. After the authorized English version of the Scriptures, it is the most exact translation with which we are acquainted; that is to say, the original words of every sentence are scrupulously rendered. But the numerous ellipses and chasms in the sense, which occur on every page, are carefully filled up with words wholly wanting in the Arabic, but which serve to give nonsense the appearance of significance.

† It may be asked how this view of the case is to be reconciled with the enthusiastic admiration of the Koran, as a literary composition, which prevails among Mohammedans. The answer is, that its merit, in their eyes, or rather in their ears, is altogether metrical and musical. To use the words of a distinguished Orientalist, "sa superiorité consiste moins dans l'invention et dans les images, que dans le charme inexprimable de la diction, dans l'admirable harmonie du rythme, et dans le retour des rimes redoublées qui produisent un si grand effet sur une oreille Arabe." (Von Hammer). The writer whom we quote cites this, indeed, as a proof of genius. To us it is just the contrary—but we cannot enlarge.

any of his writings. That he foresaw the events which succeeded his original appearance as a prophet, we do not believe; still less, that he had formed a preconcerted plan for amalgamating all the Oriental sects, and rearing a throne upon that coalition. We are verily persuaded, that he was as much surprised by his own success, as any of his enemies. There is every appearance of his having acted almost constantly at random. The astonishing series of prosperous events, which constitutes his history, though one of the most singular anomalies on record, is not wholly inexplicable. The internal condition of the circumjacent countries, though it could scarcely have entered into his designs, was precisely favourable to a general revolution. And the national character of the peninsular Arabs has always been such, that if once united under one authority, and bound by common interests, (in itself an improbable contingency,) their arms are irresistible. From these considerations the inference seems fair, that the progress of the Mohammedan imposture is in no degree attributable to the impostor's own foresight and sagacity. That the political measures which grew out of the imposture may be traced to another source will be presently apparent. At the same time we admit, that the unexpected issue of Mohammed's wild attempt excited the ambition which before lay dormant, and imparted a new character to his public acts. Of his moral qualities we deem it superfluous to speak.

We turn with pleasure from the selfish depravity of the false prophet, to the sincere though blinded zealots who succeeded him. We have already specified the circumstances which induce us to believe that personal advantage was not the end at which they aimed. The whole tenor of their history evinces, that the death of the impostor left them in a state of pitiable confusion. Without principles upon which to act, yet feeling themselves bound by some imaginary obligation to be active for the cause which they had espoused, it is not surprising that they were bewildered, when the control of affairs was suddenly devolved altogether upon them. One good effect, however, of this circumstance, as we have seen already, was the simplicity of the policy which they adopted. It is well summed up in the celebrated phrase of Omar, about human learning: "If it is in the Koran, it is useless—if not there, it is sin." Upon this principle, the first three caliphs acted, in giving their whole souls to exterminating war against the infidels, and avoiding at home all show of royal state. And the result of the whole was, that Islam gained more before the death of Othman, than in any one century that followed.

In drawing these conclusions, with respect to the character and motives of the earliest successors of Mohammed, we have made no mention of the name of Ali. The omission, however,

has by no means proceeded from our not duly estimating his importance. In some respects, he is certainly the most considerable personage that figures in Arabian history; and in one point of view, has claims upon attention, which historians in general have overlooked or not allowed, as we shall presently demonstrate. He is not, however, to be classed with his three predecessors on the throne—or rather in the pulpit,—of Medina; for the idea of an enthroned caliph had not yet been conceived. While we allow his superiority in point of genius, education, and refinement, we must deny him the poor praise of simple, disinterested, blind devotion to the interests of Islam. Ambition was his ruling passion and his ruin. That he did not feel the same absorbing interest in the new religion as his predecessors, and that, unlike them, he had an eye, in all his acts, to his own elevation, will be clear, we think, from a review of the relations which he bore to the false prophet.*

Ali and Mohammed were the sons of brothers. Their paternal grandfather, Abdalmotalleb, was the chief of the Koreish, the most powerful, as well as the most cultivated tribe of old Arabia. To him belonged, by hereditary right, the custody of the Caaba. It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader, that this ancient edifice, which for eleven centuries has been annually thronged with Moslem pilgrims almost from the extremities of Africa and Asia, was, before the birth of the Impostor, scarcely less celebrated and frequented as a place of pagan worship. This fact, while it naturally tended to augment the riches and refinement of the tribe who were proprietors of Mecca, could not fail to make the office of Abdalmotalleb a post of great dignity and influence. It is probable, indeed, that among the innumerable petty chiefs, who, then as now, maintained the rank of kings in the peninsula, there was no one who commanded more respect, or enjoyed the means and opportunities of exercising more extensive influence, than the Guardian of the Caaba. Mohammed and Ali, therefore, were of high extraction, and were thrown, by the circumstances of their pedigree and birth, into the only situation in the Oriental world, which was likely to inspire a lofty and enlarged ambition, or which could afford facilities for gratifying such a passion. Divided as the people of Arabia ever have been into numberless minute but independent sovereignties, a habitable spot could scarcely have been fixed upon, that would not have afforded occupation to a restless spirit, which, though greedy for dominion, could be satisfied with triumphs on a petty scale. But to none save a Koreish

* In explanation of some reasonings and statements in this article, it may be necessary to apprize the reader, that the date of Ali's birth is an uncertain and disputed point.

and a Meccan could any thing like a scheme of universal conquest have been possibly suggested. To any other Oriental, the view of civil society must needs have been limited, and broken, and obscure. The possibility of working such effects as were ultimately wrought by the imposture, would have seemed to a Beduin, or an inhabitant of Yemen, a preposterous chimera; while he who surveyed affairs from a confluent and central point, was enabled by his situation to form juster notions, and was therefore likely to conceive designs more bold and comprehensive.

It is not at all surprising that the circumstances upon which we have here dwelt, should have operated powerfully on a youth of lofty spirit, elevated rank, and brilliant genius. Such a youth was Ali, as all Oriental history bears witness. Not only is his name, with its expressive adjuncts—the Lion and the Sword of God, to this day the burden of a thousand warlike ballads in the heart of the peninsula: his military prowess forms a small part of his traditionary claims to immortality. The keenness of his wit, and the splendour of his genius, are proverbial with the populace; his written compositions, though possessing no remarkable intrinsic excellence, are only second to the Book in the Arab's estimation; while the beauty of his person, the extent of his learning, and the depth and fervour of his piety, have been extolled from age to age, as beyond all human eulogy. In a word, notwithstanding the great convulsion, which, as we shall see, divided for ever the partisans of Ali from the orthodox Mohammedans, the belief in his transcendent merit, as to heroism and genius, is so universal, that all parties, Sonnîs as well as Shîahs, assign him the next rank to Mohammed in the history of Islam. That the latter was his inferior in natural endowments, is clear, from the simple fact, that though all Moslems agree in acknowledging his prophetic character, he has never received, from any quarter, even a share of that exaggerated panegyric which has been lavished upon Ali. That Mohammed's education was defective, or rather that he never received any education beyond that instruction in his native language which ordinary conversation and the oral recitations of the poets of the wilderness afforded, is a fact denied by Christian writers, but which we believe, because it is precisely what might naturally be expected from his early history. His father died pennyless, abandoning his infant to the charitable care of his relations. These, however, were already burdened with a numerous progeny, and, as the Arab's sensibilities are naturally rather violent, it is not surprising that his father's brother lavished very little tenderness upon the orphan child of the prodigal Abdallah. He appears, indeed, to have received protection and support from his grandfather, and his uncle Abu Taleb, Ali's father. It was not to be expected, however, that

Abdalmotalleb, in extreme old age, could educate the orphan; or that Abu Taleb, though he harboured and protected him, could or would afford to him the same advantages enjoyed by his own son. But stronger than all these à priori reasonings, and much more to the purpose, are the undisputed facts, that Mohammed entered early upon business as a merchant, or a merchant's factor, with a capital of half a dozen camels; and until he reached the age of forty, continued in obscurity, without exhibiting the slightest indications of superior genius or an ambitious spirit. It was about this time that he is said to have conceived the plan of his imposture, in consequence, as we suppose and have already hinted, of his visits to Syria, for purposes of trade. The natural affection which appears to have subsisted in sincerity between the cousins, and the admiration which Mohammed no doubt entertained for the precocious talents of his kinsman, would naturally lead to a communication of his confused and crude conceptions to his friend. At this juncture, we are of opinion that no definite design whatever had been formed by the Impostor; but that he was merely feasting in imagination on the magnificent though mutilated fragments of prophetic history which floated in his memory, and perhaps indulging in vague dreams of being made himself the instrument of miracles and wonders. To Ali the idea of a new religion was probably a novel one; but if, as we suppose, he had already felt the stirrings of ambition, he must have comprehended at a glance the advantages which such a scheme would offer for the attainment of his ends. And to us it does appear, from a view of all the circumstances, that the plan of assuming the prophetic character, abolishing idolatry, and rearing a new system of belief upon its ruins, was, if not suggested, countenanced by Ali as a means of forwarding his own ambitious views. All this is fully reconcileable with the historical details. Ali is usually reckoned as the second convert to the new religion, Kadijah, the Prophet's wife, being the first. There is, however, strong authority for counting him the first. A Persian writer, probably still living, in a controversial work upon Mohammed's miracles, puts these words into the mouth of Ali, (quoting the canonical traditions for authority:) "I was the first person converted to the faith. He received his commission on Ruz-du-shembeh (Monday), and I joined him in prayer on Ruz-seh-shembeh (Tuesday); and for seven years, I alone joined him in prayer, until many professed Islam, and the Most High established his religion."* In these seven years, what part he

* See Lee's Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism, by the late Rev. Henry Martyn, and some of the most eminent writers of Persia. (Cambridge, 1824.) Page 43.

may have borne in laying the foundations of the new religion, who can tell?

The validity of our conclusions in relation to this subject rests of course upon the fact, that Ali was, as we suppose, an aspiring politician. The circumstances of his early history, we think, are enough to justify the supposition; but we have no need of such presumptive proof. Subsequent events, to which we now proceed, in the course of our historical review, sufficiently evince that Ali was from the first regarded by the stricter Moslems as a man whose ruling passion was the lust of power, and whose views in espousing Islam were entirely personal.

We have already said, that on Mohammed's death, the faithful were thrown into no small perplexity respecting a successor. And yet it does really appear, that a case could hardly have occurred, which furnished less occasion for dispute or doubt. In whatever light the subject was considered, the claims of Ali, upon common principles, appeared quite incontestable. If regard was to be had to hereditary right, his pretensions were immeasurably stronger than those of any other man. He was the cousin-german, foster-brother, and son-in-law of the prophet. If seniority as a believer was to be the ground of preference, no one could compete with him; for, as we have seen, he had precedence by seven years of every other convert. If personal merit was to decide the controversy, it is probable that no one would have ventured to contest it with him. His genius, learning, and accomplishments were allowed to be unrivalled. His warlike prowess and achievements had obtained for him the name of the Victorious Lion of God. In acts of devotion, and the exterior observances of the new religion, his zeal and punctuality were unremitted. Finally, if the matter were referred to the will of the deceased prophet himself, though he had indicated no successor, and expressed no opinion on the subject, it was perfectly notorious, that Ali had always been, from the origin of Islam, his vizier or counsellor, his intimate companion, and his confidential friend. Against all this array of strong pretensions, there was no one who could offer any claims of more than secondary rank. Abubekr, who ultimately received the appointment, was the father of one of the impostor's many wives, the next convert after Ali, and an older man; slight grounds, undoubtedly, on which to rest a competition. Yet in the face of all this, the Mohammedan noblesse, or leading men among the converts to the new religion, who, agreeably to the principle of patriarchal aristocracy upon which the police of the Arab tribes is founded, assumed a sort of legislative power in emergencies of this kind, deliberately set aside the claims of Ali, and elected Abubekr. And it must be remembered, that this was the act, not of selfish aspirants or corrupted partisans, but of men, who, so

far as history enables us to judge, were sincere in their professions of attachment to the faith. The character of Abubekr was any thing but that of an ambitious demagogue, and that of the men who raised him to the caliphat, partook as little of an interested cast. They seem all to have been blind, but honest zealots. Of their conduct upon this occasion, therefore, only one explanation can be given. These devoted Moslems saw through the designs and character of Ali. They understood too well, that with all his exterior devotion and surpassing gifts, he was (to use an Oriental figure) his own Keblah: his prayers were all offered at the shrine of his profane ambition; and with stern fidelity to their professions, they sacrificed him as a splendid victim to the interests of Islam.

This event is certainly among the most momentous in the annals of the false religion. Its immediate consequence was a schism, which, though apparently trivial at first, widened gradually, till it finally divided the Mohammedan world into two irreconcileable and bitter parties, who, for eleven hundred years, have looked upon each other with abhorrence and contempt; and though acknowledging the same Prophet, the same Koran, and the same leading principles of faith and practice, are, at this day, scarcely more friendly in their mutual relations than in their intercourse with Jews and Christians. These sects, or parties, the distinction between which still exists in all its force, are no doubt familiar to our readers, under the names of Sonnîs (or Sonnites) and Shîahs.* To enter upon an extended exposition of the points of difference between them, would be foreign from the subject of this article. The few words which we have to say upon this topic, will be placed with more propriety a little later in the progress of the narrative.

The rejection of the claims of so illustrious and popular a character, could not fail to make a deep impression on the minds of his adherents and admirers. As Ali himself, however, was dignified or politic enough to yield with a good grace what he was unable to retain, the Moslem world continued undisturbed from this quarter, till the death of Abubekr. A second rejection of the claims of Ali, and the election of a candidate with still fewer pretensions than his predecessor, no doubt exasperated their resentment; but in imitation of their chief, they still continued silent till the death of Omar. A third repetition of the insult, as it was considered, to the son-in-law and vizier of the prophet, was too great a trial for the patience of his partisans. Discontent began to be expressed, and that so unequivocally, that the

* Shîah (or Schismatics, Separatists, Heretics) is a word of reproach applied to the partisans of Ali by their adversaries. The Sonnîs are so called on account of their adhering to the Sonnah, or great body of traditions which the Shîahs reject.

death of Othman (the third caliph) by assassination, was openly attributed to Ali's followers, and by some, most unjustly, to himself.

After the death of Othman, the choice of the electors fell on Ali; nor is this to be wondered at. That deep devotion to the new religion, which before prevailed, was now fast wearing out. The conquest of Egypt, Syria, and Persia, by the Moslem armies, had infused a more earthly spirit into the bosoms of the faithful. The thirst of conquest had usurped the place of simple, blind submission to the fancied will of God;* and the character of Islam and its votaries was gradually changing. Besides, the men who had opposed Ali's elevation at the first, were some of them dead, as for instance his three predecessors, and some of them abroad as victorious generals, and governors of provinces. Nor was it, on the part of those who made the choice, dictated by a sense of Ali's merit or a wish to do him honour. The electors were distracted among rival candidates, and seem to have nominated him in order to gain time for further intrigue or deliberation, and of course without any serious intention of submitting to his authority. Such an appointment Ali naturally treated with contempt, though he clothed his refusal in the cant of hypocritical humility. To a second invitation he acceded, probably through fear of exciting the suspicions of the Moslems by continuing aloof. All parties seem, however, to have understood the feeble tenure by which he held his office. Scarcely was he inaugurated, when Moawiyah, the head of the Benu Ommiyah, a family near akin to that of Ali and Mohammed, who was at that time governor of Syria, proclaimed himself caliph at Damascus. His hereditary rank, his personal merit, and the power actually in his hands, soon drew to his standard many of the Moslem generals, so that his military force in a short time became formidable. In opposition to this usurpation, Ali seems to have acted with astonishing remissness, though supported by many of the stricter Moslems, as well as his own partisans. He displayed, it is true, great bravery in one or two pitched battles, but upon the whole he manifested an indifference not far removed from apathy. It may be, that his lofty spirit had been broken by the unexpected slight which had been put upon him by the Moslem chiefs. To us, however, it appears more probable that he had laid some plan requiring time for its development, and that the period had not yet come for putting forth his strength in a decisive movement. If this was his design, he delayed too long; for he fell by the hand of a fanatical assassin in the fortieth year of the Hejrah. His son Hasan, who was

* This implicit resignation or submission to the will of God, is the very idea properly expressed by the Arabic word Islam.

nominally chosen to succeed him, after holding the title a few months, resigned it of his own accord to his competitor. By this act, which was solemnly confirmed by the electors at Medina, Moawiyah found himself in peaceable possession of the caliphat.

As our design in this historical review is not so much to give a dry detail of facts as to trace the gradual change of character in the successors of Mohammed, and the nature of their office, we shall pause here for a moment to consider what point had been reached at the end of forty years from the Hejrah of the Prophet.

We have already hinted that a striking alteration had been wrought by the progress of foreign conquest in the spirit of the Mussulman. The same precision in exterior observances continued, and the same contemptuous intolerance for infidels. But his eyes had been opened to the prospect of secular prosperity and carnal power. He had begun to identify the true religion (as he proudly called it) with the vast scheme of universal conquest and dominion, which had been engrafted on the bold and pitiful imposture. A strong political and military spirit was infused into the whole society, affecting in some slight degree the lowest members, while it became the ruling passion of the chiefs. It is true, that from the first the converts to the new religion had fought boldly for it. But, in earlier times, the impelling principle was zeal for Islam, in itself and for its own sake. Arms were resorted to only because they were the means of propagation prescribed by the Impostor. Now the case was altered. The lust of power had succeeded to this pure fanaticism, (if we may use the phrase,) and Moslems now appeared to value their religion, chiefly because it was the surest road to opulence and power. This second stage of the disease was not of long continuance. The fever of ambition sank as the fever of wild zeal had sunk before it, but not until the lapse of time had fixed the new religion on a base too firm to need any stronger prop than prejudice and prescription.

Another important change had been wrought in the aspect of affairs, by the schism already mentioned, between the partisans and enemies of Ali, which had been too desperately widened and inflamed to be healed by the tardy justice done to Ali's merits. It is worthy of remark, that among the first four caliphs, Ali seems to have been the only one who had personal adherents. The other three were elevated to the office, not from any particular attachment to their persons, on the part of the electors, but because it was supposed that their elevation would prove a public benefit. The friends of Ali, on the other hand, appear to have been animated by a warm affection for their chief, a circumstance which rendered their resentment, on account of his discomfiture, more violent and lasting. To this

source may be traced almost all the discrepancies of opinion which have ever since distinguished the two sects. As one of Ali's strongest claims to the pontifical authority was founded on his kindred to Mohammed, the Shiahs of course became obstinate sticklers for hereditary succession in the holy office, while the Sonnis as steadfastly maintained, and still maintain, that the office is elective, founding the claims of the later caliphs, not upon their birth, but upon the assent of the Sheikhs and Ulema to their inauguration. The two sects, at the present day, enumerate the successors of the Prophet in a manner wholly different. The Sonnis begin with Abubekr, counting Ali and Hasan as the fourth and fifth, and passing from the latter to Moawiyah and his successors. The Shiahs, on the contrary, begin with Ali, rejecting his three predecessors as usurpers, and passing from him to his descendants, without recognising any of the caliphs of Damascus or Bagdad as legitimate successors. They believe that there have been as yet only twelve lawful Imams, (a term corresponding to the Latin word Antistes, which the Shiahs use to signify the supreme head of their religion,) the first being Ali himself, the second and third his sons, Hasan and Hosein, and the rest the lineal descendants of the latter. The twelfth Imam they believe to be still alive and upon earth, and maintain that at some future period he will appear and ascend the throne of universal empire.

It may easily be imagined that these disputes on the subject of legitimate succession were not agitated by the hostile sects in the calm spirit of philosophy. At an early period, the caliphs of the house of Ommiyah omitted Ali's name in the prayers and benedictions at the royal mosque, and afterwards went so far as to introduce a solemn curse upon him and his race into the ritual. This insult was, in later times, retaliated on the first three caliphs, by the Fatimites, who reigned in Egypt, and by some of the Abassides of Bagdad; and to this day the cursing of Omar forms a part of the regular religious service in the mosques of Persia. But while both sects have considered it essential to their character as true believers to revile and curse each other, the Shiahs have gone much further towards the opposite extreme, the aggrandizement of their great idol. Not content with ascribing to him every excellence compatible with mortal frailty, they have been led by party zeal to the extravagance of representing him as something more than human; nor have there been wanting zealots wild enough to rank him higher than the Prophet himself, and even to regard him as an incarnation of the Deity. In relation to the distinctive characters of these great sects, we shall only say, in a single word, that the Shiahs are more prone to the extreme of wild and mystical fanaticism; and the Sonnis to that of intolerant and frigid bigotry.

The stronghold of the Shiahs, at the present day, is Persia, while the Turks are rigid Sonnis, a circumstance which has no doubt contributed to aggravate the national antipathy between those countries. The Mohammedans of India, Africa, and the Arabian peninsula, are almost without exception Sonnis. Having given this extended, and perhaps too tedious, sketch of the infancy of Islam, with such prospective reference to subsequent events, as was necessary for a proper understanding of the subject, we shall now take a much more rapid view of the succeeding century.

Though Moawiyah professed to receive the caliphat upon the same terms as his predecessors, he soon betrayed his disposition to render it hereditary, by proposing to the grandees who composed his court, to recognise his son Yezid as heir apparent. To this suggestion there were strong objections, arising not only from general considerations, but also from the personal character of the proposed successor. Yet such was the relaxation which had taken place in the rigour of the Moslem principles, or such the influence of which the crown was already in possession, that all scruples seem to have been quickly overcome. During the reign of Moawiyah, the Arab conquests were extended eastward, beyond Persia, to the mountains of Bokhara. The encroaching Turks and Uzbecks were for a time driven back into Tartary, and Samarcand became a Moslem city. During this reign, too, siege was laid to Constantinople, but without success. Moawiyah is recorded in the annals of the East, as the first caliph who addressed the people in a sitting posture, (an innovation rendered necessary by his corpulence,) and the first who presumed to pardon an offence which the Koran had condemned. He also attempted to remove Mohammed's walking-stick and pulpit from Medina to Damascus, his own capital, but such a tumult was excited in the former city by this impious attempt, that he found it necessary to desist.

On the death of Moawiyah, two rivals started up to contest the caliphat with his successor—Abdallah Ibn Zobeir, an eloquent and warlike Hashemite at Mecca, and Hosein, Ali's second son, at Cufa. The people of Medina even went so far as by a solemn act to set aside Yezid and formally depose him. The inhabitants of Cufa, who were partisans of Ali, rose in arms to vindicate the claims of Hosein, but perfidiously forsook him in extremity, in consequence of which he was overthrown and slain at the battle of Kerbelah. The anniversary of this event (which is called the Day of Hosein) is still celebrated by the Persians, with funeral ceremonies and public lamentations over their third Imam; and his grave is annually visited by Shiah pilgrims from all parts of Asia. One rival being thus removed, the army of Yezid marched into Hejaz, and having

stormed Medina, was advancing upon Mecca, where Abdallah held his court, when it was arrested by the news of the caliph's death. Yezid is represented by the Eastern writers as a monster of impiety. He was educated in the desert, where he imbibed an ardent love of poetry, and became himself a poet. An extemporaneous couplet, said to have been uttered in reply to his father's reproof of his intemperance, is still preserved, and merits to be quoted, not only as characteristic of the man, but as breathing the very spirit of a Beduin:

"Is it for a draught of the water of the vine which I have drunk that thou art angry? Then sweet is ebriety!
I will drink—do thou rage—I care not—both are delightful to my soul, disobedience to thee, and wine!"*

Such is the abhorrence entertained by Moslems for his character, that the word Yezid is used as an appellative to signify an impious wretch; and his name is never mentioned by the Persian writers without the significant addition—Lanat-Allah-alaihi —"The curse of God be upon him." The only fact recorded to his honour, is that he treated the wives and children of Hosein with humanity and kindness, and released them from captivity. During his reign of three years and a half, Khorasan and Khowarezm were added to the Moslem empire.

The sickly Moawiyah II. soon grew weary of the royal office, and resigned it to his cousin, Merwan Ibn Alhakem, on condition that his own son Khalid, then a minor, should be next in the succession. In the mean time, Abdallah Ibn Zobeir, who was recognised as caliph at Medina, had extended his dominion over all Arabia, Persia, Irak, and Egypt, leaving Merwan master of no more than Syria and some adjacent territories. Merwan's troubles were increased, too, by an insurrection of the inhabitants of Cufa, who, in sorrow for their treachery to their martyred Imam, raised an army of sixteen thousand men, arrayed themselves in mourning, assumed the name of Penitents, and selected as their watchword, "Vengeance for Hosein!" In a short time, however, they were cut to pieces.

Abdalmalec, who, notwithstanding the pledge given to Moawiyah, succeeded his father Merwan, was an acute, brave, and learned prince, but proverbially covetous. He became, before his death, more powerful than any of his predecessors, by the reduction of Abdallah Ibn Zobeir, at Medina, and the addition of Armenia, Northern Africa, and part of India, to his empire.

* A-min-sharbatin-min-maï-carmin-sharibtuha-gadsibta-alayya-'lana-taba-'ssacro Saäshrabu-faïgdsab-la-radsitu-cullahuma-habibon-ila-kalbi-ukukuca-wa-'lkhamro.

The version in the text, which is both exact and spirited, is by Richardson, who quotes the verses in his grammar.

His attacks upon the Greeks, however, were most unsuccessful. One of them ended in the caliph's being forced to pay, for several successive years, a tribute of 365,000 dinars, 365 horses, and as many slaves, to the Greek emperor; and another in the destruction of 200,000 Arabs. In this reign the Moslems first coined money, to relieve themselves from the necessity of using that of Greece. As Mohammed denounces images of all sorts, the first coins were struck without any device but a simple legend from the Koran; and even this gave offence to many rigid Moslems, who regarded it as an impious exposure of the name of God to the touch of unclean persons. In this reign there seems to have been a more tolerant feeling towards Christians, who began to be promoted to important offices. This favour probably arose from the increasing interest now beginning to be felt in philosophy and literature, which, at that time, were wholly monopolized by Christians. We read of two Greek physicians, one of them a scientific writer, who were liberally patronised by Alhejaj, the greatest general of his age, and a fair sample of a class of persons very common in Oriental history, uniting in his character the remote extremes of sanguinary ferocity and considerable intellectual cultivation. The former trait is sufficiently evinced by an anecdote recorded of him, that when he went to take upon himself the office of governor, in some provincial city, he began his first address to the people in the mosque with these emphatic words: "Whithersoever I turn my eyes, methinks I see heads ripe for the harvest, and beards sprinkled with blood."

Abdalmalec was succeeded by his son Alwalid, whose ruling passion seems to have been a taste for architectural magnificence. He was the first Moslem prince who built a hospital or a public caravanserai. He adorned the mosque of Omar at Jerusalem, and rebuilt the temple at Medina, where Mohammed and the first caliphs lie buried; but excited no small indignation by demolishing the houses which had been the dwelling places of the prophet's wives. He also transformed the church of St. John the Baptist at Damascus into a splendid mosque, and built another in the conquered capital of Khowarezm. During his reign, Cilicia and Cappadocia were conquered, and the incursions of the Turks on the eastern frontier successfully repelled. But this period owes its chief distinction to the conquest of a part of Spain by the Moslem general Tarif or Tarik, who invaded that country at the rock of Gibraltar, (a corruption of the Arabic words Iibel-Tarif, or the hill of Tarif) defeated Roderick, reduced Toledo, and effected a decisive but precarious establishment of the Mohammedan authority in the peninsula. Even this was not all. The conquest of Sardinia, Minorca, and Majorca, little Bokhara, and Turkistan, are all to be referred to the reign

of Alwalid, which is therefore by no means the least splendid in the Moslem annals.

Alwalid's brother and successor, Solyman, was educated in the desert with his mother's relatives, and commanded universal admiration by his genius and eloquence. On his elevation to the throne, he appears to have enjoyed, in an enviable measure, the affection of his subjects. Yet the same historians who draw this favourable picture of his character, are careful to inform us, that with all his virtues he was an enormous glutton.* His reign is memorable for no conquest, but on the contrary, for a calamitous attack upon Constantinople, in which the efforts of the Arabs were really stupendous, and their discomfiture proportionally dreadful. A tremendous tempest dashed the caliph's fleet in pieces, while famine and pestilence cut off from his land forces above a hundred thousand men.

In the exercise of the privilege, now universally conceded to the caliph, of selecting his successor, Solyman nominated to the office Omar Ibn Abdalaziz, his cousin-german, inclosing his name in a sealed paper, and requiring the grandees to swear allegiance to their unknown sovereign. The secret was not divulged till after the caliph's death, when Omar reluctantly accepted the appointment, on the prescribed condition, that Yezid, Solyman's brother, should be his successor.

Omar appears to have been one of the last of those sincere though blinded devotees, who loved Islam for its own sake; while in other and higher qualities, he was much superior to those fierce zealots to whom the new religion owed its first establishment. He made himself remarkable by a self-denial, amounting to monastic rigour, as well as by a liberality of sentiment and tolerance of feeling towards schismatics, errorists, and even infidels, exceedingly remarkable from its strange contrast to the prevailing spirit of his age, and of the faith which he professed. To this honourable singularity, indeed, he owed his death. The suppression of the malediction upon Ali in the ritual, and other indications of a friendly spirit towards his partisans, induced a suspicion that he meditated a translation of the royal power from his own family to that of Hosein, to prevent which catastrophe, he was removed by poison. But his reign, though short, is, in a moral view, the brightest in the annals of the caliphat. The eastern historians all bear testimony to his signal excellence; and what may be considered as a stronger evidence, his name is one of those which have obtained proverbial currency in eastern fiction, as in themselves expressive of superior worth.† The

* This vice would seem to be hereditary in the royal families of Asia.

† A Persian manuscript, which lies before us, containing a collection of popular stories, furnishes an instance, in which one of the dramatis personæ cites, with strong expressions of respect, the traditionary anecdote of Omar's giving money to the slave who administered the poison, and urging him to flight.

most important act of Yezid II., was the publication of an edict for destroying all the images in Christian churches. He also issued a whimsical decree for the extirpation of all animals of a white colour. His idle and voluptuous reign was terminated by a fit of grief for the death of a favourite mistress.

Hesham, the richest and most covetous of the caliphs of Damascus, attacked the Greek emperor, like almost all his predecessors, and with similar success, being totally defeated by Constantine Copronymus. He reigned nineteen years, and was principally famous for his avarice and love of horses. During his reign, the Arab troops in Spain invaded Gascony, and met with a severe repulse from Charles Martel.

Alwalid II., the dissolute son of Yezid II., appears to have set his heart upon squandering the vast hoards of his predecessors. His arbitrary and capricious cruelty, his amazing prodigality, and his impudent contempt for all religion, which led him to profess himself an atheist, to trample on the Koran, and to drink wine in the holy mosque at Mecca, soon overcame the forbearance of his subjects, and after a short reign of one year, he was first deposed, and then assassinated.

The proud but eloquent and virtuous Yezid III., who was descended on the mother's side both from the Persian Shahs and the Roman emperors, fell a victim, six months after his accession, to the plague. He was suspected by the stricter Moslems of a leaning towards the heresy of the Kadarians, a sect who deny predestination, in consequence of which he was afterwards disinterred and crucified by Merwan II.

His brother, Ibrahim, a stupid prince, soon found himself compelled to abdicate in favour of his kinsman, Merwan, surnamed the Ass of Mesopotamia, who advanced upon Damascus at the head of eighty thousand men, to revenge the death of the infamous Alwalid. But scarcely was Merwan seated on the throne, when he found the foundations of his power shaken by a general rising of the adherents of Alabbas, who had long been maturing the plan and collecting the materials of a revolution, which now burst upon the empire with resistless violence.

Alabbas was the second son of Abdalmotalleb.—Abu Taleb, Ali's father, being the first born. The descendants of the former, therefore, were next in succession after the posterity of Ali. It does not appear, however, that this family laid any claim to the royal office, until the reign of Omar Ibn Abdalaziz, about the year 100 of the Hejrah, when a scheme was formed in Khorasan to transfer the crown from the house of Ommiyah to that of Alabbas, by elevating Mohammed Ibn Abdallah, at that time the head of the latter family, to the throne. Mohammed, however, who was then advanced in years, declined the honour for himself, though he eagerly assented to the change of dynasty. His

three sons, Ibrahim, Abulabbas Saffah, and Abu Iaafar Almansur, entered accordingly into negotiations with the revolutionists. The proceedings in this case were remarkable for a degree of caution and provident deliberation quite uncommon in the plots and complots of the East. Thirty years were suffered to elapse without any decisive overt act of positive rebellion; and it was not till Merwan II. ascended the throne of Damascus, in circumstances of great difficulty and confusion, that the partisans of Alabbas finally declared themselves. A number of events concurred about the same time to distract and paralyse the efforts of the caliph. Insurrections wholly independent of that which had so long been in agitation, simultaneously broke out, not only in Irak and other provinces, but in his very capital, Damascus. These intestine troubles so effectually seconded the movements of the children of Alabbas, that, although the eldest brother Ibrahim was taken prisoner and put to death by Merwan, the arms of the disaffected soon prevailed, Abulabbas Saffah was proclaimed caliph at Cufa, Merwan himself was killed in battle, and Damascus taken in the 132d year of the Hejrah.*

This event furnishes another striking proof of the change which had taken place in the sentiments and spirit of the Moslems, and evinces clearly that the caliphat was now regarded much less as a religious than a civil office. Moawiyah I. had done enough to do away the old views and impressions of the people, by rendering the throne hereditary; but a much larger stride was made towards the consummation of this change of character, by the bold assumption of supreme authority on the part of the Benu'lAbbas. The only pretext upon which they could be justified in dethroning the Ommiades, was their own affinity to Mohammed, and on that ground they were themselves excluded by the prior claims of the posterity of Ali. On Shiah and Sonni principles, therefore, they were equally usurpers; and this revolution very clearly showed, that a time was come, when aspirants after power were ready to lay hold of any pretext, or even to avail themselves of force, in order to obtain the mastery, without regard to the interests of Islam or the wishes of the Faithful. And yet, notwithstanding these invincible objections to the elevation of the Benu'lAbbas, they were strongly supported in their first attempts by the partisans of Ali, either because their views were not fully understood, or because all minor jealousies were lost in the absorbing hatred which these parties bore in common to the house of Ommiyah. They were soon however undeceived, and repented their precipitate co-operation in the acts of the usurpers, but not until the new dynasty was too securely fixed upon the throne to fear

* A. D. 749.

the disaffection of a mere minority. Nevertheless, there is no doubt, that the growing discontent of the partisans of Ali contributed eventually to the downfall of the house of Abbas.

The first acts of the new caliph plainly showed, that he looked upon himself as the founder of a new dynasty, and was resolved to have nothing in common with his predecessors. Damascus was dismantled, and the seat of empire transferred to Anbar. The bones of the princes of the house of Ommiyah were disinterred and burnt, and all who held office under the old regime were of course expelled. The reign of Abulabbas Saffah was chiefly occupied in settling the disturbances of the community, extinguishing the impotent rebellions of the disaffected, and organizing the machinery of the new government upon a more extensive and imposing plan. He is recorded as the first caliph who employed viziers, or privy counsellors, and all his political arrangements manifest a very great declension from the primitive simplicity of earlier times, which forbade the multiplication of public offices, and centred all responsibility as well as power in the pontiff's own person. Abulabbas was cut off by the small pox, after reigning about four years.

So completely had men ceased to look upon the caliphat as any thing more than a situation of great dignity and worldly power, that on the death of Abulabbas, several pretenders to the throne sprang up in opposition to Almansur, among his own relations; and, even when these were silenced, new rebellions continued to break out among the adherents of the house of Ommiyah. So proficient, too, was the new caliph in the kind of policy now commonly called Oriental, that he thought it necessary, after the suppression of these insurrections, to assassinate the general by whose valour and conduct his brother had been elevated to the throne, and his own claims to the caliphat established.

After a few ineffectual attempts to make head against the new dynasty, Abdalrahman, the chief of the Ommiades, a grandson of the caliph Hesham, fled to Spain, where he was cordially received, and solemnly proclaimed Emir-el-mumenin, or Commander of the Faithful. The western caliphat, thus founded, continued firm for two succeeding centuries. Among other magnificent public works accomplished by this prince, the most remarkable was the grand mosque at Cordova, which in some measure superseded that of Mecca, as a central point of pilgrimage and worship, in the estimation of the Spanish Moslems.

In the reign of Almansur, the Christians began to enjoy privileges at the caliph's court, to which they had been previously strangers, in consequence of a cure wrought upon that monarch by George, a Greek physician. But the most memorable event recorded of this period, is the erection of Bagdad, the occasion

of which is thus related by the Eastern annalists. While Almansur held his court at Anbar, or rather at Alhashemiyyah, a neighbouring town, built by his predecessor, a fanatical sect, called Rawandis, attempted to offer divine honours to his person, going round his palace with great solemnity, as the pilgrims compass the Caaba in the holy city. On the caliph's treating this apotheosis with very little ceremony, as an impious indecency, the fanatics went to the opposite extreme, and attempted to assassinate him. In consequence of these events, he conceived a disgust for the place where they occurred, and formed the design of erecting for himself a city worthy to become the metropolis of such a mighty empire. This scheme resulted in the building of Bagdad, the foundations of which were laid upon the Tigris, in the year of the Hejrah 145.* Of a city so familiar to every reader of history, we need only say in passing, that it continued to be the seat of the Eastern caliphat for five hundred years, that it then passed successively into the hands of the Turcomans and Tartars, after which the possession of it was contested obstinately by the Turks and Persians, being taken and retaken repeatedly by both, till it was finally yielded to the former, about two hundred years ago, since which time it has been the seat of a pacha.

Almansur died, after a reign of one-and-twenty years, leaving the crown to his son Almohdi, on condition that it should pass from him to his cousin Isa Ibn Musa. The latter, however, not content with mere prospective sovereignty, took advantage of the absence of Almohdi from the capital, and assumed the supreme authority at once. Yet with true Oriental sordidness and flexibility, when fairly overcome by superior force, he not only abandoned his premature pretensions, but actually sold all claim to the succession for a sum of money. The reign of Almohdi was principally occupied in conflicts with the Greeks, and in quelling insurrections. Of the latter, the most remarkable was that headed by Almo-Kanna, the Veiled Prophet of Khorasan, the most interesting points in whose history have been versified by Moore in his Lalla Rookh.

Alhadi, the son and successor of Almohdi, after a reign of a few months, was dispatched by poison, and the crown descended by hereditary right to his younger brother, Harun Alrashid.

One hundred and seventy years had now elapsed since the flight of Mohammed to Medina; one hundred and twenty since the throne became hereditary in the house of Ommiyah; and not quite forty since it was transferred to the Abassides. The changes, whether gradual or sudden, which had taken place in the pervading spirit of the Moslem world, in the nature of the

* A. D. 762.

office of caliph, and in the principles on which it was administered, have been so particularly remarked in the preceding sketches, that a general survey in this place is unnecessary. The Commander of the Faithful, though he still continued, like the simple and devoted zealots who first filled the office, to perform in person the duties of an Imam or officiating priest, in the royal mosque, had in other respects become assimilated to the ignobile vulgus of ordinary kings, and began to find his attention more and more diverted from religious duties, by the multiplying cares of a great and growing empire. The caliphat now comprehended nominally, and perhaps substantially, the whole of the ancient Persian empire, and no small proportion of the Roman, in addition to some regions (and among the rest Arabia) which, though historically reckoned as appurtenances of those mighty kingdoms, had in point of fact never appertained to either. It is not to be understood, however, that at the period of which we speak, the Moslem empire was at its height. In numbers, wealth, and territory, it had suffered, since the change of dynasty, no trifling loss by the adhesion of the Spanish Moslems to the house of Ommiyah. This was afterwards, indeed, compensated by new conquests; which did not occur, however, until after Harun's death. Still, the extent of the caliph's territories was stupendous, and the coffers of so vast an empire were of course well filled; for, in all Eastern countries, an enormous proportion of the whole wealth of the people finds its way into the treasury. This overflow of stagnant and ill-gotten wealth, had begun already to produce its natural and necessary consequences, partial refinement and radical corruption. The caliphs of the house of Abbas thought it necessary to render the distinction still more marked between their predecessors and themselves, by a splendour in the appointments of their court, and a munificence in the disposal of their funds, which would have seemed incredible to the poorer and more frugal princes of the house of Ommiyah. And it must be admitted, that the Eastern writers have recorded largesses of these prodigal monarchs, almost, perhaps entirely, unparalleled in Occidental history. Among the other schemes devised by these indefatigable spendthrifts, for emptying their coffers and commanding admiration, may be mentioned their splendid pilgrimages to the holy city—in themselves remarkable enough, but rendered still more striking by their contrast with the simplicity, and even meanness, which their predecessors considered it a duty to display upon similar occasions. Almost all the early princes of the house of Abbas performed the hajj in this novel style; but Almohdi may be fairly said to have eclipsed them all; for in addition to immense stores of every other kind, he carried snow enough across the desert, not only to allay the

thirst of his vast retinue, both going and returning, and to astonish the Meccans with the phenomena of ice-water, but to preserve fresh an incalculable quantity of Syrian and Mesopotamian fruits, which formed a part of his provisions.* Yet amidst all this glittering profusion, it is curious to observe how inefficacious wealth and its immediate consequences are, to refine the rudeness and soften the asperities of social life. It is impossible for us to go into the small details which would be necessary even to illustrate this remark; but the rich store of anecdote preserved by the Arabic historians seems clearly to evince, that the manners even of the higher classes were, at this time, in a sort of fluctuation between the coarseness of half-barbarism and the elegant effeminacy of a luxurious age. This fact may be attributed in part to the natural influence of the Mohammedan religion, but still more to the infancy and insignificance of Arab literature. The peninsular Arabs, it is true, had ever been enthusiastic lovers of poetry; but preceding caliphs were, with few exceptions, little able or disposed to afford efficient patronage to genius; and what is still more to the purpose, there was an almost total want of those materials—books, schools, and men of patient industry—without which the only sure foundations of true learning, and a lasting literature, never can be laid.

Harun Alrashid (or Aaron the Guide) appears to have acquired no small degree of popularity before his accession to the throne. His manners and deportment seem to have been such as were likely to win the affections of the populace. His social disposition, neglect of ceremony, and romantic fondness for adventure, brought him early into contact with the lower classes of his father's capital, and procured for him that enthusiastic admiration, which such condescension, on the part of royal personages, commonly produces. This partiality was greatly strengthened by the laurels which he won, at an early age, in his campaigns against the Greeks. At the head of the Moslem troops, he advanced repeatedly beyond the frontier of the Roman empire, and in one instance threatened the metropolis itself; displaying, in every case, an energy, sagacity, and courage, highly creditable to so young a prince, nurtured in all the effeminate refinement of an

* This pilgrimage is elegantly alluded to in the celebrated poem before mentioned.

> "Ne'er did the march of Mahadi (Mohdi) display
> Such pomp before;—not e'en when on his way
> To Mecca's Temple, when both land and sea
> Were spoil'd to feed the pilgrim's luxury;
> When round him, 'mid the burning sands, he saw
> Fruits of the North in icy freshness thaw,
> And cool'd his thirsty lip, beneath the glow
> Of Mecca's sun, with urns of Persian snow."—Lalla Rookh.

Oriental court. But even these were not the only grounds of the popular enthusiasm in favour of Alrashid. Towards the close of his father's reign, he displayed, in an important juncture, a generosity of feeling and chivalrous loftiness of spirit, as honourable in itself as it is rare in the annals of the East. Almohdi, charmed with the promising abilities and gallant exploits of his younger son, conceived a design to supersede his first-born, and make Harun his immediate heir. From this project he was, strange to tell, dissuaded by Harun himself, whom neither persuasion nor parental authority could force into an acquiescence in the scheme. So firm was he, indeed, in this disinterested opposition to his father's plan, that he peremptorily refused to come to Bagdad, when formally summoned by the caliph, with a view to his being there proclaimed successor to the crown. Nor was this sense of honour and regard to his brother's rights displayed merely while his father lived. On the contrary, the most striking exhibition of his generosity was made immediately upon Almohdi's death, when, although the sceptre was completely in his power, in consequence of Alhadi's absence, and the strong attachment of the courtiers to himself, he resisted the temptation, and proclaimed his brother caliph. Disinterestedness and self-denial so heroic, could not fail to have its influence upon the public feelings, and accordingly we find, that the partiality for Harun was increased on the accession of his brother, and continued gradually to grow stronger, till it burst into enthusiasm, on the detection of Alhadi's ungrateful and unwise attempt to take his brother's life. The success of this abominable project was finally prevented by the caliph's own untimely death, which is currently ascribed, by Oriental writers, to his mother.

When to these facts we add the circumstance that Harun was, throughout his life, rigid in his adherence to the forms of his religion, the reader will readily conceive, that he must have enjoyed a great advantage over all his predecessors in the important article of personal popularity. His condescension, his engaging manners, the elegance of his person, his military prowess, his wit, learning, and accomplishments; but above all, his generosity and loftiness of spirit, gained for him such a hold on the affections of his people, as seemed to promise new stability to his vast empire, and may serve to explain the prominence with which he is exhibited in Oriental history, tradition, and romance. The only one of the early caliphs who appears at any time to have enjoyed the personal attachment of the people in a high degree, was the son of Abu Taleb; and the reader need not be reminded, that he lost the favour of one half the Moslem world by the excess of his ambition. But in the days of Harun, the same ambition which in Ali was a mortal sin, had become a public virtue. Alrashid came therefore to the throne, under cir-

cumstances highly favourable to his happiness and the permanence of his dominion. Among these circumstances no mean place must be assigned to a fortuitous occurrence, which vulgar superstition construed into an infallible prognostic of felicity and greatness. According to the custom in all former cases, the new caliph was proclaimed as soon as the breath left the body of his predecessor, and almost at the same moment he received intelligence that one of his wives had been delivered of a son. A day thus distinguished, by the death of one caliph, the accession of another, and the birth of a third, (for the new-born infant was no other than the famed Almamun) could not fail to be recorded in the Oriental calendar as one of peculiar brightness; and we have no doubt, that this concurrence of events tended powerfully to increase the prepossessions of the populace, already strong, in behalf of the new sovereign.

On looking back at what we have already written, we are startled at our own prolixity, and find ourselves compelled to draw to a conclusion, without having filled up the outline previously sketched in our imagination. We have however traced the progress of events, and their influence upon society, from the origin of Islam to the accession of Alrashid, and may hereafter find occasion to pursue the subject further. In that case, we shall undertake to point out some of the peculiar circumstances which render Harun's reign an interesting subject of historical research, independently of those more ordinary and familiar topics which it has in common with so many other periods. At present we can barely hint at some of these—the condition of the Oriental churches under Harun's government, the rise and fall of the family of Barmec,* the state of education in the Moslem empire, and the important work of translating foreign writers, which was begun by this caliph and completed by Almamun.

ART. IV.—*Considerations on the propriety and necessity of annexing the Province of Texas to the United States: by a Revolutionary Officer.* New-York: G. F. Hopkins & Son: 1829.

HOWEVER unfruitful the discussion of questions regarding the expediency of incorporating Texas with the North American Union, may prove in other respects, it cannot fail to augment the sum of our knowledge of its physical geography. Much ad-

* Commonly called Barmecides.