

231783



III

THE SIXTH

DISCOURSE:

73

ON THE

PERSIANS.

PH
955
D 63

DELIVERED 19 FEBRUARY, 1789.

Gentlemen,

I TURN with delight from the vast mountains and barren deserts of *Turan*, over which we travelled last year with no perfect knowledge of our course, and request you now to accompany me on a literary journey through one of the most celebrated and most beautiful countries in the world: a country, the history and languages of which, both ancient and modern, I have long attentively studied, and on which I may without arrogance promise you more positive information than I could possibly procure on a nation so disunited and so unlettered as the *Tartars*; I mean that which *Europeans* improperly call *Persia*, the name of a single province being applied to the whole empire of *Iran*, as it is correctly denominated by the present natives of it, and by the learned *Muselmans* who reside in these *British* territories. To give you an account of its largest boundaries, agreeably to my former mode of describing *India* 'rabia, and

IAS, Shimla

Library

PH 955 D 63



00016030

Tartary, between which it lies, let us begin with the source of the great *Assyrian* stream *Euphrates* (as the *Greeks*, according to their custom, were pleased to miscall the *Forat*) and thence descend to its mouth in the *Green Sea*, or *Persian Gulf*, including in our line some considerable districts and towns on both sides of the river; then, coasting *Persia*, properly so named, and other *Iranian* provinces, we come to the *Delta* of the *Sindh* or *Indus*; whence ascending to the mountains of *Cashghar*, we discover its fountains and those of the *Faihun*, down which we are conducted to the *Caspian*, which formerly perhaps it entered, though it loses itself now in the sands and lakes of *Khwarezn*. We next are led from the *Sea of Khozar* by the banks of the *Cur*, or *Cyrus*, and along the *Caucasean* ridges to the shore of the *Euxine*, and thence by the several *Grecian Seas* to the point whence we took our departure, at no considerable distance from the *Mediterranean*. We cannot but include the *Lower Asia* within this outline, because it was unquestionably a part of the *Persian*, if not of the old *Assyrian* empire; for we know that it was under the dominion of *Caixhosrau*; and *Diodorus*, we find, asserts, that the kingdom of *Troas* was dependent on *Assyria*, since *Priam* implored and obtained succours from his emperor *Teutames*, whose name approaches nearer to *Tahmuras* than to that of any other *Assyrian* monarch. Thus may we look on *Iran* as the noblest island (for so the *Greeks* and the *Arabs* would have called it) or at least as the noblest peninsula on this habitable globe; and if *M. Bailly* had fixed on it as the *Atlantis* of *Plato*, he might have supported his opinion with far stronger arguments than any that he has adduced in favour of *New Zembla*. If the account, indeed, of the *Atlantes* be not purely an *Egyptian*, or an *Utopian* fable, I should be more inclined to place them in *Iran* than in any region with which I am acquainted.

It may seem strange, that the ancient history of so distinguished an empire should be yet so imperfectly known; but very satisfactory reasons may be assigned for our ignorance of it: the principal of them are the superficial knowledge of the *Greeks* and *Jews*, and the loss of *Persian* archives, or historical compositions. That the *Grecian* writers, before *Xenophon*, had no acquaintance with *Persia*, and that all their accounts of it are wholly fabulous, is a paradox too extravagant to be seriously maintained: but their connection with it in war or peace had indeed been generally confined to bordering kingdoms, under feudatory princes; and the first *Persian* emperor, whose life and character they seem to have known with tolerable accuracy, was the great *Cyrus*, whom I call, without fear of contradiction, *Caikhosrau*; for I shall then only doubt that the *Khosrau* of *Firdausi* was the *Cyrus* of the first *Greek* historian, and the hero of the oldest political and moral romance, when I doubt that *Louis Quatorze* and *Lewis the Fourteenth* were one and the same *French King*. It is utterly incredible that two different princes of *Persia* should each have been born in a foreign and hostile territory; should each have been doomed to death in his infancy by his maternal grandfather, in consequence of portentous dreams, real or invented; should each have been saved by the remorse of his destined murderer; and should each, after a similar education among herdsmen, as the son of a herdsman, have found means to revisit his paternal kingdom; and having delivered it, after a long and triumphant war, from the tyrant who had invaded it, should have restored it to the summit of power and magnificence! Whether so romantic a story, which is the subject of an epic poem as majestic and entire as the *Iliad*, be historically true, we may feel perhaps an inclination to doubt; but it cannot with reason be denied, that the outline of it related to a single hero, whom the *Asiatics*, convers-

ing with the father of *European* history, described according to their popular traditions by his true name, which the *Greek* alphabet could not express: nor will a difference of names affect the question, since the *Greeks* had little regard for truth, which they *sacrificed* willingly to the *graces* of their language, and the nicety of their ears; and, if they could render foreign words melodious, they were never solicitous to make them exact; hence they probably formed *Cambyses* from *Cambakhsh*, or *granting desires*, a title rather than a name; and *Xerxes* from *Shiruyi*, a prince and warrior in the *Shahnamah*, or from *Shirshah*, which might also have been a title; for the *Asiatic* princes have constantly assumed new titles or epithets at different periods of their lives, or on different occasions: a custom which we have seen prevalent in our own times both in *Iran* and *Hindustan*, and which has been a source of great confusion even in the scriptural accounts of *Babylonian* occurrences. Both *Greeks* and *Jews* have in fact accommodated *Persian* names to their own articulation; and both seem to have disregarded the native literature of *Iran*, without which they could at most attain but a general and imperfect knowledge of the country. As to the *Persians* themselves, who were contemporary with the *Jews* and *Greeks*, they must have been acquainted with the history of their own times, and with the traditional accounts of past ages; but for a reason, which will presently appear, they chose to consider *Cayumers* as the founder of their empire; and, in the numerous distraction which followed the overthrow of *Dara*, especially in the great revolution on the defeat of *Yezdegird*, their civil histories were lost, as those of *India* have unhappily been, from the solicitude of the priests, the only depositaries of their learning, to preserve their books of law and religion at the expence of all others. Hence it has happened, that nothing remains of genuine *Persian* history before the dynasty

of *Sasan*, except a few rustic traditions and fables, which furnished materials for the *Shahnamah*, and which are still supposed to exist in the *Pahlavi* language. All the annals of the *Pishdadi*, or *Assyrian* race, must be considered as dark and fabulous; and those of the *Cayani* family, or the *Medes* and *Persians*, as heroic and poetical; though the lunar eclipses, said to be mentioned by *Ptolemy*, fix the time of *Gushtasp*, the prince by whom *Zeratush* was protected, of the *Parthian* kings descended from *Arshac* or *Arsaces*, we know little more than the names; but the *Sasanis* had so long an intercourse with the emperors of *Rome* and *Byzantium*, that the period of their dominion may be called an historical age. In attempting to ascertain the beginning of the *Assyrian* empire, we are deluded, as in a thousand instances, by names arbitrarily imposed. It had been settled by chronologers, that the first monarchy established in *Persia* was the *Assyrian*; and *Newton*, finding some of opinion that it rose in the first century after the Flood, but unable by his own calculations to extend it farther back than *seven hundred and ninety* years before *Christ*, rejected part of the old system, and adopted the rest of it; concluding, that the *Assyrian* monarchs began to reign about two hundred years after *Solomon*, and that, in all preceding ages, the government of *Iran* had been divided into several petty states and principalities. Of this opinion I confess myself to have been; when, disregarding the wild chronology of the *Muselmans* and *Gabrs*, I had allowed the utmost natural duration to the reigns of eleven *Pishdadi* kings, without being able to add more than a hundred years to *Newton's* computation. It seemed indeed unaccountably strange, that, although *Abraham* had found a regular monarchy in *Egypt*; although the kingdom of *Yemen* had just pretensions to very high antiquity; although the *Chinese*, in the twelfth century before our æra, had made approaches

at least to the present form of their extensive dominion; and although we can hardly suppose the first *Indian* monarchs to have reigned less than three thousand years ago, yet *Persia*, the most delightful, the most compact, the most desirable country of them all, should have remained for so many ages unsettled and disunited. A fortunate discovery, for which I was first indebted to *Mir Muhammed Husain*, one of the most intelligent *Muselmans* in *India*, has at once dissipated the cloud, and cast a gleam of it on the primeval history of *Iran* and of the human race, of which I had long despaired, and which could hardly have dawned from any other quarter.

The rare and interesting tract on *twelve different religions*, entitled the *Dabistan*, and composed by a *Mohammedan* traveller, a native of *Cashmir*, named *Mohsan*, but distinguished by the assumed surname of *Fani*, or *perishable*, begins with the wonderfully curious chapter on the religion of *Hushang*, which was long anterior to that of *Zeratusht*, but had continued to be secretly professed by many learned *Persians* even to the author's time; and several of the most eminent of them, dissenting in many points from the *Gabrs*, and persecuted by the ruling powers of their country, had retired to *India*; where they compiled a number of books, now extremely scarce, which *Mohsan* had perused, and with the writers of which, or with many of them, he had contracted an intimate friendship. From them he learned, that a powerful monarchy had been established for ages in *Iran* before the accession of *Cayumers*; that it was called the *Mahabadian* dynasty, for a reason which will soon be mentioned; and that many princes, of whom seven or eight are only named in the *Dabistan*; and among them *Mahbul*, or *Maha Beli*, had raised their empire to the zenith of human glory. If we

can rely on this evidence, which to me appears unexceptionable, the *Iranian* monarchy must have been the oldest in the world; but it will remain dubious to which of the three stocks, *Hindu*, *Arabian*, or *Tartar*, the first Kings of *Iran* belonged; or whether they sprang from a *fourth* race distinct from any of the others; and these are questions which we shall be able, I imagine, to answer precisely, when we have carefully inquired into the *languages* and *letters*, *religion* and *philosophy*, and incidentally into the *arts* and *sciences*, of the ancient *Persians*.

I. In the new and important remarks which I am going to offer on the ancient *languages* and *characters* of *Iran*, I am sensible that you must give me credit for many assertions which, on this occasion, it is impossible to prove; for I should ill deserve your indulgent attention, if I were to abuse it by repeating a dry list of detached words, and presenting you with a vocabulary instead of a dissertation; but, since I have no system to maintain, and have not suffered imagination to delude my judgment; since I have habituated myself to form opinions of men and things from *evidence*, which is the only solid basis of *civil*, as *experiment* is of *natural* knowledge; and since I have maturely considered the questions which I mean to discuss, you will not, I am persuaded, suspect my testimony, or think that I go too far, when I assure you, that I will assert nothing positively which I am not able satisfactorily to demonstrate. When *Muhammed* was born, and *Anushiravan*, whom he calls the *Just King*, sat on the throne of *Persia*, two languages appear to have been generally prevalent in the great empire of *Iran*; that of the *Court*, thence named *Deri*, which was only a refined and elegant dialect of the *Parsi*, so called from the province, of which *Shiraz* is now the capital, and that of the learned, in which most books were composed, and which had the

name of *Pahlavi*, either from the *heroes* who spoke it in former times, or from *Pahlu*, a track of land, which included, we are told, some considerable cities of *Irak*. The ruder dialects of both were, and, I believe, still are spoken by the rustics in several provinces; and in many of them, as *Herat*, *Zabul*, *Sistan*, and others, distinct idioms were vernacular, as it happens in every kingdom of great extent. Besides the *Parsi* and *Pahlavi*, a very ancient and abstruse tongue was known to the priests and philosophers, called *the language of the Zend*, because a book on religious and moral duties, which they held sacred, and which bore that name, had been written in it; while the *Pazend*, or comment on that work, was composed in *Pahlavi*, as a more popular idiom; but a learned follower of *Zeratusht*, named *Bahman*, who lately died in *Calcutta*, where he had lived with me as a *Persian* reader about three years, assured me that the letters of his prophet's book were properly called *Zend*, and the language *Avesta*, as the words of the *Vedus* are *Sanscrit*, and the characters *Nagari*; or as the old *Sagas* and poems of *Iceland* were expressed in *Runic* letters. Let us however, in compliance with custom, give the name of *Zend* to the sacred language of *Persia*, until we can find, as we shall very soon, a fitter appellation for it. The *Zend* and the old *Pahlavi* are almost extinct in *Iran*; for among six or seven thousand *Gabrs*, who reside chiefly at *Yezd*, and in *Cirman*, there are very few who can read *Pahlavi*; and scarce any who even boast of knowing the *Zend*; while the *Parsi*, which remains almost pure in the *Shahnamah*, has now become by the intermixture of numberless *Arabic* words, and many imperceptible changes, a new language exquisitely polished by a series of fine writers in prose and verse, and analogous to the different idioms gradually formed, in *Europe* after the subversion of the *Roman* empire: but with modern *Persian* we have no concern in our present in-

quiry, which I confine to the ages that preceded the *Mohammedan* conquest. Having twice read the works of *Firdausi* with great attention since I applied myself to the study of old *Indian* literature, I can assure you with confidence, that hundreds of *Parsi* nouns are pure *Sanscrit*, with no other change than such as may be observed in the numerous *bhashas*, or vernacular dialects of *India*; that very many *Persian* imperatives are the roots of *Sanscrit* verbs; and that even the moods and tenses of the *Persian* verb substantive, which is the model of all the rest, are deducible from the *Sanscrit* by an easy and clear analogy: we may hence conclude, that the *Parsi* was derived, like the various *Indian* dialects, from the language of the *Brahmans*; and I must add, that in the pure *Persian* I find no trace of any *Arabian* tongue, except what proceeded from the known intercourse between the *Persians* and *Arabs*, especially in the time of *Bahram*, who was educated in *Arabia*, and whose *Arabic* verses are still extant, together with his heroic line in *Deri*, which many suppose to be the first attempt at *Persian* versification in *Arabian* metre; but, without having recourse to other arguments, *the composition of words*, in which the genius of the *Persian* delights, and which that of the *Arabic* abhors, is a decisive proof that the *Parsi* sprang from an *Indian*, and not from an *Arabian* stock. Considering languages as mere instruments of knowledge, and having strong reasons to doubt the existence of genuine books in *Zend* or *Pahlavi* (especially since the well-informed author of the *Dabistan* affirms the work of *Zeratusht* to have been lost, and its place supplied by a recent compilation) I had no inducement, though I had an opportunity, to learn what remains of those ancient languages; but I often conversed on them with my friend *Bahman*; and both of us were convinced, after full consideration, that the *Zend* bore a strong resemblance to *Sanscrit*, and the *Pahlavi* to *Arabic*. He had at my request translated

into *Pahlavi* the fine inscription exhibited in the *Gulistan*, on the diadem of *Cyrus*; and I had the patience to read the list of words from the *Pazend* in the appendix to the *Farhangi Jehangiri*. This examination gave me perfect conviction that the *Pahlavi* was a dialect of the *Chaldaic*; and of this curious fact I will exhibit a short proof. By the nature of the *Chaldean* tongue, most words ended in the first long vowel, like *shemia*, heaven; and that very word, unaltered in a single letter, we find in the *Pazend*, together with *laila*, night; *meyd*, water; *nira*, fire; *matra*, rain; and a multitude of others, all *Arabic* or *Hebrew*, with a *Chaldean* termination; so *zamar*, by a beautiful metaphor, from *pruning trees*, means in *Hebrew* to *compose verses*, and thence, by an easy transition to *sing* them; and in *Pahlavi* we see the verb *zamruniten*, to *sing*, with its forms *zamrunemi*, I *sing*, and *zamrunid*, he *sang*; the verbal terminations of the *Persian* being added to the *Chaldaic* root. Now all those words are integral parts of the language, not adventitious to it like the *Arabic* nouns and verbals engrafted on modern *Persian*; and this distinction convinces me, that the dialect of the *Gabrs*, which they pretend to be that of *Zeratusht*, and of which *Bahman* gave me a variety of written specimens, is a late invention of their priests, or subsequent at least to the *Muselman* invasion; for, although it may be possible that a few of their sacred books were preserved, as he used to assert, in sheets of lead or copper, at the bottom of wells near *Yezd*, yet, as the conquerors had not only a spiritual, but a political interest in persecuting a warlike, robust, and indignant race of irreconcilable, conquered subjects, a long time must have elapsed, before the hidden scriptures could have been safely brought to light, and few, who could perfectly understand them, must then have remained; but, as they continued to profess among themselves the religion of their forefathers, it then became expedient for the *Mubeds*

to supply the lost or mutilated works of their legislator by new compositions, partly from their imperfect recollection, and partly from such moral and religious knowledge as they gleaned, most probably, among the *Christians*, with whom they had an intercourse. One rule we may fairly establish in deciding the question, Whether the books of the modern *Gabrs* were anterior to the invasion of the *Arabs*? When an *Arabic* noun occurs in them, changed only by the spirit of the *Chaldean* idiom; as *werta* for *werd*, a rose; *daba* for *dhahab*, gold; or *deman* for *zeman*, time, we may allow it to have been ancient *Pahlavi*; but when we meet with verbal nouns or infinitives, evidently formed by the rules of *Arabian* grammar, we may be sure that the phrases in which they occur are comparatively modern; and not a single passage which *Bahman* produced from the books of his religion would abide this test.

We come now to the language of the *Zend*; and here I must impart a discovery which I lately made, and from which we may draw the most interesting consequences. *M. Anquetil*, who had the merit of undertaking a voyage to *India*, in his earliest youth, with no other view than to recover writings of *Zeratusht*, and who would have acquired a brilliant reputation in *France*, if he had not sullied it by his immoderate vanity and virulence of temper, which alienated the good will even of his own countrymen, has exhibited in his work, entitled *Zendavesta*, two vocabularies in *Zend* and *Pahlavi*, which he had found in an approved collection of *Rawayat*, or *Traditional Pieces*, in modern *Presian*. Of his *Pahlavi* no more need to be said than that it strongly confirms my opinion concerning the *Chaldaic* origin of that language; but, when I perused the *Zend* glossary, I was inexpressibly surprized to find that six or seven words in ten were pure *Sanscrit*, and even some of their inflexions

formed by the rules of the *Vyacaran*; as *yushmacam*, the genitive plural of *yushmad*. Now M. Anquetil, most certainly, and the *Persian* compiler most probably, had no knowledge of *Sanscrit*; and could not, therefore, have invented a list of *Sanscrit* words: it is, therefore, an authentic list of *Zend* words which had been preserved in books, or by tradition: and it follows, that the language of the *Zend* was at least a dialect of the *Sanscrit*, approaching perhaps as nearly to it as the *Pracrit*, or other popular idioms, which we know to have been spoken in *India* two thousand years ago. From all these facts it is a necessary consequence, that the oldest discoverable languages of *Persia* were *Chaldaic* and *Sanscrit*; and that, when they had ceased to be vernacular, the *Pahlavi* and *Zend* were deduced from them respectively, and the *Parsi* either from the *Zend*, or immediately from the dialect of the *Brahmans*; but all had perhaps a mixture of *Tartarian*; for the best lexicographers assert, that numberless words in ancient *Persian* are taken from the language of the *Cimmerians*, or the *Tartars* of *Kipchak*; so that the three families, whose lineage we have examined in former discourses, had left visible traces of themselves in *Iran* long before the *Tartars* and *Arabs* had rushed from their deserts, and returned from that very country from which, in all probability, they originally proceeded, and which the *Hindus* had abandoned in an earlier age, with positive commands from their legislators to revisit it no more. I close this head with observing, that no supposition of a mere political or commercial intercourse between the different nations, will account for the *Sanscrit* and *Chaldaic* words, which we find in the old *Persian* tongues; because they are, in the first place, too numerous to have been introduced by such means; and secondly, are not the names of exotic animals, commodities, or arts, but those of material elements, parts of the body, natural objects

and relations, affections of the mind, and other ideas common to the whole race of man.

If a nation of *Hindus*, it may be urged, ever possessed and governed the country of *Iran*, we should find on the very ancient ruins of the temple or palace, now called *the Throne of Femshid*, some inscriptions in *Devanagari*, or at least in the characters on the stones at *Elephanta*, where the sculpture is unquestionably *Indian*, or in those on the *staff of Viruz Shah*, which exist in the heart of *India*; and such inscriptions we probably should have found, if that edifice had not been erected after the migration of the *Brahmans* from *Iran*, and the violent schism in the *Persian* religion, of which we shall presently speak; for, although the popular name of the building at *Istakar*, or *Persepolis*, be no certain proof that it was raised in the time of *Femshid*, yet such a fact might easily have been preserved by tradition; and we shall soon have abundant evidence that the temple was posterior to the reign of the *Hindu* monarchs. The *cypresses* indeed, which are represented with the figures in procession, might induce a reader of the *Shahnamah* to believe, that the sculptures related to the new faith introduced by *Zeratusht*; but as a cypress is a beautiful ornament, and as many of the figures appear inconsistent with the reformed adoration of fire, we must have recourse to stronger proofs, that the *Takhti Femshid* was erected after *Cayumers*. The building has lately been visited, and the characters on it examined, by *Mr. Francklin*; from whom we learn, that *Niebuhr* has delineated them with great accuracy; but without such testimony I should have suspected the correctness of the delineation, because the *Danish* traveller has exhibited two inscriptions in modern *Persian*, and one of them from the same place, which cannot have

been exactly transcribed: they are very elegant verses of *Nizami* and *Sadi*, on the instability of human greatness, but so ill engraved or so ill copied, that if I had not had them nearly by heart, I should not have been able to read them; and *M. Rousseau* of *Isfahan*, who translated them with shameful inaccuracy, must have been deceived by the badness of the copy, or he never would have created a new king *Wakam*, by forming one word of *Jem* and the particle prefixed to it. Assuming, however, that we may reason as conclusively on the characters published by *Niebuhr* as we might on the monuments themselves, were they now before us, we may begin with observing, as *Chardin* had observed on the very spot, that they bear no resemblance whatever to the letters used by the *Gabrs* in their copies of the *Vendidad*. This I once urged, in an amicable debate with *Bahman*, as a proof that the *Zend* letters were a modern invention; but he seemed to hear me without surprize, and insisted that the letters to which I alluded, and which he had often seen, were monumental characters never used in books, and intended either to conceal some religious mysteries from the vulgar, or to display the art of the sculptor, like the embellished *Cufick* and *Nagari* on several *Arabian* and *Indian* monuments. He wondered that any man could seriously doubt the antiquity of the *Pahlavi* letters; and in truth the inscription behind the horse of *Rustam*, which *Niebuhr* has also given us, is apparently *Pahlavi*, and might with some pains be decyphered; that character was extremely rude, and seems to have been written, like the *Roman* and the *Arabic*, in a variety of hands; for I remember to have examined a rare collection of old *Persian* coins in the museum of the great Anatomist *William Hunter*; and, though I believed the legends to be *Pahlavi*, and had no doubt that they were coins of *Parthian* kings, yet I could not read the inscrip-

tions without wasting more time than I had then at command, in comparing the letters and ascertaining the proportions in which they severally occurred. The gross *Pahlavi* was improved by *Zeratusht* or his disciples into an elegant and perspicuous character, in which the *Zendavesta* was copied; and both were written from the right hand to the left, like other *Chaldaic* alphabets, for they are manifestly both of *Chaldean* origin; but the *Zend* has the singular advantage of expressing all the long and short vowels by distinct marks in the body of each word, and all the words are distinguished by full points between them; so that if modern *Persian* were unmixed with *Arabic*, it might be written in *Zend* with the greatest convenience, as any one may perceive, by copying in that character a few pages of the *Shahnamah*. As to the unknown inscriptions in the palace of *Jemshid*, it may reasonably be doubted whether they contain a system of letters which any nation ever adopted: in *five* of them the letters, which are separated by points, may be reduced to forty, at least I can distinguish no more essentially different; and they all seem to be regular variations and compositions of a straight line and an angular figure like the head of a javelin, or a leaf (to use the language of botanists) *hearted and lanced*. Many of the *Runic* letters appear to have been formed of similar elements; and it has been observed, that the writing at *Persepolis* bears a strong resemblance to that which the *Irish* call *Ogham*. The word *Agam* in *Sanscrit* means *mysterious knowledge*; but I dare not affirm that the two words had a common origin; and only mean to suggest that, if the characters in question be really alphabetical, they were probably secret and sacerdotal, or a mere cypher perhaps, of which the priests only had the key. They might, I imagine, be decyphered if the language were certainly known; but in all other inscriptions of the

same sort, the characters are too complex, and the variations of them too numerous, to admit an opinion that they could be symbols of articulate sounds; for even the *Nagari* system, which has more distinct letters than any known alphabet, consists only of forty-nine simple characters, two of which are mere substitutions, and four of little use in *Sanscrit*, or in any other language; while the more complicated figures, exhibited by *Niebuhr*, must be as numerous at least as the *Chinese* keys, which are the signs of *ideas* only, and some of which resemble the old *Persian* letters at *Istakar*. The *Danish* traveller was convinced from his own observation that they were written from the left hand, like all the characters used by *Hindu* nations; but I must leave this dark subject, which I cannot illuminate, with a remark formerly made by myself, that the square *Chaldaic* letters, a few of which are found on the *Persian* ruins, appear to have been originally the same with the *Devanagari* before the latter were enclosed, as we now see them, in angular frames.

II. The primeval religion of *Iran*, if we rely on the authorities adduced by *Mohsani Fani*, was that which Newton calls the oldest (and it may be justly called the noblest) of all religions: "A firm belief that One Supreme God made the world by his power, and continually governed it by his providence; a pious fear, love, and adoration of him; a due reverence for parents and aged persons; a fraternal affection for the whole human species, and a compassionate tenderness even for the brute creation." A system of devotion so pure and sublime could hardly, among mortals, be of long duration; and we learn from the *Dabistan*, that the popular worship of the *Iranians* under *Hushang*, was purely *Sabian*; a word of which I cannot offer any certain etymology, but which has been deduced by grammarians from *Saba*, an *host*,

and particularly the *host of heaven*, or the *celestial bodies*, in the adoration of which the *Sabian* ritual is believed to have consisted. There is a description in the learned work just mentioned, of the several *Persian* temples dedicated to the Sun and Planets, of the images adored in them, and of the magnificent processions to them on prescribed festivals; one of which is probably represented by sculpture in the ruined city of *Jemshid*. But the planetary worship in *Persia* seems only a part of a far more complicated religion, which we now find in these *Indian* provinces; for *Mohsan* assures us that, in the opinion of the best informed *Persians*, who professed the faith of *Hushang*, distinguished from that of *Zeratusht*, the first monarch of *Iran*, and of the whole earth, was *Mahabad* (a word apparently *Sanscrit*) who divided the people into four orders, the *religious*, the *military*, the *commercial*, and the *servile*, to which he assigned names unquestionably the same in their origin with those now applied to the four primary classes of the *Hindus*. They added, that he received from the Creator, and promulgated among men, a *sacred book in a heavenly language*, to which the *Musulman* author gives the *Arabic* title of *Desatir*, or *Regulations*, but the original name of which he has not mentioned; and that *fourteen Mahabads* had appeared or would appear in human shapes for the government of this world. Now when we know that the *Hindus* believe in *fourteen Menus*, or celestial personages with similar functions, the *first* of whom left a book of *regulations*, or *divine ordinances*, which they hold equal to the *Veda*, and the language of which they believe to be that of the gods, we can hardly doubt that the first corruption of the purest and oldest religion was the system of *Indian* theology invented by the *Brahmans*, and prevalent in these territories, where the book of *Mahabad*, or *Menu*, is at this moment the standard of all religious and moral duties. The accession of *Cayri-*

mers to the throne of *Persia*, in the eighth or ninth century before *Christ*, seems to have been accompanied by a considerable revolution both in government and religion: he was most probably of a different race from the *Mahabadians* who preceded him, and began perhaps the new system of national faith which *Hushang*, whose name it bears, completed; but the reformation was partial; for, while they rejected the complex polytheism of their predecessors, they retained the laws of *Mahabad*, with a superstitious veneration for the sun, the planets, and fire; thus resembling the *Hindu* sects, called *Sauras* and *Sagnicas*, the second of which is very numerous at *Banares*, where many *agnihotras* are continually blazing, and where the *Sagnicas*, when they enter on their sacerdotal office, kindle, with two pieces of the hard wood *Semi*, a fire which they keep lighted through their lives for their nuptial ceremony, the performance of solemn sacrifices, the obsequies of departed ancestors, and their own funeral pile. This remarkable rite was continued by *Zeratusht*, who reformed the old religion by the addition of genii, or angels, presiding over months and days, of new ceremonies in the veneration shown to fire, of a new work which he pretended to have received from Heaven, and, above all, by establishing the actual adoration of one Supreme Being. He was born, according to *Mohsan*, in the district of *Rai*; and it was he (not, as *Animianus* asserts, his protector *Gushtash*) who travelled into *India*, that he might receive information from the *Brahmans* in theology and ethics. It is barely possible that *Pythagoras* knew him in the capital of *Irak*; but the *Grecian* sage must then have been far advanced in years; and we have no certain evidence of an intercourse between the two philosophers. The reformed religion of *Persia* continued in force till that country was subdued by the *Muselmans*; and, without studying the *Zend*, we have ample information concerning

it in the modern *Persian* writings of several who professed it. *Bahman* always named *Zeratusht* with reverence; but he was in truth a pure Theist, and strongly disclaimed any adoration of the *fire* or other elements: he denied that the doctrine of two coeval principles, supremely good and supremely bad, formed any part of his faith; and he often repeated with emphasis the verses of *Firdausi* on the prostration of *Cyrus* and his paternal grandfather before the blazing altar: "Think not that they were adorers of fire; for that element was only an exalted object, on the lustre of which they fixed their eyes; they humbled themselves a whole week before *God*; and, if thy understanding be ever so little exerted, thou must acknowledge thy dependence on the Being supremely pure." In a story of *Sadi*, near the close of his beautiful *Bustan*, concerning the idol of *Somanath*, or *Mahadeva*, he confounds the religion of the *Hindus* with that of the *Gabrs*, calling the *Brahmans* not only *Moghs* (which might be justified by a passage in the *Mesnavi*) but even readers of the *Zend* and *Pazend*. Now, whether this confusion proceeded from real or pretended ignorance I cannot decide, but am as firmly convinced that the doctrines of the *Zend* were distinct from those of the *Veda*, as I am that the religion of the *Brahmans*, with whom we converse every day, prevailed in *Persia* before the accession of *Cayumers*, whom the *Parsis*, from respect to his memory, consider as the first of men, although they believe in an *universal deluge* before his reign.

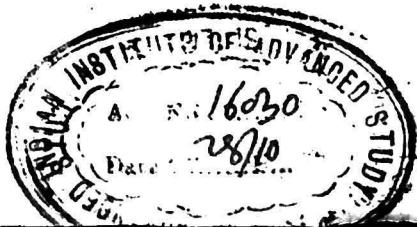
With the religion of the old *Persians* their *philosophy* (or as much as we know of it) was intimately connected; for they were assiduous observers of the luminaries, which they adored and established, according to *Mohsan*, who confirms in some degree the fragments of *Berosus*, a number of arti-

ficial cycles with distinct names, which seem to indicate a knowledge of the period in which the equinoxes appear to revolve. They are said also to have known the most wonderful powers of nature, and thence to have acquired the fame of magicians and enchanters: but I will only detain you with a few remarks on that metaphysical theology which has been professed immemorially by a numerous sect of *Persians* and *Hindus*, was carried in part into *Greece*, and prevails even now among the learned *Muselmans*, who sometimes avow it without reserve. The modern philosophers of this persuasion are called *Sufis*, either from the *Greek* word for a *sage*, or from the *woollen* mantle which they used to wear in some provinces of *Persia*: their fundamental tenets are, that nothing exists absolutely but *God*; that the human soul is an emanation from his essence, and though divided for a time from its heavenly source, will be finally reunited with it; that the highest possible happiness will arise from its reunion; and that the chief good of mankind in this transitory world, consists in as perfect an *union* with the Eternal Spirit as the incumbrances of a mortal frame will allow; that for this purpose they should break all *connection* (or *taalluk*, as they call it) with extrinsic objects, and pass through life without *attachments*, as a swimmer in the ocean strikes freely without the impediment of clothes; that they should be straight and free as the cypress, whose fruit is hardly perceptible, and not sink under a load, like fruit-trees *attached* to a trellis; that, if mere earthly charms have power to influence the soul, the *idea* of celestial beauty must overwhelm it in extatic delight; that for want of apt words to express the divine perfections and the ardour of devotion, we must borrow such expressions as approach the nearest to our ideas, and speak of *Beauty* and *Love* in a transcendent and mystical sense; that, like a *reed* torn from its native

bank, like *wax* separated from its delicious honey, the son of man bewails its disunion with *melancholy music*, and sheds burning tears, like the lighted taper waiting passionately for the moment of its extinction, as a disengagement from earthly trammels, and the means of returning to its Only Beloved. Such in part (for I omit the minuter and more subtil metaphysics of the *Sufis*, which are mentioned in the *Dabistan*) is the wild and enthusiastic religion of the modern *Persian* poets, especially of the sweet *Hafiz* and the great *Maulavi*: such is the system of the *Vedanti* philosophers and best lyric poets of *India*; and, as it was a system of the highest antiquity in both nations, it may be added to the many other proofs of an immemorial affinity between them.

III. On the ancient *monuments* of *Persian* sculpture and architecture, we have already made such observations as were sufficient for our purpose; nor will you be surprized at the diversity between the figures at *Elephanta*, which are manifestly *Hindu*, and those at *Persepolis*, which are merely *Sabian*, if you concur with me in believing that the *Takhti Femshid* was erected after the time of *Cayumers*, when the *Brahmans* had migrated from *Iran*, and when their intricate mythology had been superseded by the simpler adoration of the planets and of fire.

IV. As to the *sciences* or *arts* of the old *Persians*, I have little to say; and no complete evidence of them seems to exist. *Mohsan* speaks more than once of ancient verses in the *Pahlavi* language; and *Bahman* assured me, that some scanty remains of them had been preserved: their music and painting, which *Nizami* celebrated, have irrecoverably perished; and in regard to *Mani*, the painter and impostor, whose book of drawings, called *Artang*, which he pretended to be



divine, is supposed to have been destroyed by the *Chinese*, in whose dominions he had sought refuge,—the whole tale is too modern to throw any light on the questions before us concerning the origin of nations and the inhabitants of the primitive world.

Thus has it been proved by clear evidence and plain reasoning, that a powerful monarchy was established in *Iran* long before the *Assyrian*, or *Pishdadi*, government: that it was in truth a *Hindu* monarchy, though if any chuse to call it *Cusian*, *Casdean*, or *Scythian*, we shall not enter into a debate on mere names; that it subsisted many centuries, and that its history has been engrafted on that of the *Hindus*, who founded the monarchies of *Ayodhya* and *Indraprestha*; that the language of the first *Persian* empire was the mother of the *Sanscrit*, and consequently of the *Zend* and *Parsi*, as well as of *Greek*, *Latin*, and *Gothic*; that the language of the *Assyrians* was the parent of *Chaldaic* and *Pahlavi*, and that the primary *Tartarian* language also had been current in the same empire; although, as the *Tartars* had no books or even letters, we cannot with certainty trace their unpolished and variable idioms. We discover, therefore in *Persia*, at the earliest dawn of history, the *three* distinct races of men, whom we described on former occasions, as possessors of *India*, *Arabia*, *Tartary*; and whether they were collected in *Iran* from distant regions, or diverged from it as from a common centre, we shall easily determine by the following considerations. Let us observe, in the first place, the central position of *Iran*, which is bounded by *Arabia*, by *Tartary*, and by *India*; whilst *Arabia* lies contiguous to *Iran* only, but is remote from *Tartary*, and divided even from the skirts of *India* by a considerable gulf; no country, therefore, but *Persia* seems likely to have

sent forth its colonies to all the kingdoms of *Asia*. The *Brahmans* could never have migrated from *India* to *Iran*, because they are expressly forbidden by their oldest existing laws to leave the region which they inhabit at this day; the *Arabs* have not even a tradition of an emigration into *Persia* before *Mohammed*, nor had they indeed any inducement to quit their beautiful and extensive domains; and as to the *Tartars*, we have no trace in history of their departure from their plains and forests till the invasion of the *Medes*, who, according to etymologists, were the sons of *Maddai*; and even they were conducted by princes of an *Assyrian* family. The three races, therefore, whom we have already mentioned (and more than three we have not yet found) migrated from *Iran* as from their common country; and thus the *Saxon Chronicle*, I presume from good authority, brings the first inhabitants of *Britain* from *Armenia*; while a late very learned writer concludes, after all his laborious researches, that the *Goths* or *Scythians* came from *Persia*; and another contends with great force, that both the *Irish* and old *Britons* proceeded severally from the borders of the *Caspian*; a coincidence of conclusions from different media by persons wholly unconnected, which could scarce have happened if they were not grounded on solid principles. We may therefore hold this proposition firmly established, that *Iran*, or *Persia* in its largest sense, was the true centre of population, of knowledge, of languages, and of arts; which, instead of travelling westward only, as it has been fancifully supposed, or eastward, as might with equal reason have been asserted, were expanded in all directions to all the regions of the world in which the *Hindu* race had settled under various denominations: but whether *Asia* has not produced other races of men, distinct from the *Hindus*, the *Arabs*, or the *Tartars*; or whether any apparent diversity may not have sprung from an intermixture of those three

in different proportions, must be the subject of a future inquiry. There is another question of more immediate importance, which you, gentlemen, only can decide; namely, "By what means we can preserve our Society from dying gradually away; as it has advanced gradually to its present (shall I say flourish-
 "ing or languishing?) state." It has subsisted five years without any expence to the members of it, until the first volume of our Transactions was published; and the price of that large volume, if we compare the different values of money in *Bengal* and in *England*, is not more than equal to the *annual* contribution towards the charges of the Royal Society by each of its fellows, who may not have chosen to compound for it on his admission. This I mention not from an idea that any of us could object to the purchase of one copy at least, but from a wish to inculcate the necessity of our common exertions in promoting the sale of the work, both here and in *London*. In vain shall we meet as a literary body, if our meetings shall cease to be supplied with original dissertations and memoirs; and in vain shall we collect the most interesting papers, if we cannot publish them occasionally without exposing the superintendents of the Company's press, who undertake to print them at their own hazard, to the danger of a considerable loss. By united efforts the *French* have compiled their stupendous repositories of universal knowledge; and by united efforts only can we hope to rival them, or to diffuse over our own country and the rest of *Europe* the light attainable by our *Asiatic Researches*.

IV.

A LETTER

FROM

THE LATE HENRY VANSITTART, ESQ.

TO THE PRESIDENT.

Sir,

HAVING some time ago met with a *Persian* abridgment, composed by *Maulwî Khairuddin*, of the *asrarul Afaghinah*, or the secrets of the *Afghans*, a book written in the *Pushto* language by *Husain*, the son of *Sabir*, the son of *Khizr*, the disciple of *Hazrat Shah Kasim Sulaimani*, whose tomb is in *Chunargur*, I was induced to translate it. Although it opens with a very wild description of the origin of that tribe, and contains a narrative which can by no means be offered upon the whole as a serious and probable history; yet I conceive that the knowledge of what a nation suppose themselves to be, may be interesting to a Society like this, as well as of what they really are. Indeed, the commencement of almost every history is fabulous; and the most enlightened nations, after they have arrived at that degree of civilization and importance which has enabled and induced them to commemorate their actions, have always found a vacancy at their outset, which invention, or at best presumption, must supply. Such fictions appear at first in the form of traditions; and having in this shape amused successive generations by a gratification of their national vanity, they are committed to writing, and acquire the authority of history.

As a kingdom is an assemblage of component parts, condensed by degrees from smaller associations of individuals to their general union, so history is a combination of the transactions not only of the different tribes, but even of the individuals of the nation of which it treats: each particular narrative in such a general collection must be summary and incomplete. Biography, therefore as well as descriptions of the manners, actions, and even opinions of such tribes as are connected with a great kingdom, are not only entertaining in themselves but useful, as they explain and throw a light upon the history of the nation.

Under these impressions I venture to lay before the Society the translation of an abridged history of the *Afghans*; a tribe at different times subject to and always connected with the kingdoms of *Persia* and *Hindustan*. I also submit a specimen of their language, which is called by them *Pukhto*; but this word is softened in *Persian* into *Pushto*.

I am, Sir,

with the greatest respect,

your most obedient humble servant,

HENRY VANSITTART.

Calcutta, March 3, 1784.

