

THE CHRISTIAN MIRROR.

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"MANY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO, AND KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE INCREASED."—DANIEL xii. 4.

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THE TRAVELLER.

THE NESTORIANS, OR THE LOST TRIBES.

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CHAP. III.—(Continued)

On this part of my route I was favoured with the agreeable society and kind attentions of Captain Conolly, an intelligent English officer, who had, through many dangers, reached Mardin, on his way to India with despatches. I felt the exhilaration of returning strength after my late severe illness; and our journey was enlivened with the sight of fleet herds of antelopes, which scoured the boundless desert, and a slight altercation with a band of Koordish banditti, who lay in ambush to intercept and rob us. But we gained possession of an eminence that commanded their position, and, with a small party of Arab horsemen with long spears, who had been sent for our protection by the Chief whose encampment we had recently left, we presented such a formidable aspect that the robbers lowered their guns, and suffered us to pass quietly on our way.

At Mosul I found the country in a more quiet state, under the rule of their vigorous pasha. My observations upon this place were soon completed, and my preparations made to proceed on my route. The Nestorians who once inhabited this district have all embraced the Romish faith, and become *Chaldeans*, as the Papal Nestorians are usually called. They mostly inhabit the villages on the east of the Tigris; and Elkosh, with its convent of Rabban Hormuz, is the chief seat of their influence. Their patriarch resides at Bagdad, where there are but few of their people. He was educated at the Propaganda in Rome, and is a zealous supporter of his holiness the Pope. He receives his appointment directly from Rome, and is in no way connected with the Nestorian Church. That church has but the single patriarch, Mar Shimon, who resides in the mountains near Julamerk, and who will be hereafter described. The lineal descendants of the patriarch Elias of Elkosh are all connected with the Church of Rome, and the last pretender to that sect is now a bishop of the papal Chaldean Church. In the year 1834 he went to Ooroomiah, and told the Nestorians of that district that he had returned to the ancient faith of his fathers, and that he would bring over all the Chaldeans to the same faith, if the Nestorians would acknowledge him as their spiritual head. But it afterward proved that his professions were quite faithless: and he has since been actively engaged in efforts to proselyte the Nestorians to the papal religion.

There are about five hundred families of the Jacobite, and as many of the papal Syrians, in Mosul and its vicinity; but the Jacobite Syrians have their chief seat in Mesopotamia, and in their doctrines and practice they are more allied to the Armenians than to the Nestorians.

On the morning of the 7th of October I bade adieu to Mosul, with its thirty thousand inmates, on my way towards the unexplored mountains of central Koordistan, accompanied by two Nestorians of Persia, a Koordish muletter, and a Turkish cavass (police officer) from the pasha.

My passport was demanded and examined at the gate of the city, a formality of recent date in Turkey, and quite unknown in Persia. We came at once upon the Tigris, from which the city is supplied with water, conveyed in leathern sacks upon horses and mules, and in pitchers upon the shoulders of the poor. The bridge of boats was thronged with a motley crowd of Koords, Arabs, Turks, Christians, and Jews, clad in their various

and grotesque costumes; and, in their confused jargon of dissonant voices, bearing unequivocal testimony to the curse of Babel. Their camels, mules, horses, bullocks, and donkeys, were laden with the various produce of the country, with which the markets are crowded at an early hour in the morning, especially at this season of the year, when grain, fruits, melons, and vegetables are cheap and abundant. Some of the loads had fallen upon the bridge, increasing the confusion, which already threatened to precipitate man and beast into the deep and rapid current of the Tigris, which was then about 150 yards wide at that place, though much broader at high water. The Orientals are agreed that this and the Euphrates are two of the rivers which watered the paradise of Eden; and the original name Hiddekel, or Degleh, is preserved by the Christians and Jews; but the other two rivers they are unable to identify, and their notions of the situation of that primitive cradle of our race are altogether confused or visionary. But, while the blissful bowers of Eden are no more, the fruit of the fall everywhere abounds, and fills these fair portions of the earth with tears and blood.

The passage of the Tigris transferred me from Mesopotamia into Assyria, and I stood upon the ruins of Nineveh, "that great city," where the prophet Jonah proclaimed the dread message of Jehovah to so many repenting thousands, whose deep humiliation averted for a time the impending ruin. But when her proud monarchs had scourged idolatrous Israel, and carried the ten tribes into captivity, and raised their hands against Judah and the holy city, the inspired strains of the eloquent Nahum, clothed in terrible sublimity as they were, met their full accomplishment in the utter desolation of one of the largest cities on which the sun ever shone. "Nineveh is laid waste! who will bemoan her? She is empty, and void, and waste; her nobles dwell in the dust; her people are scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them."

Where her gorgeous palaces once resounded to the strains of music, and the shouts of revelry, a few black tents of the wandering Arab and Turkoman are now scattered among the shapeless mounds of earth and rubbish—the ruins of the city—as if in mockery of her departed glory; while their tenants were engaged in the fitting employment of weaving "sackcloth of hair," as if for the mourning attire of the world's great emporium, whose "merchants" were "multiplied above the stars of heaven." The largest mound, from which very ancient relics and inscriptions are dug, is now crowned with the Moslem village of Neby Yunas, or the prophet Jonah, where his remains are said to be interred, and over which has been reared, as his mausoleum, a temple of Islam.

Soon after leaving the ruins of Nineveh, we came in sight of two villages of the Yezidees, the reputed worshippers of the devil. Large and luxuriant olive-groves, with their rich green foliage and fruit just ripening in the autumnal sun, imparted such a cheerful aspect to the scene as soon dispelled whatever of pensive melancholy had gathered around me while treading upon the dust of departed greatness. Several white sepulchres of Yezidee sheikhs attracted attention as I approached the villages. They were in the form of fluted cones or pyramids, standing upon quadrangular bases, and rising to the height of some twenty feet or more. We became the guests of one of the chief Yezidees of Baasheks, whose dwelling, like others in the place, was a rude stone structure, with a flat terrace roof. Coarse felt carpets were spread for our feet in the open court, and a formal welcome was given us, but it was evidently not a very cordial one. My Turkish cavass

understood the reason, and at once removed it. Our host had mistaken me for a Mohammedan, towards whom the Yezidees cherish a settled aversion. As soon as I was introduced to him as a Christian, and he had satisfied himself that this was my true character, his whole deportment was changed. He at once gave me a new and cordial welcome, and set about supplying our wants with new alacrity. He seemed to feel that he had exchanged a Moslem foe for a Christian friend, and I became quite satisfied of the truth of what I had often heard, that the Yezidees are friendly towards the professors of Christianity.

They are said to cherish a high regard for the Christian religion, of which clearly they have some corrupt remains. They practise the rite of baptism, make the sign of the cross, so emblematical of Christianity in the East—put off their shoes, and kiss the threshold, when they enter a Christian church; and it is said that they often speak of wine as the blood of Christ, hold the cup with both hands, after the sacramental manner of the East, when drinking it, and, if a drop chance to fall on the ground, they gather it up with religious care.

They believe in one supreme God, and, in some sense at least, in Christ as a Saviour. They have also a remnant of Sabianism, or the religion of the ancient fire-worshippers. They bow in adoration before the rising sun, and kiss his first rays when they strike on a wall or other object near them; and they will not blow out a candle with their breath, or spit in the fire, lest they should defile that sacred element.

Circumcision, and the passover, or a sacrificial festival allied to the passover in time and circumstance, seem also to identify them with the Jews; and, altogether, they certainly present a most singular chapter in the history of man.

Their system of faith has points of strong resemblance to the ancient Manichean heresy; and it is probable that they are a remnant of that heretical sect. This idea derives support from the fact, that they seem to have originated in the region where Manes first laboured and propagated his tenets with the greatest success; and from the coincidence of the name of their reputed founder, or most revered teacher, Adde, with an active disciple of Manes, of the same name and place of abode. If Adde of the Yezidees and of the Manicheans was one and the same, the circumstance at once reconciles their remains of Christian forms and sentiments, with the testimony of the Syrian and Nestorian Christians around them, to their Christian origin, and throws important light upon the early history of this remarkable people. Their Christian attachments, if not their origin, should at least plead strongly to enlist the sympathies of Christians in their behalf, while it holds out cheering encouragement for us to labour for their good.

That they are really the worshippers of the devil can only be true, if at all, in a modified sense, though it is true that they pay him so much deference as to refuse to speak of him disrespectfully, (perhaps for fear of his vengeance,) and, instead of pronouncing his name, they call him the "lord of the evening," or "prince of darkness;" also, Sheikh Maazen, or Exalted Chief. Some of them say that Satan was a fallen angel with whom God was angry; but he will at some future day be restored to favour, and there is no reason why they should treat him with disrespect. It may be found that their notions of the evil being are derived from the Ahriman of the ancient-magi, and the secondary or evil deity of the Manicheans, which was evidently ingrafted on the Oriental philosophy. Some of the ancient Nestorian writers speak of them as of Hebrew