

## TRACES OF HENRY MARTYN.

"Having received an invitation to dine, or rather sup, with a Persian party in the city, I went and found a number of guests assembled. The conversation was varied, grave, and gay; chiefly of the latter complexion. Poetry was often the subject, sometimes philosophy, and sometimes politics, prevailed. Among the topics discussed religion was one. There are so many sects in Persia, especially if we include the free-thinking classes, that the questions which grow out of such a discussion constitute no trifling resource for conversation. I was called upon though with perfect good breeding and politeness, to give an account of the tenets of my faith; and I confess myself sometimes embarrassed by the pointed queries of my companions. Among the guests was a person who took but little part in the conversation, and who appeared to be intimate with none but the master of the house. He was a man below the middle age, of a serious countenance and mild deportment; they called him Mahomed Raheem.—I thought that he frequently observed me with great attention, and watched every word I uttered—especially when the subject of religion was discussing. Once, when I expressed myself with some levity, this individual fixed his eyes upon me with such a peculiar expression of surprise, regret, and reproof, that I was struck to the very soul, and felt a strange mysterious wonder who this person could be. I asked privately one of the party, who told me that he had been educated for a mollah, but had never officiated; and that he was a man of considerable learning, and much respected; but lived retired, and seldom visited even his most intimate friends. My informant added, that his only inducement to join the party had been the expectation of meeting an Englishman, as he was much attached to the English nation, and had studied our language and learning. This information increased my curiosity, which I determined to seek an opportunity of gratifying, by conversing with the object of it. A few days afterwards I called upon Mahomed Raheem, and found him reading a volume of Cowper's poems. This circumstance led to an immediate discussion of English poetry, and English literature in general. I was perfectly astonished at the clear and accurate conception which he had formed upon these subjects, and at the precision with which he expressed himself in English. We discussed on these and congenial topics for nearly two hours, till at length I ventured to sound his opinions on the subject of religion.

"You are a mollah, I am informed." "No," said he, "I was educated at a Madrassa (college), but I have never felt an inclination to be one of the priesthood." "The exposition

of your religious volume,' I rejoined, 'demands a pretty close application to study, before a person can be qualified to teach the doctrines of the Koran. I understand he must thoroughly examine and digest volumes of comments, which ascertain the sense of the text and the application of its injunctions. This is a laborious preparation if a man be disposed conscientiously to fulfil his important functions.' As he made no remark, I continued, 'Our Scriptures are their own expositors. We are solicitous only that they should be read: and although some particular passages are not without difficulties, arising from the inherent obscurity of language, the faults of translations, or the error of copyists, yet it is our boast that the authority of the Holy Scriptures is confirmed by the perspicuity and simplicity of their style, as well as precepts.'

"I was surprised that he made no reply to these observations. At the hazard of being deemed importunate, I proceeded to panegyrize the leading principles of Christianity, more particularly in respect to their moral and practical character; and happened among other reflections to suggest, that, as no other concern was of so much importance to the human race as religion, and as only one faith could be right, the subject admitted not of being regarded as indifferent, though too many did so regard it. 'Do not you esteem it so?' he asked. 'Certainly not,' I replied. 'Then your indifference at the table of our friend Meerza Reeza, when the topic of religion was under consideration, was merely assumed, out of complaisance to Mussulmans, I presume?'

"I remembered the occasion to which he alluded, and recognised in his countenance the same expression, compounded half of pity, half of surprise which it then exhibited. I owned that I had acted inconsistently, perhaps incautiously, and imprudently: but I made the best defence I could; and disavowed, in the most solemn manner, any premeditated design to contemn the religion which I profess.

"I am heartily glad I was deceived," he said; 'for sincerity in religion is our paramount duty. What we are, we should never be ashamed of appearing to be.' 'Are you a sincere Mussulman, then?' I boldly asked.—An interval struggle seemed, for an instant, to agitate his visage. at length he answered mildly, 'No!' 'You are not a sceptic or a free-thinker?' 'No, indeed, I am not.' 'What are you then? be you sincere. Are you a Christian?' 'I am,' he replied.

"I should vainly endeavour to describe the astonishment which seized me at this declaration. I surveyed Mahomed Raheem at first, with a look which, judging from its reflection from his benign countenance must have betokened suspicion or even contempt. The