

the most noble of them all, and his ancestors, for several generations, had ranked among the princes of Mecca, and the keepers of the keys of the Caaba, its sacred temple. His father's name was Abdallah, one of the thirteen sons of Abdol Motaleb, the chief personage in his day among the Koreish, and inheriting from his father Hashem the principal place in the government of Mecca, and succeeding him in the custody of the Caaba. This Hashem, the great-grandfather of Mohammed, was the most distinguished name in all the line of his predecessors, and from him not only is the appellation of Hashemites bestowed upon the kindred of the prophet, but even to this day, the chief magistrate, both at Mecca and Medina, who must always be of the race of Mohammed, is invariably styled "The Prince of the Hashemites." The name of Mohammed's mother was Amia, whose parentage was traceable also to a distinguished family of the same tribe. Her lot was envied in gaining the hand of the son of Abdol Motaleb, as the surpassing beauty of his person is said to have ravished the hearts of a hundred maidens of Arabia, who were left, by his choice of Amina, to sigh over the wreck of their fondest hopes.

Abdallah, though the son of a rich and princely father, was possessed of but little wealth, and as he died while his son was an infant, or, as some say, before he was born, it is probable that that little was seized with the characteristic rapacity of the Arabs, and shared among his twelve surviving brothers, the powerful uncles of Mohammed. Although the laws of the Koran, in respect to inheritances, promulgated by the prophet himself, breathe more of the spirit of equity and kindness; yet the pagan Arabs, previous to his time, as we learn from Eastern writers, were wont to treat widows and orphans with great injustice, frequently denying them any share in the inheritances of their fathers and husbands, under the pretence that it ought to be distributed among those only who were able to bear arms, and disposing of widows, even against their own consent, as a part of their husband's possessions. The fatherless Mohammed, accordingly, faring like the rest of his countrymen, received, in the distribution of the patrimony, no more than five camels and an Ethiopian female slave.

The Moslem writers, in order to represent the birth of their pretended prophet as equally marvellous with that of Moses or of Christ, the ancient messengers of God who preceded him, have reported a tissue of astonishing prodigies said to have occurred in connexion with that event. If the reader will receive their statements with the same implicit faith with which they seem to be delivered, he must acknowledge, that at the moment when the favoured infant was ushered into the world, a flood of light burst forth with him and illuminated every part of Syria; that the waters of the Lake Sawa were entirely dried up, so that a city was built upon its bottom; that an earthquake threw down fourteen towers of the king of Persia's palace; that the sacred fire of the Persians was extinguished, and all the evil spirits which had inhabited the moon and stars were expelled together from their celestial abodes, nor could they ever after animate idols or deliver oracles on earth. The child also, if w