

Sovereign, they could protect and encourage their fellow-Christians. A Bishopric was established in the new Mussulman settlement of Cufa, and shortly afterwards the seat of the Patriarchate was transferred from Seleucia and Ctesiphon, now falling into decay, to Baghdad, the new and flourishing capital of the Commanders of the Faithful.

We are indebted to the Chaldeans for the preservation of numerous precious fragments of Greek learning; as the Greeks were, many centuries before, to the ancestors of the Chaldeans for the records of astronomy and the elements of Eastern science. In the celebrated schools of Edessa, Nisibis, Seleucia, or Mahuza—as it is frequently called by the Syrian chroniclers,—and of Dorkena, the early languages of the country, the Chaldee and Syriac, as well as Greek, were publicly taught; and there were masters of the sciences of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy, and medicine, whose treatises were preserved in public libraries.* The works of Greek physicians and philosophers had at an early period been translated into Chaldee. They excited the curiosity of the Caliphs, who were then the encouragers and patrons of learning; and by their orders they were translated by Nestorian Chaldeans into Arabic. Amongst the works confided by the Caliph Al Mamoun to his Chaldean subjects, we find recorded those of Aristotle and Galen; and others in the Greek, Persian, Chaldee, and Egyptian languages. He also sent learned Nestorians into Syria, Armenia, and Egypt, to collect manuscripts, and to obtain the assistance of the most learned men. When asked by a rigid Mussulman how he could trust the translation of any book to a Christian, he is said to have replied: "If I confide to him the care of my body, in which dwell my soul and my spirit, wherefore should I not intrust him with the words of a person whom I know not, especially when they relate to matters which have no reference to our faith or to his faith?" Assemani, who wrote the history of the Nestorian and Monophysite Churches, gives a long list of the translators of, and commentators upon, the treatises of Aristotle; and a Syriac writer has left an extensive catalogue of the works of Chaldee authors.

The Chaldean Patriarchs were not insensible to the growing power of the Tartar kings, whose descendants afterwards overturned the throne of the Caliphs, and overran nearly the whole of Asia. At an early period their missionaries had penetrated into Tartary, and from the sixth century, up to the time of the conquest of Baghdad by Hulaku Khan, in the middle of the thirteenth, they had possessed great influence over the Tribes of Turkistan. They even boasted of the conversion to Christianity of more than one Tartar king, amongst whom was the celebrated Prester, or Presbyter, John. Of this strange personage, who plays so conspicuous a part in the early annals of the Church, and of whom so many fables have been related that his very existence has been doubted, there remains a curious letter. It may have been composed for him by the Chaldean missionaries who accompanied him in his wanderings, or it may be a forgery, after their return to Europe, by some ecclesiastics who had visited his court. It contains, however, a singular and amusing description of the power and state of these Tartar kings, and shows the exaggerated ideas which prevailed regarding them. Many particulars contained in this letter are confirmed by Marco Polo, Sir John Mandeville, and other travellers; and as this circumstance goes far to prove, that it was at least written by one who had seen the country and people he describes, I have made some extracts from it. It is addressed to Alexius Comnenus, the Greek Emperor.

"Prester John, by the grace of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, the king of kings, to Alexius Comnenus, the governor of Constan-

tinople, health and a happy end. Our Majesty has been informed that thou hast learnt our excellence, and that mention has been made to thee of our greatness. That which we desire to know is, whether thou holdest with us the true faith, and whether in all things thou believest in our Lord Jesus Christ?

"If thou desirest to know our greatness, and the excellence of our might, and over what lands our power extendeth, know and believe, without doubting, that we are Prester John, the servant of God: that we excel in all riches under Heaven, and in virtue and in power all the kings of the earth. Seventy kings are our tributaries. We are a devout Christian, and we every where protect, and nourish with alms, such poor Christians as are within the empire of our clemency. We have made a vow to visit the sepulchre of our Lord with a great army, as it becometh the glory of our Majesty, to wage war against and humiliate the enemies of the cross of Christ, and to exalt His holy name.* Our magnificence ruleth over the three Indias; and our territories stretch beyond the furthestmost India, in which resteth the body of the blessed Apostle, Thomas; thence through the wilderness they extend towards the rising of the sun, and, returning towards the going-down thereof, to Babylon, the Deserted, even to the Tower of Babel. Seventy-two provinces obey us, a few of which are Christian provinces; and each hath its own king. And all their kings are our tributaries. In our territories are found elephants, dromedaries, and camels, and almost every kind of beast that is under Heaven. Our dominions flow with milk and honey. In one portion of our territories no poisons can harm; in another grow all kinds of pepper; and a third is so thick with groves that it resembleth a forest, and is full of serpents in every part. There is also a sandy sea without water. Three days' journey from this sea there are mountains from which descend rivers of stones. Near these mountains in a desert between inhospitable hills. Under ground there floweth a rivulet, to which there appareth to be no access; and this rivulet falleth into a river of greater size, wherein men of our dominions enter, and obtain therefrom precious stones in great abundance. Beyond this river are ten tribes of Jews, who, although they pretend to have their own kings, are nevertheless our servants and tributaries.† In another of our provinces, near the torrid zone, are worms, which in our tongue are called Salamanders. These worms can only live in fire, and make a skin around them as the silk-worm. This skin is carefully spun by the ladies of our palace, and from it we have cloth for our common use. This cloth can only be washed in a bright fire.‡ Our army is preceded by thirteen great crosses of gold and precious stones;§ but when we ride out without state, a cross unadorned with figures, gold, or jewels, that we may be ever mindful of our Lord Jesus Christ, and a silver vase filled with gold, that all men may know that we are the king of kings, are carried before us. We visit yearly the body of the holy prophet Daniel, which is in Babylon, the Desert.|| Our palace is of ebony and shittim wood, and cannot be injured by fire. On its roof, at each end, are two golden

* A similar vow was exacted by Haiton, the Christian King of Armenia, from Mango Chan, the fourth Emperor of the Tartars in 1253. (Histoire Orientale, ou des Tartares, par Haiton, parent du Roi d'Arménie Bergeron, Collect. de Voyages, vol. ii.)

† In Marco Polo's Travels (lib. ii. ch. 2) Jews are described as being in the army of the Emperor Cublai. It seems, therefore, that it was not in this century alone that the lost tribes were traced to Tartary.

‡ The Salamander is also described by Marco Polo (lib. i. ch. 47). The cloth is mentioned in the inscription on the celebrated stone of Se-gan-foo (D'Herbelot, vol. iv. p. 380). This fable, or exaggeration, which was probably of very early date, appears therefore to have been current amongst the Tartars or amongst the Chaldeans.

§ The army of Naïm, when he rebelled against Cublai, was preceded by a cross. (Marco Polo, lib. ii. c. 6.)

|| According to tradition the tomb of Daniel was preserved amongst the ruins of Susa, or in a valley of the Bakhtiyari. We have no other mention of its existence at Babylon.

apples, and in each apple are two carbuncles, that the gold may shine by day and the carbuncles give light by night. The greater gates are of sardonyx, mingled with horn, so that none may enter with poison; the lesser gates are of ebony. The windows are of crystal. The tables are of gold and amethyst, and the columns, which sustain them, are of ivory. The chamber in which we sleep is a wonderful work of gold and silver, and every manner of precious stones. Within it incense is ever burning. Our bed is of sapphire. We have the most beautiful wives. We feed daily 30,000 men, besides casual guests; and all these receive daily sums from our chamber, to nourish their horses, and to be otherwise employed. During each month we are served by seven kings (by each one in his turn), by sixty-five dukes, and by three hundred and sixty-five counts. In our hall there dine daily, sixty-five counts. In our hall there dine daily, on our right hand, twelve archbishops, on our left twenty bishops, besides the Patriarch of St. Thomas and the Protopapas of Salmas, and the Archiprotopapas of Susa, in which city is the throne of our glory and our imperial palace. Abbots, according to the number of the days in the year, minister to us in our chapel. Our butler is a primate and a king; our steward is an archbishop and a king; our chamberlain is a bishop and a king; our mareschal is an archbishop and a king; and our head cook is a king and an abbot; but we assume an inferior rank, and a more humble name, that we may prove our great humility."

The Chaldean missionaries do not appear to have had the same success with other Tartar monarchs as with Prester John. If they refused to embrace the Christian religion, there is, nevertheless, evidence to prove that their wives and children, in many instances, were amongst the converts. Their influence secured to the Christians the toleration of their religion, although it may not have been sufficient to enable them to extend it. Amongst those who married a Christian wife may be mentioned the celebrated Ginghis Khan, whose four children were probably brought up in the faith of their mother. The Metropolitan of the Tartar branch of the Chaldean church resided at Meru, or Merv. This city, built upon the ruins of the Margiana, Alexandria of the Macedonian conqueror, stood on the southwestern borders of those vast steppes which stretch eastwards to the frontiers of China; and formed, in the days of its prosperity, the principal station in the great caravan route between Persia and Bokhara, Balkh, Samarcand, and the cities of Transoxiana. These plains were subsequently occupied by roving Tartar tribes; the most numerous of which were known to the early Christian historians, as the Keraites. The chief of this tribe was looked upon as the sovereign of that great region. He resided in the city of Karakorum, at the foot of the mountains of Altai, the burial place of the kings of his race. It is singular that a Chaldean Patriarch first announced, in the hall of the Caliphs, the progress from the north of these innumerable hordes, which were destined, ere long, to sweep away the dynasty of the prophet, and to defile the palaces of Baghdad. The incident, as described by Eastern writers,* is highly interesting; and it so strikingly illustrates the manners of the people who now inhabit the city where the scene occurred, that it is worth recording.

The Chaldean Patriarch had received a letter from his Metropolitan at Samarcand, giving him an account of the new race which had appeared. He hastened to communicate the news to the Caliph, and read the letter before the divan, or assembly of councillors and chiefs. A people, numerous as the locust-cloud, had burst from the mountains between Thibet and Kotan, and were pouring down upon the fertile plains of Kashgar. They were commanded by seven kings, each at the head of 70,000 horsemen. The warriors were as swarthy as Indians. They used no

* Assemani, vol. iv. p. 943.

* Abulfaraj in Chronico Syriaco ad an. Hegiræ 488. Assemani, vol. iv. p. 487.