

II. THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIONS.

THE RELIGIONS OF PERSIA.

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THE prevailing religion of Persia at the present day is that of Mahomet. In the battle of Cadesiah in 636, Omar the son of Khettab defeated the Shah Yezdegerd, and captured the palladium of Iran, the leathern flag adorned with precious stones, which, more than two thousand years before, had been Gavaah the blacksmith's apron raised in revolt against ancient tyranny. But the Mahometanism of Persia then imposed upon the people is not that of Turkey. In the latter country the Sultan, like the Czar of Russia, is the head alike of Church and State; the creed is the unalterable law of the Koran: the universal sect is that of the Sunnees; and Mahomet is the sole object, after God or Allah, of adoration and of oaths. In Persia, on the other hand, the Shah is more in conflict with the Church than is King Humbert of Italy with that of Rome; the creed is progressive, emanating from a living infallible chief Mashtaheed or Mahometan Pope; the universal sect is that of the Sheehs who regard the Sunnees as heretics of the worst kind; and Ali the son-in-law of Mahomet, who claimed to possess his Noor, light or spirit, is the object of worship and

the sanction of oaths. The Sheehs look for the appearing of Al Mahdi, the Guide, a Mahometan Messiah, whose title was impudently assumed by the Rebel of the Soudan.

There have been Christians in Persia since the third century, of this we are well assured, but they must have had representation there long before, since among the converts at Pentecost there were Parthians, Medes, and Elamites belonging to that country. From it also came the Magi, or wise men of the East, to adore the infant Saviour. So greatly did the Christian religion flourish in Iran that, in the thirty-five years persecution, at the hands of the fire-worshippers, which began in 333, no fewer than "10,000 priests, monks, and nuns were executed, while the number of martyrs among the laity exceeded all computation." In 498 the whole Persian Church adopted the Nestorian form and creed which had arisen in Syria some sixty years before and which were purer by far than those of the so-called Catholic Church. Great missionary work was done by the Nestorians in India and China and among the Tartar and Mongol tribes. But a small remnant of from forty