

THE TRAVELLER.

THE NESTORIANS, OR THE LOST TRIBES.

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CHAP. V.

Arrival at Dûree.—Intercourse with the Nestorian Bishop.—View from the Mountains.—Arrival among the Independent Tribes.—Remarkable Incident.—Klud reception.

OCTOBER 15.—I proceeded at an early hour towards the borders of the independent Nestorian country. Their nearest villages are about twelve hours distant; but some of their men cultivate a portion of the border district of Dûree, where one of their bishops resides, about six or seven hours from Amâdieh. I engaged mules to this place, but they could not be brought to the town, lest the government officers should seize them for their own use, without making any remuneration for their services. I therefore descended from the fortress on foot. The priest kindly sent his brother to introduce me to the bishop at Dûree, and I found his presence important.

My Koordish cavass from the chief at Akra was still with me; but he was very reluctant to proceed, lest he should fall into the hands of some of the independent Nestorians, who are represented as a most formidable race of people. The most extravagant stories are told of them, and it is said that, when any of them come to Amâdieh to trade, they are not allowed to remain in the town over night, lest they should obtain possession of the fortress. They are regarded as almost invincible, and are represented as having the power of vanquishing their enemies by some magical spell in their looks. On one occasion, they came and drove away the flocks of the Koords from under the very walls of Amâdieh, in return for some aggression upon themselves. And when the Raven-doo Koords, after subduing all the surrounding region, threatened their country, the Nestorians are said to have seized six or seven of the Koords, cut off their heads, and hung them up over a narrow bridge which led to their district, as a warning to the Koords who might attempt to invade them. That such stories are told and believed by their Moslem neighbours, is sufficient evidence of the terror inspired by their name.

"To the borders of their country," said the vigorous pasha of Mosul, "I will be responsible for your safety; you may put gold upon your head, and you will have nothing to fear; but I warn you that I can protect you no farther. Those mountain infidels (Christians) acknowledge neither pashas nor kings, but from time immemorial every man has been his own king!" To the borders of their country I therefore required the attendance of the cavass, as a protection against the Koords, and we set out through a bold rocky defile over the wild mountains on our north and northeast.

As we approached the village of Dûree, after a loilsome ride of seven hours over the rough mountain-passes, we were hailed by several of the Mountain Nestorians from the independent district of Tiary, who demanded who we were, what we wanted, whither going, &c.; and the demand was repeated by each successive party we passed, till finally the cry seemed to issue from the very rocks over our head, "Who are you? whence do you come? what do you want?" A cry so often repeated in the deep Syriac gutturals of their stentorian voices, was not a little startling; and then their bold bearing, and a certain fierceness of expression, and spirited action, and intonation of voice, with the scrutinizing inquiry, whether we were Catholics or bad men whom they might rob, (as ðne inquired of our Nestorian guide,) bereft my poor cavass of the little courage that had sustained him thus far; and he manifested so much real alarm, that I yielded to his earnest request, and dismissed him as soon as we reached the house of the bishop, who assured me that his presence was no longer desirable.

The people soon satisfied themselves of my character and friendly intentions, and, finding that I spoke their language, seemed to regard me as one of their own people, and gathered around me in the most friendly manner, but without that familiar sycophancy so common among the Christian subjects of Persian and Turkish dominion. The next day, they came from all directions for medical aid. One man became quite alarmed at being

made so sick by an emetic; but, when it was over, such was his relief that he wanted some more of the same medicine; and others, instead of asking me to prescribe for them, often asked for "*derman d'moritha*," or medicine for bile.

The bishop, who is a most patriarchal personage, with a long white beard, was very cordial, and took me into his venerable church, a very ancient structure, made by enlarging a natural cave by means of heavy stone walls in front of the precipitous rock. It stood far up on the side of the mountain, and within, it was dark as midnight.

The attentive old bishop took my hand, and guided it to a plain stone cross which lay upon the altar, supposing I would manifest my veneration or devotional feelings after their own custom, by pressing it to my lips. I must confess that there is something affecting in this simple outward expression, as practised by the Nestorians, who mingle with it none of the image worship, or the other corrupt observances of the Roman Catholic Church. May it not be that the abuse of such symbols by the votaries of the Roman see, has carried us Protestants to the other extreme, when we utterly condemn the simple memento of the cross? The old bishop sleeps in his solitary church, so as to be in readiness to attend his devotions before daylight in the morning; and he was much gratified by the present of a box of *loco focos*, which I gave him to ignite his lamp. A number of beehives, the property of the church, were kept here, and the honey from them was regarded as peculiarly valuable. It was certainly very fine. Red squirrels were skipping among the black walnut trees—the first of the squirrel tribe I had seen in the East.

A high range of mountains still separated me from the proper country of the independent Nestorians. At Mosul, I was strongly advised not to venture into their country until I should send, and obtain an escort from the patriarch; but, after mature consideration, and free consultation with the bishop, I resolved to proceed at once; for by this course, I might gain the good will of the Nestorians, from the confidence I evinced in them, and also save eight or ten days' delay—a consideration of some importance on the eve of winter among these lofty mountains. The bishop volunteered to send an intelligent young Nestorian with me, and two others went to bring back the mules from Lezan, which is the first village of the independent tribe of Tiary, the nearest and by far the most powerful of the mountain tribes.

To enable me to secure a footing where, as I was told, I could neither ride on my mule nor walk with shoes, so precipitous was the mountain, I exchanged my wide Turkish boots for the bishop's sandals. These were wrought with hair-cord in such a manner as to defend the sole of the foot, and enable the wearer to secure a foothold where he might, without such protection, be hurled down the almost perpendicular mountain sides.

Thus equipped in native style, I set off on the 18th, at an early hour in the morning; and, after a toilsome ascent of an hour and a half, I found myself at the summit of the mountain, where a scene indescribably grand was spread out before me. The country of the independent Nestorians opened before my enraptured vision like a vast amphitheatre of wild, precipitous mountains, broken with deep, dark looking defiles and narrow gorges, into few of which the eye could penetrate so far as to gain a distinct view of the cheerful, smiling villages which have long been the secure abodes of the main body of the Nestorian Church. Here was the home of a hundred thousand Christians, around whom the arm of Omnipotence had reared the adamantine ramparts whose lofty, snow-capped summits seemed to blend with the skies in the distant horizon. Here, in their munition of rocks, has God preserved, as if for some great end in the economy of his grace, a chosen remnant of his ancient Church, secure from the beast and the false prophet, safe from the flames of persecution, and the clangour of war. As I gazed and wondered, I seemed as if standing on Pisgah's top, and I could with a full heart exclaim,

"On the mountain's top appearing,
Lo the sacred herald stands;
Welcome news to Zion bearing,
Zion long in hostile lands!
Mourning captive!
God himself shall loose thy bands."

I retired to a sequestered pinnacle of rock, where I could feast my vision with the sublime spectacle, and pour out my heartfelt gratitude that I had been brought at length, through many perils, to behold a country from which emanated the brightest beams of hope for the long-benighted empire of Mohammedan delusion, by whose millions of votaries I was surrounded on every side. My thoughts went back to the days when their missionaries were spread abroad throughout the East, and for more than a thousand years continued to plant and sustain the standard of the cross thro' the remote and barbarous countries of Central Asia, Tartary, Mongolia, and China—to the time when, as tradition and history alike testify, the gospel standard was reared in these mountains by apostles' hands: for it was not from Nestorius, but from Thomas, Bartholemew, Thaddeus, and others, that this people first received the knowledge of a Saviour, as will be seen in the sequel.

I looked at them in their present state, sunk down into the ignorance of semi-barbarism, and the light of vital piety almost extinguished upon their altars, and my heart bled for their condition. But hope pointed her radiant wand to brighter scenes, when all these glens, and rocks, and vales shall echo and re-echo to the glad praises of our God; and, like a morning star, these Nestorians shall arise to usher in a glorious and resplendent day. But, ere that bright period shall arrive, there is a mighty work to be done—a conflict with the powers of darkness, before the shout of victory. Let us arm this brave band for the contest.

Onward to the work! and onward I sped my course down the steep declivity of the mountain, now cautiously climbing over the rocks which obstructed our course—now resting my weary limbs under the inviting shade of a wild pear-tree—and anon, mounted on my hardy mule, winding along our narrow zigzag pathway over the mountain spurs, and down, far down, to the banks of the rolling, noisy, dashing Zab. Here lay one of the large, populous villages of the independent Nestorians, which extended amid fertile gardens for more than a mile in length.

What reception shall I meet from these wild sons of the mountain, who have never seen the face of a foreigner before? How will they regard the helpless stranger thrown so entirely upon their mercy? One breath of suspicion might blast my fondest hopes. But God was smiling upon the work in which I was engaged; prayer had been heard, and the way was prepared before me in a manner so wonderful that I can hardly forbear repeating the account, though already made public.

The only person I had ever seen from this remote tribe was a young Nestorian, who came to me about a year before, entirely blind. He said he had never expected to see the light of day, till my name had reached his country, and he had been told that I could restore his sight. With wonderful perseverance, he had gone from village to village, seeking some one to lead him by the hand, till, in the course of five or six weeks, he had reached my residence at Ooroomiah, where I removed the cataract from his eyes, and he returned to his mountains seeing. Scarcely had I entered the first village in his country, when this young man, hearing of my approach, came with a smiling countenance, bearing in his hand a present of honey, in token of his gratitude for the restoration of his sight, and affording me an introduction to the confidence and affections of his people.

I was invited to the residence of the chief man of the village, whose house was built, after the common style of the country, of stone laid in mud, with flat terrace roof; having a basement and second story, with two or three apartments in each. We were seated upon the floor in "a large upper room," which serves as the guest-chamber of the family room in summer, but is too open to be comfortable in winter. Food was placed before us in a very large wooden bowl, placed upon the skin of a wild goat or ibex, which was spread upon the carpet with the hair side down, and served as a table and cloth. Bread made of millet, baked in the manner of the Virginia hoeecake, but not so palatable, was laid round the edge of our goatskin table, and a large wooden spoon provided for each one of the party, eight or ten in number, to help himself out of the common dish. The people here less generally eat with their fingers than do those of Persia.

Whenever the goatskin was brought forward, I noticed that it contained the fragments of bread