

LIFE OF MOHAMMED.

CHAPTER I.

National Descent of the Arabs—Proved to be from Ishmael, Son of Abraham.

IN tracing the genealogy of nations to their primitive founders, the book of Genesis is a document of inestimable value. With those who do not hesitate to receive this and the other inspired books of the Scriptures as authentic vouchers for historical facts, the national descent of the Arabs from Ishmael, the son of Abraham, is a point which will not admit of dispute. The fact of this derivation, however, has been seriously brought into question by several skeptical writers, particularly by the celebrated historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. With his usual dexterity of insinuation, he assails the united authority of Scripture history and Arabian tradition, respecting the pedigree of this remarkable people. Yet in no case does he undertake, in a formal manner, to *disprove* the fact to which he still labours to give the air of a fiction.* A succinct view, therefore, of the testimonies which go to establish the Ishmaelitish origin of the Arab, may form no unsuitable introduction to the present work, detailing the life and character of the individual who has done so much towards rendering the race illustrious.

From the narrative of Moses we learn not only the parentage, birth, and settlement of Ishmael in Arabia, but the fact also of a covenant made with Abraham in his behalf, accompanied with a prophecy respecting his decendants, singularly analogous to the prophetic promise concerning the more favoured seed of Isaac. "And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, Sarah, thy wife, shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation."† In like manner, it will be recollected, the nation of Israel sprung from the twelve sons of Jacob, and was divided into twelve tribes. In a subsequent part of the Mosaic records we find the notice of the incipient fulfilment of this prediction concerning the posterity of Ishmael. "And these are the names of the sons of Ish-

* Decline and Fall, ch. 1.

† Genesis, xvii. 18—20.