

CHAPTER I.

FROM BAGDAD, ACROSS THE DIALA, TO KES- RABAD OR DASTAGHERD.

AFTER my journey from Aleppo to Bagdad, by a circuitous route through Mesopotamia, a severe fever, followed by extreme exhaustion, rendered repose more than usually agreeable to me: and I was fortunate in finding, in the ancient City of the Caliphs, all the comforts of an English home, in the house of the British Resident, Mr. Rich, and the society of his amiable family. My course being directed to India, enquiries had been made as to the comparative facilities of prosecuting the remainder of my way to “the further East,” by descending the Tigris and Euphrates to Bussorah, and going from thence on ship-board down the Persian Gulf, or accompanying some caravan into Persia

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by land, and passing through Kermanshah, Hamadan, Ispahan, and Shiraz to Bushire, where vessels for Bombay were always to be found. After much consideration, the latter course was adopted, as being, on the whole, more favourable to certainty and expedition, as well as attended with the advantage of a better climate, which, considering my state of debility from previous suffering, and the intense heat of the season that still prevailed, was a matter of the first importance. The last days of my stay at Bagdad were therefore passed in making preparations for the further prosecution of my Eastern journey by this route.

SEPT. 3rd.—We had been put off, from day to day, with assurances of a Persian Ambassador's being about to return to Teheran, in whose train we might make a safe entry into Persia. He had performed his pilgrimage to the tombs of Ali and Hossein, as well as to that of Imâm Moosa, near Bagdad, and now only wanted the permission of the Pasha to commence his journey homeward. This had been promised him at every morning's divan, so that we waited to set out with him. It was now

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publicly signified, however, that as some of the troops of his Sovereign were at this moment in Koordistan, supporting intrigues among the Pashas who are nominally dependent on Bagdad, he could not be suffered to depart from hence until news should reach of these troops having been withdrawn.

A large party of Persian pilgrims, who had been waiting, with ourselves, for many days, to profit by this occasion, for the sake of protection, now determined therefore to set out without it, and rely on their own strength for defence. We began accordingly to prepare for our journey, as I had determined to delay no longer, but to accompany them.

The future companion of my way was an Afghan Dervish, named Hadjee Ismael,—one who, besides his own tongue, understood Persian, Turkish, and Arabic, was of a cheerful temper, well known on the road, and neither so impudent nor so ignorant as most of those who belong to his class. He was acknowledged to be one of the first engravers on stone in all the East, and had executed some seals and rings for Mr. Rich, which were finer than any this gentleman had seen even in Constantinople.

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With a very ordinary degree of industry and application, this man might have acquired a moderate share of wealth; but, in becoming a Dervish he had followed the strong bent of his natural inclination,—which was to renounce the sordid cares of this world, to live a life of indolence and pleasure, and to move from place to place for the sake of that variety of incident and character which he loved to meet and to observe.

Such a companion was in many respects very congenial to my wishes; and what rendered him more so in this particular instance was, that it was his own desire that I should pass with him as a Mussulman, under the name of Hadjee Abdallah, ibn Suliman, min Massr: i. e. “The Pilgrim Abdallah, (the Slave of God,) the Son of Solomon, from Egypt.” He had even engraved a ring for me with this name on it, offered to assist me in reading the Koran, and to become my voucher on all occasions, provided I would constantly support the character of a Mohammedan, and state myself to be an Arab of Egypt, since that was still the accent of my Arabic, and that the country with which I was most familiar.

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The disadvantages of such a companion were only these;—that I should be obliged on all occasions to be my own groom, cook, and servant; and on some occasions perhaps his also, from our being so completely on a level; but for all this I was well prepared by long previous discipline.

The horses on which we rode were both my own, with all else that belonged to them, as I wished to be as independent as possible of assistance. My papers, money, and all articles on which I set any value, were carried in a pair of khordj, or small hair-cloth bags across my own saddle; and the rest of the baggage, consisting only of a change of linen for myself, a coffee-pot, and tobacco bag, carpets, &c., for our joint use, were carried beneath the Dervish.

My own dress was that of an Arab of the middling class, and my arms a good lance of fifteen feet long, a pair of pistols, and a Damascus sword. Ismael wore also an Arab dress with which I had provided him, and was armed with a Persian sword and an English musket.

During my stay at Bagdad, I had collected together such notes for my journey as Mr.

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Rich's library and my own intervals of health would allow me to arrange ; and by that gentleman I was furnished with letters for the governors of the great towns, in the event of my needing them ; so that every preparation had been made to render our journey both secure and agreeable.

At El-Assr, the hour of prayer between noon and sunset, all was ready for our departure, and the moment came in which I was required to take a painful leave of the individuals in whose society I had been of late so happy. As it is impossible for me to praise in adequate terms the warm and generous behaviour of every member of that circle towards me during my stay, so it is in vain to attempt a description of my own feelings in quitting them : they were as poignant as I ever remember them on any similar occasion, for there are few people for whom I ever felt more of affection mingled with respect, after so short a period of acquaintance, than for Mr. and Mrs. Rich.

We quitted Bagdad by the gate of Imâm Azam, so called from its leading to the tomb of that saint, who is venerated as the chief of the Hanefies, and whose mausoleum is

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about an hour's ride to the north of the city. This was the gate by which I entered on my arrival here; and being in the N. E. quarter of Bagdad, it is the principal point of arrival and departure for all the great roads on the east side of the Tigris.

We found a small caravan, composed of about fifty persons, and as many animals, in horses, mules, and asses, but no camels, assembled without the gate, and preparing to load. As their departure would be delayed, however, until muggrib, the hour of prayer at sunset, we spread our carpets amidst the crowd, and sat patiently down to await their movements.

I was accompanied thus far by Mr. Rich's Armenian dragoman, and the Persian secretary of the Residency, who were charged to see me safely off. The chiefs of the caravan were then introduced to me; and as I was by far the best-dressed and best-mounted individual of the whole company, excepting only those who were of my own party, the Persians thought themselves sufficiently honoured by sitting beside the Hadjee Aga, the "Sir Pilgrim," as I was called, receiving with great respect my pipe and coffee when

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offered to them, and enquiring earnestly about Egypt and the City of the Prophet.

In all my journeys, I never remember to have seen such shabby, old, infirm, ill-dressed, ill-equipped, and helpless persons as these fifty or sixty pilgrims with whom I was going to set out on a road acknowledged to be a dangerous one. They had all been absent from Persia several months, on a pilgrimage to the tombs of Imâm Ali and Hossein; visiting also that of Imâm Moosa, near Bagdad, and of another Imâm at Samarra, the city so celebrated in the history of the Caliphs, and whose remains are still considerable on the banks of the Tigris, two days' journey from hence.

None of them, however, had reached as far as Mecca. In the journeys which they had already performed, they had most of them been routed and plundered two or three times by the Arabs of the Desert; and many of them had lost their companions by fatigue and sickness. The numbers carried off in this way are indeed considerable; for, of the retinue of an Indian widow and her son, who came through Persia to Bussorah, twenty or thirty had died on their way to

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Bagdad, by the river ; and advices had been received from Mecca, of the rest having been taken off on the road across the Desert, and in the country of the Hedjaz itself.

It must require a degree of superstitious attachment to a religion, difficult to conceive, to induce such crowds of all classes to run, from year to year, the imminent risks, which the performance of these journeys involves. The reason assigned by most of the Persians of the caravan whom we questioned, for not going to Mecca, was the inadequacy of their means, after being plundered and stripped ; and this seemed plausible enough : but there were not wanting many among them who seemed to think the Caaba, the sacred temple at Mecca, an object of less veneration than the tomb of the Prophet at Medina, or than those of the Caliphs and Imâms already enumerated ;—in the same manner as by the lower order of Greeks Saint George is equally esteemed with the Messiah himself, and the Virgin Mary ranked quite as high as her unbegotten Son with the same class of Catholics.

The dresses of our Persian companions were of the ordinary fashion of their coun-

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try, consisting of a long robe made tight about the arms and waist, the latter being long and slender, the lower part of the robe representing a full petticoat, the breast covered by a thin and coarse shirt, and the head-dress consisting of a conical cap of black sheep-skin. Their horses were of the worst kind imaginable, and their arms and caparisons were suitably mean. It was asserted, and I believe with great truth, that five well-mounted Arabs of the Desert had arrested and deliberately plundered as large a party of Persian pilgrims as this; and it was even admitted by the people of the caravan themselves, that ten good horsemen of the Beni Lam tribe would be more than a match for all their party!

Among them were some women, whose veils struck me as peculiar; these wore the blue chequered cloth mantle of the Bagdad females; but instead of the black horse-hair covering for the face, they had a large white cotton veil tied round the head like those of Egypt; and instead of the eyes being shown through two large holes, as in that country, there was a small grating window, of about