The Sassanians (New Persia) [1]

By George Rawlinson

Lesson	Titles
SASS001	Chapters 1 to 3
SASS002	Chapters 4 to 6
SASS003	**Chapters 7 to 9**
SASS004	Chapters 10 to 12
SASS005	Chapters 13 to 16
SASS006	Chapters 17 to 19
SASS007	Chapters 20 and 21
SASS008	Chapters 22 to 24
SASS009	Chapters 25 and 26
SASS010	Chapters 27 and 28

7. Hormisdas II; Sapor II

Hormisdas II., who became king on the abdication of his father, Narses, had, like his father, a short reign. He ascended the throne A.D. 301; he died A.D. 309, not quite eight years later. To this period historians assign scarcely any events. The personal appearance of Hormisdas, if we may judge by a gem, was pleasing; he is said, however, to have been of a harsh temper by nature, but to have controlled his evil inclinations after he became king, and in fact to have then neglected nothing that could contribute to the welfare of his subjects. He engaged in no wars; and his reign was thus one of those quiet and uneventful intervals which, furnishing no materials for history, indicate thereby the happiness of a nation. We are told that he had a strong taste for building, and could never see a crumbling edifice without instantly setting to work to restore it. Ruined towns and villages, so common throughout the East in all ages, ceased to be seen in Persia while he filled the throne. An army of masons always followed him in his frequent journeys throughout his empire, and repaired dilapidated homesteads and cottages with as much care and diligence as edifices of a public character. According to some writers he founded several entirely new towns in Khuzistan or Susiana, while, according to others, he built the important city of Hormuz, or (as it is sometimes called) Ram-Aormuz, in the province of Kerman, which is still a flourishing place. Other authorities ascribe this city, however, to the first Hormisdas, the son of Sapor I. and grandson of Artaxerxes.

Among the means devised by Hormisdas II. for bettering the condition of his people the most remarkable was his establishment of a new Court of Justice. In the East the oppression of the weak by the powerful is the most inveterate and universal of all evils, and the one that well-intentioned monarchs have to be most careful in checking and repressing. Hormisdas, in his anxiety to root out this evil, is said to have set up a court expressly for the hearing of causes where complaint was made by the poor of wrongs done to them by the rich. The duty of the judges was at once to punish the oppressors, and to see that ample reparation was made to those whom they had wronged. To increase the authority of the court, and to secure the impartiality of its sentences, the monarch made a point of often presiding over it himself, of hearing the causes, and pronouncing the judgments in person. The most powerful nobles were thus made to feel that, if they offended, they would be likely to receive adequate punishment; and the weakest and poorest of the people were encouraged to come forward and make complaint if they had suffered injury.

Among his other wives, Hormisdas, we are told, married a daughter of the king of Cabul.

[1] This Grace Notes study of material in the public domain is published for free distribution. Edited by Warren Doud, warren.doud@gmail.com, Austin, Texas.

It was natural that, after the conquest of Seistan by Varahran II., about A.D. 280, the Persian monarchs should establish relations with the chieftains ruling in Afghanistan. That country seems, from the first to the fourth century of our era, to have been under the government of princes of Scythian descent and of considerable wealth and power. Kadphises, Kanerki, Kenorano. Ooerki, Baraoro, had the main seat of their empire in the region about Cabul and Jellalabad; but from this centre they exercised an extensive sway, which at times probably reached Candahar on the one hand, and the Punjab region on the other. Their large gold coinage proves them to have been monarchs of great wealth, while their use of the Greek letters and language indicates a certain amount of civilization. The marriage of Hormisdas with a princess of Cabul implies that the hostile relations existing under Varahran II. had been superseded by friendly ones. Persian aggression had ceased to be feared. The reigning Indo-Scythic monarch felt no reluctance to give his daughter in marriage to his Western neighbor, and sent her to his court (we are told) with a wardrobe and ornaments of the utmost magnificence and costliness.

Hormisdas II. appears to have had a son, of the same name with himself, who attained to manhood while his father was still reigning. This prince, who was generally regarded, and who, of course, viewed himself, as the heir-apparent, was no favorite with the Persian nobles, whom he had perhaps offended by an inclination towards the literature and civilization of the Greeks. It must have been upon previous consultation and agreement that the entire body of the chief men resolved to vent their spite by insulting the prince in the most open and public way at the table of his father. The king was keeping his birthday, which was always, in Persia, the greatest festival of the year, and so the most public occasion possible. All the nobles of the realm were invited to the banquet; and all came and took their several places. The prince was absent at the first, but shortly arrived, bringing with him, as the excuse for his late appearance, a quantity of game, the produce of the morning's chase. Such an entrance must have created some disturbance and have drawn general attention; but the nobles, who were bound by etiquette to rise from their seats, remained firmly fixed in them, and took not the slightest notice of the prince's arrival. This behavior was an indignity which naturally aroused his resentment. In the heat of the moment he exclaimed aloud that "those who had insulted him should one day suffer for it--their fate should be the fate of Marsyas." At first the threat was not understood; but one chieftain, more learned than his fellows, explained to the rest that, according to the Greek myth, Marsyas was flayed alive. Now, flaying alive was a punishment not unknown to the Persian law; and the nobles, fearing that the prince really entertained the intention which he had expressed, became thoroughly alienated from him, and made up their minds that they would not allow him to reign. During his father's lifetime, they could, of course, do nothing; but they laid up the dread threat in their memory, and patiently waited for the moment when the throne would become vacant, and their enemy would assert his right to it.

Apparently, their patience was not very severely taxed. Hormisdas II. died within a few years; and Prince Hormisdas, as the only son whom he had left behind him, thought to succeed as a matter of course. But the nobles rose in insurrection, seized his person, and threw him into a dungeon, intending that he should remain there for the rest of his life. They themselves took the direction of affairs, and finding that, though King Hormisdas had left behind him no other son, yet one of his wives was pregnant, they proclaimed the unborn infant king, and even with the utmost ceremony proceeded to crown the embryo by suspending the royal diadem over the womb of the mother. A real interregnum must have followed; but it did not extend beyond a few

months. The pregnant widow of Hormisdas fortunately gave birth to a boy, and the difficulties of the succession were thereby ended. All classes acquiesced in the rule of the infant monarch, who received the name of Sapor--whether simply to mark the fact that he was believed to be the late king's son, or in the hope that he would rival the glories of the first Sapor, is uncertain.

The reign of Sapor II. is estimated variously, at 69, 70, 71, and 72 years; but the balance of authority is in favor of seventy. He was born in the course of the year A.D. 309, and he seems to have died in the year after the Roman emperor Valens, or A.D. 379. He thus reigned nearly three-quarters of a century, being contemporary with the Roman emperors, Galerius, Constantine, Constantius and Constans, Julian, Jovian, Valentinian I., Valens, Gratian, and Valentinian II.

This long reign is best divided into periods. The first period of it extended from A.D. 309 to A.D. 337, or a space of twenty-eight years. This was the time anterior to Sapor's wars with the Romans. It included the sixteen years of his minority and a space of twelve years during which he waged successful wars with the Arabs. The minority of Sapor was a period of severe trial to Persia. On every side the bordering nations endeavored to take advantage of the weakness incident to the rule of a minor, and attacked and ravaged the empire at their pleasure. The Arabs were especially aggressive, and made continual raids into Babylonia, Khuzistan, and the adjoining regions, which desolated these provinces and carried the horrors of war into the very heart of the empire. The tribes of Beni-Ayar and Abdul-Kais, which dwelt on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf, took the lead in these incursions, and though not attempting any permanent conquests, inflicted terrible sufferings on the inhabitants of the tracts which they invaded. At the same time a Mesopotamian. chieftain, called Tayer or Thair, made an attack upon Otesiphon, took the city by storm, and captured a sister or aunt of the Persian monarch. The nobles, who, during Sapor's minority, guided the helm of the State, were quite incompetent to make head against these numerous enemies. For sixteen years the marauding bands had the advantage, and Persia found herself continually weaker, more impoverished, and less able to recover herself. The young prince is said to have shown extraordinary discretion and intelligence. He diligently trained himself in all manly exercises, and prepared both his mind and body for the important duties of his station. But his tender years forbade him as yet taking the field; and it is not unlikely that his ministers prolonged the period of his tutelage in order to retain, to the latest possible moment, the power whereto they had become accustomed. At any rate, it was not till he was sixteen, a later age than Oriental ideas require, that Sapor's minority ceased--that he asserted his manhood, and, placing himself at the head of his army, took the entire direction of affairs, civil and military, into his own hands.

From this moment the fortunes of Persia began to rise. Content at first to meet and chastise the marauding bands on his own territory, Sapor, after a time, grew bolder, and ventured to take the offensive. Having collected a fleet of considerable size, he placed his troops on board, and conveyed them to the city of El-Katif, an important place on the south coast of the Persian Gulf, where he disembarked and proceeded to carry fire and sword through the adjacent region. Either on this occasion, or more probably in a long series of expeditions, he ravaged the whole district of the Hejer, gaining numerous victories over the tribes of the Temanites, the Beni-Wa'iel, the Abdul-Kais, and others, which had taken a leading part in the invasion of Persia. His military genius and his valor were everywhere conspicuous; but unfortunately these excellent qualities were unaccompanied by the humanity which has been the crowning virtue oL many a conqueror. Sapor, exasperated by the sufferings of his

countrymen during so many years, thought that he could not too severely punish those who had inflicted them. He put to the sword the greater part of every tribe that he conquered; and, when his soldiers were weary of slaying, he made them pierce the shoulders of their prisoners, and insert in the wound a string or thong by which to drag them into captivity. The barbarity of the age and nation approved these atrocities; and the monarch who had commanded them was, in consequence, saluted as Dhoulacta, or "Lord of the Shoulders," by an admiring people. Cruelties almost as great, but of a different character, were at the same time sanctioned by Sapor in regard to one class of his own subjects--viz., those who had made profession of Christianity. The Zoroastrian zeal of this king was great, and he regarded it as incumbent on him to check the advance which Christianity was now making in his territories. He issued severe edicts against the Christians soon after attaining his majority; and when they sought the protection of the Roman emperor, he punished their disloyalty by imposing upon them a fresh tax, the weight of which was oppressive. When Symeon, Archbishop of Seleucia, complained of this additional burden in an offensive manner, Sapor retaliated by closing the Christian churches, confiscating the ecclesiastical property, and putting the complainant to death. Accounts of these severities reached Constantine, the Roman emperor, who had recently embraced the new religion (which, in spite of constant persecution, had gradually overspread the empire), and had assumed the character of a sort of general protector of the Christians throughout the world. He remonstrated with Sapor, but to no purpose. Sapor had formed the resolution to renew the contest terminated so unfavorably forty years earlier by his grandfather. He made the emperor's interference with Persian affairs, and encouragement of his Christian subjects in their perversity, a ground of complaint, and began to threaten hostilities. Some negotiations, which are not very clearly narrated, followed. Both sides, apparently, had determined on war, but both wished to gain time. It is uncertain what would have been the result had Constantine lived. But the death of that monarch in the early summer of A.D. 337, on his way to the eastern frontier, dispelled the last chance of peace by relieving Sapor from the wholesome fear which had hitherto restrained his ambition. The military fame of Constantine was great, and naturally inspired respect; his power was firmly fixed, and he was without competitor or rival. By his removal the whole face of affairs was changed; and Sapor, who had almost brought himself to venture on a rupture with Rome during Constantine's life, no longer hesitated on receiving news of his death, but at once commenced hostilities.

It is probable that among the motives which determined the somewhat wavering conduct of Sapor at this juncture was a reasonable fear of the internal troubles which it seemed to be in the power of the Romans to excite among the Persians, if from friends they became enemies. Having tested his own military capacity in his Arab wars, and formed an army on whose courage, endurance, and attachment he could rely, he was not afraid of measuring his strength with that of Rome in the open field; but he may well have dreaded the arts which the Imperial State was in the habit of employing, to supplement her military shortcomings, in wars with her neighbors. There was now at the court of Constantinople a Persian refugee of such rank and importance that Constantine had, as it were, a pretender ready made to his hand, and could reckon on creating dissension among the Persians whenever he pleased, by simply proclaiming himself this person's ally and patron. Prince Hormisdas, the elder brother of Sapor, and rightful king of Persia, had, after a long imprisonment, contrived, by the help of his wife, to escape from his dungeon, and had fled to the court of Constantine as early as A.D. 323. He had been received by the emperor with every mark of

honor and distinction, had been given a maintenance suited to his rank, and had enjoyed other favors. Sapor must have felt himself deeply aggrieved by the undue attention paid to his rival; and though he pretended to make light of the matter, and even generously sent Hormisdas the wife to whom his escape was due, he cannot but have been uneasy at the possession, by the Roman emperor, of his brother's person. In weighing the reasons for and against war he cannot but have assigned considerable importance to this circumstance. It did not ultimately prevent him from challenging Rome to the combat; but it may help to account for the hesitation, the delay, and the fluctuations of purpose, which we remark in his conduct during the four or five years which immediately preceded the death of Constantine.

8. War with Rome; Sieges of Nisibis

"Constantius adversus Persas et Saporem, qui Mesopotamiam vastaverant, novem prasliis parum prospere decertavit."--Orosius, Hist. vii. 39.

The death of Constantine was followed by the division of the Roman world among his sons. The vast empire with which Sapor had almost made up his mind to contend was partitioned out into three moderate-sized kingdoms. In place of the late brave and experienced emperor, a raw youth, who had given no signs of superior ability, had the government of the Roman provinces of the East, of Thrace, Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. Master of one third of the empire only, and of the least warlike portion, Constantius was a foe whom the Persian monarch might well despise, and whom he might expect to defeat without much difficulty. Moreover, there was much in the circumstances of the time that seemed to promise success to the Persian arms in a struggle with Rome. The removal of Constantme had been followed by an outburst of licentiousness and violence among the Roman soldiery in the capital; and throughout the East the army had cast off the restraints of discipline, and given indications of a turbulent and seditious spirit. The condition of Armenia was also such as to encourage Sapor in his ambitious projects. Tiridates, though a persecutor of the Christians in the early part of his reign, had been converted by Gregory the Illuminator, and had then enforced Christianity on his subjects by fire and sword. A sanguinary conflict had followed. A large portion of the Armenians, firmly attached to the old national idolatry, had resisted determinedly. Nobles, priests, and people had fought desperately in defence of their temples, images, and altars; and, though the persistent will of the king overbore all opposition, yet the result was the formation of a discontented faction, which rose up from time to time against its rulers, and was constantly tempted to ally itself with any foreign power from which it could hope the re-establishment of the old religion. Armenia had also, after the death of Tiridates (in A.D. 314), fallen under the government of weak princes. Persia had recovered from it the portion of Media Atropatene ceded by the treaty between Galerius and Narses. Sapor, therefore, had nothing to fear on this side; and he might reasonably expect to find friends among the Armenians themselves, should the general position of his affairs allow him to make an effort to extend Persian influence once more over the Armenian highland.

The bands of Sapor crossed the Roman frontier soon after, if not even before, the death of Constantine; and after an interval of forty years the two great powers of the world were once more engaged in a bloody conflict. Constantius, having paid the last honors to his father's remains, hastened to the eastern frontier, where he found the Roman army weak in numbers, badly armed and badly provided, ill-disposed towards himself, and almost ready to mutiny. It was necessary, before anything could be done to resist the advance of Sapor, that the insubordination of the troops should be checked, their wants supplied, and their good-will conciliated.

Constantius applied himself to effect these changes. Meanwhile Sapor set the Arabs and Armenians in motion, inducing the Pagan party among the latter to rise in insurrection, deliver their king, Tiranus, into his power, and make incursions into the Roman territory, while the latter infested with their armed bands the provinces of Mesopotamia and Syria. He himself was content, during the first year of the war, A.D. 337, with moderate successes, and appeared to the Romans to avoid rather than seek a pitched battle. Constantius was able, under these circumstances, not only to maintain his ground, but to gain certain advantages. He restored the direction of affairs in Armenia to the Roman party, detached some of the Mesopotamian Arabs from the side of his adversary, and attached them to his own, and even built forts in the Persian territory on the further side of the Tigris. But the gains made were slight; and in the ensuing year (A.D. 338) Sapor took the field in greater force than before, and addressed himself to an important enterprise. He aimed, it is evident, from the first, at the recovery of Mesopotamia, and at thrusting back the Romans from the Tigris to the Euphrates. He found it easy to overrun the open country, to ravage the crops, drive off the cattle, and burn the villages and homesteads. But the region could not be regarded as conquered, it could not be permanently held, unless the strongly fortified posts which commanded it, and which were in the hands of Rome, could be captured. Of all these the most important was Nisibis. This ancient town, known to the Assyrians as Nazibina, was, at any rate from the time of Lucullus, the most important city of Mesopotamia. It was situated at the distance of about sixty miles from the Tigris, at the edge of the Mons Masius, in a broad and fertile plain, watered by one of the affluents of the river Khabour, or Aborrhas. The Romans, after their occupation of Mesopotamia, had raised it to the rank of a colony; and its defences, which were of great strength, had always been maintained by the emperors in a state of efficiency. Sapor regarded it as the key of the Roman position in the tract between the rivers, and, as early as A.D. 338, sought to make himself master of it.

The first siege of Nisibis by Sapor lasted, we are told, sixty-three days. Few particulars of it have come down to us. Sapor had attacked the city, apparently, in the absence of Constantius, who had been called off to Pannonia to hold a conference with his brothers. It was defended, not only by its garrison and inhabitants, but by the prayers and exhortations of its bishop, St. James, who, if he did not work miracles for the deliverance of his countrymen, at any rate sustained and animated their resistance. The result was that the bands of Sapor were repelled with loss, and he was forced, after wasting two months before the walls, to raise the siege and own himself baffled.

After this, for some years the Persian war with Rome languished. It is difficult to extract from the brief statements of epitomizers, and the loose invectives or panegyrics of orators, the real circumstances of the struggle; but apparently the general condition of things was this. The Persians were constantly victorious in the open field; Constantius was again and again defeated; but no permanent gain was effected by these successes. A weakness inherited by the Persians from the Parthians--an inability to conduct sieges to a prosperous issue--showed itself; and their failures against the fortified posts which Rome had taken care to establish in the disputed regions were continual. Up to the close of A.D. 340 Sapor had made no important gain, had struck no decisive blow, but stood nearly in the same position which he had occupied at the commencement of the conflict.

But the year A.D. 341 saw a change. Sapor, after obtaining possession of the person of Tiranus, had sought to make himself master of Armenia, and had even attempted to set up one of his own relatives as king. But the

indomitable spirit of the inhabitants, and their firm attachment to their Arsacid princes, caused his attempts to fail of any good result, and tended on the whole to throw Armenia into the arms of Rome. Sapor, after a while, became convinced of the folly of his proceedings, and resolved on the adoption of a wholly new policy. He would relinquish the idea of conquering, and would endeavor instead to conciliate the Armenians, in the hope of obtaining from their gratitude what he had been unable to extort from their fears. Tiranus was still living; and Sapor, we are told, offered to replace him upon the Armenian throne; but, as he had been blinded by his captors, and as Oriental notions did not allow a person thus mutilated to exercise royal power, Tiranus declined the offer made him, and suggested the substitution of his son, Arsaces, who was, like himself, a prisoner in Persia. Sapor readily consented; and the young prince, released from captivity, returned to his country, and was installed as king by the Persians, with the good-will of the natives, who were satisfied so long as they could feel that they had at their head a monarch of the ancient stock. The arrangement, of course, placed Armenia on the Persian side, and gave Sapor for many years a powerful ally in his struggle with Rome.

Thus Sapor had, by the, year A.D. 341, made a very considerable gain. He had placed a friendly sovereign on the Armenian throne, had bound him to his cause by oaths, and had thereby established his influence, not only over Armenia itself, but over the whole tract which lay between Armenia and the Caucasus. But he was far from content with these successes. It was still his great object to drive the Romans from Mesopotamia; and with that object in view it continued to be his first wish to obtain possession of Nisibis. Accordingly, having settled Armenian affairs to his liking, he made, in A.D. 346, a second attack on the great city of Northern Mesopotamia, again investing it with a large body of troops, and this time pressing the siege during the space of nearly three months. Again, however, the strength of the walls and the endurance of the garrison baffled him. Sapor was once more obliged to withdraw from, before the place, having suffered greater loss than those whom he had assailed, and forfeited much of the prestige which he had acquired by his many victories.

It was, perhaps, on account of the repulse from Nisibis, and in the hope of recovering his lost laurels, that Sapor, in the next year but one, A.D. 348, made an unusual effort. Calling out the entire military force of the empire, and augmenting it by large bodies of allies and mercenaries, the Persian king, towards the middle of summer, crossed the Tigris by three bridges, and with a numerous and well-appointed army invaded Central Mesopotamia, probably from Adiabene, or the region near and a little south of Nineveh. Constantius, with the Roman army, was posted on and about the Sinjax range of hills, in the vicinity of the town of Singara, which is represented by the modern village of Sinjar. The Roman emperor did not venture to dispute the passage of the river, or to meet his adversary in the broad plain which, intervenes between the Tigris and the mountain range, but clung to the skirts of the hills, and commanded his troops to remain wholly on the defensive. Sapor was thus enabled to choose his position, to establish a fortified camp at a convenient distance from the enemy, and to occupy the hills in its vicinity--some portion of the Sinjar range--with his archers. It is uncertain whether, in making these dispositions, he was merely providing for his own safety, or whether he was laying a trap into which he hoped to entice the Roman army. Perhaps his mind was wide enough to embrace both contingencies. At any rate, having thus established a _point d'appui_ in his rear, he advanced boldly and challenged the legions to an encounter. The challenge was at once accepted, and the battle commenced about midday; but now the Persians, having just crossed swords with the enemy, almost

immediately began to give ground, and retreating hastily drew their adversaries along, across the thirsty plain, to the vicinity of their fortified camp, where a strong body of horse and the flower of the Persian archers were posted. The horse charged, but the legionaries easily defeated them, and elated with their success burst into the camp, despite the warnings of their leader, who strove vainly to check their ardor and to induce them to put off the completion of their victory till the next day. A small detachment found within the ramparts was put to the sword; and the soldiers scattered themselves among the tents, some in quest of booty, others only anxious for some means of quenching their raging thirst. Meantime the sun had gone down, and the shades of night fell rapidly. Regarding the battle as over, and the victory as assured, the Romans gave themselves up to sleep or feasting. But now Sapor saw his opportunity--the opportunity for which he had perhaps planned and waited. His light troops on the adjacent hills commanded the camp, and, advancing on every side, surrounded it. They were fresh and eager for the fray; they fought in the security afforded by the darkness; while the fires of the camp showed them their enemies, worn out with fatigue, sleepy, or drunken. The result, as might have been expected, was a terrible carnage. The Persians overwhelmed the legionaries with showers of darts and arrows; flight, under the circumstances, was impossible; and the Roman soldiers mostly perished where they stood. They took, however, ere they died, an atrocious revenge. Sapor's son had been made prisoner in the course of the day; in their desperation the legionaries turned their fury against this innocent youth; they beat him with whips, wounded him with the points of their weapons, and finally rushed upon him and killed him with a hundred blows.

The battle of Singara, though thus disastrous to the Romans, had not any great effect in determining the course or issue of the war. Sapor did not take advantage of his victory to attack the rest of the Roman forces in Mesopotamia, or even to attempt the siege of any large town. Perhaps he had really suffered large losses in the earlier part of the day; perhaps he was too much affected by the miserable death of his son to care, till time had dulled the edge of his grief, for military glory. At any rate, we hear of his undertaking no further enterprise till the second year after the battle, A.D. 350, when he made his third and most desperate attempt to capture Nisibis.

The rise of a civil war in the West, and the departure of Constantius for Europe with the flower of his troops early in the year no doubt encouraged the Persian monarch to make one more effort against the place which had twice repulsed him with ignominy. He collected a numerous native army, and strengthened it by the addition of a body of Indian allies, who brought a large troop of elephants into the field. With this force he crossed the Tigris in the early summer, and, after taking several fortified posts, march northwards and invested Nisibis. The Roman commander in the place was the Count Lucilianus, afterwards the father-in-law of Jovian, a man of resource and determination. He is said to have taken the best advantage of every favorable turn of fortune in the course of the siege, and to have prolonged the resistance by various subtle stratagems. But the real animating spirit of the defence was once more the bishop, St. James, who raised the enthusiasm of the inhabitants to the highest pitch by his exhortations, guided them by his counsels, and was thought to work miracles for them by his prayers. Sapor tried at first the ordinary methods of attack; he battered the walls with his rams, and sapped them with mines. But finding that by these means he made no satisfactory progress, he had recourse shortly to wholly novel proceedings. The river Mygdonius (now the Jerujer), swollen by the melting of the snows in the Mons Masius, had overflowed its banks and covered with an inundation the plain in which Nisibis stands. Sapor saw that the forces of

nature might be employed to advance his ends, and so embanked the lower part of the plain that the water could not run off, but formed a deep lake round the town, gradually creeping up the walls till it had almost reached the battlements. Having thus created an artificial sea, the energetic monarch rapidly collected, or constructed, a fleet of vessels, and, placing his military engines on board, launched the ships upon the waters, and so attacked the walls of the city at great advantage. But the defenders resisted stoutly, setting the engines on fire with torches, and either lifting the ships from the water by means of cranes, or else shattering them with the huge stones which they could discharge from their balistics. Still, therefore, no impression was made; but at last an unforeseen circumstance brought the besieged into the greatest peril, and almost gave Nisibis into the enemy's hands. The inundation, confined by the mounds of the Persians, which prevented it from running off, pressed with continually increasing force against the defences of the city, till at last the wall, in one part, proved too weak to withstand the tremendous weight which bore upon it, and gave way suddenly for the space of a hundred and fifty feet. What further damage was done to the town we know not; but a breach was opened through which the Persians at once made ready to pour into the place, regarding it as impossible that so huge a gap should be either repaired or effectually defended. Sapor took up his position on an artificial eminence, while his troops rushed to the assault. First of all marched the heavy cavalry, accompanied by the horse-archers; next came the elephants, bearing iron towers upon their backs, and in each tower a number of bowmen; intermixed with the elephants were a certain amount of heavy-armed foot. It was a strange column with which to attack a breach; and its composition does not say much for Persian siege tactics, which were always poor and ineffective, and which now, as usually, resulted in failure. The horses became quickly entangled in the ooze and mud which the waters had left behind them as they subsided; the elephants were even less able to overcome these difficulties, and as soon as they received a wound sank down--never to rise again--in the swamp. Sapor hastily gave orders for the assailing column to retreat and seek the friendly shelter of the Persian camp, while he essayed to maintain his advantage in a different way. His light archers were ordered to the front, and, being formed into divisions which were to act as reliefs, received orders to prevent the restoration of the ruined wall by directing an incessant storm of arrows into the gap made by the waters. But the firmness and activity of the garrison and inhabitants defeated this well-imagined proceeding. While the heavy-armed troops stood in the gap receiving the flights of arrows and defending themselves as they best could, the unarmed multitude raised a new wall in their rear, which, by the morning of the next day, was six feet in height. This last proof of his enemies' resolution and resource seems to have finally convinced Sapor of the hopelessness of his enterprise. Though he still continued the siege for a while, he made no other grand attack, and at length drew off his forces, having lost twenty thousand men before the walls, and wasted a hundred days, or more than three months.

Perhaps he would not have departed so soon, but would have turned the siege into a blockade, and endeavored to starve the garrison into submission, had not alarming tidings reached him from his north-eastern frontier. Then, as now, the low flat sandy region east of the Caspian was in the possession of nomadic hordes, whose whole life was spent in war and plunder. The Oxus might be nominally the boundary of the empire in this quarter; but the nomads were really dominant over the entire desert to the foot of the Hyrcanian and Parthian hills. Petty plundering forays into the fertile region south and east of the desert were no doubt constant, and were not greatly regarded; but from time to time some tribe or chieftain

bolder than the rest made a deeper inroad and a more sustained attack than usual, spreading consternation around, and terrifying the court for its safety. Such an attack seems to have occurred towards the autumn of A.D. 350. The invading horde is said to have consisted of Massagatae; but we can hardly be mistaken in regarding them as, in the main, of Tatar, or Turkoman blood, akin to the Usbegs and other Turanian tribes which still inhabit the sandy steppe. Sapor considered the crisis such as to require his own presence; and thus, while civil war summoned one of the two rivals from Mesopotamia to the far West, where he had to contend with the self-styled emperors, Magnentius and Vetranio, the other was called away to the extreme East to repel a Tatar invasion. A tacit truce was thus established between the great belligerents--a truce which lasted for seven or eight years. The unfortunate Mesopotamians, harassed by constant war for above twenty years, had now a breathing-space during which to recover from the ruin and desolation that had overwhelmed them. Rome and Persia for a time suspended their conflict. Rivalry, indeed, did not cease; but it was transferred from the battlefield to the cabinet, and the Roman emperor sought and found in diplomatic triumphs a compensation for the ill-success which had attended his efforts in the field.

9. Revolt of Armenia

It seems to have been soon after the close of Sapor's first war with Constantius that events took place in Armenia which once more replaced that country under Roman influence. Arsaces, the son of Tiranus, had been, as we have seen, established as monarch, by Sapor, in the year A.D. 341, under the notion that, in return for the favor shown him, he would administer Armenia in the Persian interest. But gratitude is an unsafe basis for the friendships of monarchs. Arsaces, after a time, began to chafe against the obligations under which Sapor had laid him, and to wish, by taking independent action, to show himself a real king, and not a mere feudatory. He was also, perhaps, tired of aiding Sapor in his Roman war, and may have found that he suffered more than he gained by having Rome for an enemy. At any rate, in the interval between A.D. 351 and 359, probably while Sapor was engaged in the far East, Arsaces sent envoys to Constantinople with a request to Constantius that he would give him in marriage a member of the Imperial house. Constantius was charmed with the application made to him, and at once accepted the proposal. He selected for the proffered honor a certain Olympias, the daughter of Ablabius, a Praetorian prefect, and lately the betrothed bride of his own brother, Constans; and sent her to Armenia, where Arsaces welcomed her, and made her (as it would seem) his chief wife, provoking thereby the jealousy and aversion of his previous sultana, a native Armenian, named Pharandzem. The engagement thus entered into led on, naturally, to the conclusion of a formal alliance between Rome and Armenia--an alliance which Sapor made fruitless efforts to disturb, and which continued unimpaired down to the time A.D. 359 when hostilities once more broke out between Rome and Persia.

Of Sapor's Eastern wars we have no detailed account. They seem to have occupied him from A.D. 350 to A.D. 357, and to have been, on the whole, successful. They were certainly terminated by a peace in the last-named year--a peace of which it must have been a condition that his late enemies should lend him aid in the struggle which he was about to renew with Rome. Who these enemies exactly were, and what exact region they inhabited, is doubtful. They comprised certainly the Chionites and Gelani, probably the Euseni and the Vertse. The Chionites are thought to have been Hiongnu or Huns; and the Euseni are probably the Usiun, who, as early as B.C. 200, are found among the nomadic hordes pressing towards the Oxus. The Vertse are wholly unknown. The Gelani should, by their name, be the inhabitants of Ghilan, or the

coast tract south-west of the Caspian; but this locality seems too remote from the probable seats of the Chionites and Euseni to be the one intended. The general scene of the wars was undoubtedly east of the Caspian, either in the Oxus region, or still further eastward, on the confines of India and Scythia. The result of the wars, though not a conquest, was an extension of Persian influence and power. Troublesome enemies were converted into friends and allies. The loss of a predominating influence over Armenia was thus compensated, or more than compensated, within a few years, by a gain of a similar kind in another quarter.

While Sapor was thus engaged in the far East, he received letters from the officer whom he had left in charge of his western frontier, informing him that the Romans were anxious to exchange the precarious truce which Mesopotamia had been allowed to enjoy during the last five or six years for a more settled and formal peace. Two great Roman officials, Cassianus, duke of Mesopotamia, and Musonianus, Praetorian prefect, understanding that Sapor was entangled in a bloody and difficult war at the eastern extremity of his empire, and knowing that Constantius was fully occupied with the troubles caused by the inroads of the barbarians into the more western of the Roman provinces, had thought that the time was favorable for terminating the provisional state of affairs in the Mesopotamian region by an actual treaty. They had accordingly opened negotiations with Tamsapor, satrap of Adiabene, and suggested to him that he should sound his master on the subject of making peace with Rome. Tamsapor appears to have misunderstood the character of these overtures, or to have misrepresented them to Sapor; in his despatch he made Constantius himself the mover in the matter, and spoke of him as humbly supplicating the great king to grant him conditions. It happened that the message reached Sapor just as he had come to terms with his eastern enemies, and had succeeded in inducing them to become his allies. He was naturally elated at his success, and regarded the Roman overture as a simple acknowledgment of weakness. Accordingly he answered in the most haughty style. His letter, which was conveyed to the Roman emperor at Sirmium by an ambassador named Narses, was conceived in the following terms:

"Sapor, king of kings, brother of the sun and moon, and companion of the stars, sends salutation to his brother, Constantius Caesar. It glads me to see that thou art at last returned to the right way, and art ready to do what is just and fair, having learned by experience that inordinate greed is oft-times punished by defeat and disaster. As then the voice of truth ought to speak with all openness, and the more illustrious of mankind should make their words mirror their thoughts, I will briefly declare to thee what I propose, not forgetting that I have often said the same things before. Your own authors are witness that the entire tract within the river Strymon and the borders of Macedon was once held by my ancestors; if I required you to restore all this, it would not ill become me (excuse the boast), inasmuch as I excel in virtue and in the splendor of my achievements the whole line of our ancient monarchs. But as moderation delights me, and has always been the rule of my conduct--wherefore from my youth up I have had no occasion to repent of any action--I will be content to receive Mesopotamia and Armenia, which was fraudulently extorted from my grandfather. We Persians have never admitted the principle, which you proclaim with such effrontery, that success in war is always glorious, whether it be the fruit of courage or trickery. In conclusion, if you will take the advice of one who speaks for your good, sacrifice a small tract of territory, one always in dispute and causing continual bloodshed, in order that you may rule the remainder securely. Physicians, remember, often cut and burn, and even amputate portions of the body, that the patient may have the healthy use of what is left to him;

and there are animals which, understanding why the hunters chase them, deprive themselves of the thing coveted, to live thenceforth without fear. I warn you, that, if my ambassador returns in vain, I will take the field against you, so soon as the winter is past, with all my forces, confiding in my good fortune and in the fairness of the conditions which I have now offered."

It must have been a severe blow to Imperial pride to receive such a letter: and the sense of insult can scarcely have been much mitigated by the fact that the missive was enveloped in a silken covering, or by the circumstance that the bearer, Narses, endeavored by his conciliating manners to atone for his master's rudeness. Constantius replied, however, in a dignified and calm tone. "The Roman emperor," he said, "victorious by land and sea, saluted his brother, King Sapor. His lieutenant in Mesopotamia had meant well in opening a negotiation with a Persian governor; but he had acted without orders, and could not bind his master. Nevertheless, he (Constantius) would not disclaim what had been done, since he did not object to a peace, provided it were fair and honorable. But to ask the master of the whole Roman world to surrender territories which he had successfully defended when he ruled only over the provinces of the East was plainly indecent and absurd. He must add that the employment of threats was futile, and too common an artifice; more especially as the Persians themselves must know that Rome always defended herself when attacked, and that, if occasionally she was vanquished in a battle, yet she never failed to have the advantage in the event of every war." Three envoys were entrusted with the delivery of this reply--Prosper, a count of the empire; Spectatus, a tribune and notary; and Eustathius, an orator and philosopher, a pupil of the celebrated Neo-Platonist, Jamblichus, and a friend of St. Basil. Constantius was most anxious for peace, as a dangerous war threatened with the Alemanni, one of the most powerful tribes of Germany. He seems to have hoped that, if the unadorned language of the two statesmen failed to move Sapor, he might be won over by the persuasive eloquence of the professor of rhetoric.

But Sapor was bent on war. He had concluded arrangements with the natives so long his adversaries in the East, by which they had pledged themselves to join his standard with all their forces in the ensuing spring. He was well aware of the position of Constantius in the West, of the internal corruption of his court, and of the perils constantly threatening him from external enemies. A Roman official of importance, bearing the once honored name of Antoninus, had recently taken refuge with him from the claims of pretended creditors, and had been received into high favor on account of the information which he was able to communicate with respect to the disposition of the Roman forces and the condition of their magazines. This individual, ennobled by the royal authority, and given a place at the royal table, gained great influence over his new master, whom he stimulated by alternately reproaching him with his backwardness in the past, and putting before him the prospect of easy triumphs over Rome in the future. He pointed out that the emperor, with the bulk of his troops and treasures, was detained in the regions adjoining the Danube, and that the East was left almost undefended; he magnified the services which he was himself competent to render; he exhorted Sapor to bestir himself, and to put confidence in his good fortune. He recommended that the old plan of sitting down before walled towns should be given up, and that the Persian monarch, leaving the strongholds of Mesopotamia in his rear, should press forward to the Euphrates, pour his troops across it, and overrun the rich province of Syria, which he would find unguarded, and which had not been invaded by an enemy for nearly a century. The views of Antoninus were adopted; but, in practice, they were overruled by the exigencies of the situation. A Roman army occupied Mesopotamia, and advanced to the banks of

the Tigris. When the Persians in full force crossed the river, accompanied by Chionite and Albanian allies, they found a considerable body of troops prepared to resist them. Their opponents did not, indeed offer battle, but they laid waste the country as the Persians took possession of it; they destroyed the forage, evacuated the indefensible towns (which fell, of course, into the enemy's hands), and fortified the line of the Euphrates with castles, military engines, and palisades. Still the programme of Antoninus would probably have been carried out, had not the swell of the Euphrates exceeded the average, and rendered it impossible for the Persian troops to ford the river at the usual point of passage into Syria. On discovering this obstacle, Antoninus suggested that, by a march to the north-east through a fertile country, the "Upper Euphrates" might be reached, and easily crossed, before its waters had attained any considerable volume. Sapor agreed to adopt this suggestion. He marched from Zeugma across the Mons Masius towards the Upper Euphrates, defeated the Romans in an important battle near Arnida, took, by a sudden assault, two castles which defended the town, and then somewhat hastily resolved that he would attack the place, which he did not imagine capable of making much resistance.

Amida, now Diarbekr, was situated on the right bank of the Upper Tigris, in a fertile plain, and was washed along the whole of its western side by a semi-circular bend of the river. It had been a place of considerable importance from a very ancient date, and had recently been much strengthened by Constantius, who had made it an arsenal for military engines, and had repaired its towers and walls. The town contained within it a copious fountain of water, which was liable, however, to acquire a disagreeable odor in the summer time. Seven legions, of the moderate strength to which legions had been reduced by Constantine, defended it; and the garrison included also a body of horse-archers, composed chiefly or entirely of noble foreigners. Sapor hoped in the first instance to terrify it into submission by his mere appearance, and boldly rode up to the gates with a small body of his followers, expecting that they would be opened to him. But the defenders were more courageous than he had imagined. They received him with a shower of darts and arrows that were directed specially against his person, which was conspicuous from its ornaments; and they aimed their weapons so well that one of them passed through a portion of his dress and was nearly wounding him. Persuaded by his followers, Sapor upon this withdrew, and committed the further prosecution of the attack to Grumbates, the king of the Chionites, who assaulted the walls on the next day with a body of picked troops, but was repulsed with great loss, his only son, a youth of great promise, being killed at his side by a dart from a balista. The death of this prince spread dismay through the camp, and was followed by a general mourning; but it now became a point of honor to take the town which had so injured one of the great king's royal allies; and Grumbates was promised that Amida should become the funeral pile of his lost darling.

The town was now regularly invested. Each nation was assigned its place. The Chionites, burning with the desire to avenge their late defeat, were on the east; the Vertse on the south; the Albanians, warriors from the Caspian region, on the north; the Segestans, who were reckoned the bravest soldiers of all, and who brought into the field a large body of elephants, held the west. A continuous line of Persians, five ranks deep, surrounded the entire city, and supported the auxiliary detachments. The entire besieging army was estimated at a hundred thousand men; the besieged, including the unarmed multitude, were under 30,000. After the pause of an entire day, the first general attack was made. Grumbates gave the signal for the assault by hurling a bloody spear into the space before the walls, after the fashion of a Roman fetialis. A cloud of darts and arrows from every side

followed the flight of this weapon, and did severe damage to the besieged, who were at the same time galled with discharges from Roman military engines, taken by the Persians in some capture of Singara, and now employed against their former owners. Still a vigorous resistance continued to be made, and the besiegers, in their exposed positions, suffered even more than the garrison; so that after two days the attempt to carry the city by general assault was abandoned, and the slow process of a regular siege was adopted. Trenches were opened at the usual distance from the walls, along which the troops advanced under the cover of hurdles towards the ditch, which they proceeded to fill up in places. Mounds were then thrown up against the walls; and movable towers were constructed and brought into play, guarded externally with iron, and each mounting a balista. It was impossible long to withstand these various weapons of attack. The hopes of the besieged lay, primarily, in their receiving relief from without by the advance of an army capable of engaging their assailants and harassing them or driving them off; secondarily, in successful sallies, by means of which they might destroy the enemy's works and induce him to retire from before the place.

There existed, in the neighborhood of Amida, the elements of a relieving army, under the command of the new prefect of the East, Sabinianus. Had this officer possessed an energetic and enterprising character, he might, without much difficulty, have collected a force of light and active soldiers, which might have hung upon the rear of the Persians, intercepted their convoys, cut off their stragglers, and have even made an occasional dash upon their lines. Such was the course of conduct recommended by Ursicinus, the second in command, whom Sabinianus had recently superseded; but the latter was jealous of his subordinate, and had orders from the Byzantine court to keep him unemployed. He was himself old and rich, alike disinclined to and unfit for military enterprise; he therefore absolutely rejected the advice of Ursicinus, and determined on making no effort. He had positive orders, he said, from the court to keep on the defensive and not endanger his troops by engaging them in hazardous adventures. Amida must protect itself, or at any rate not look to him for succor. Ursicinus chafed terribly, it is said, against this decision, but was forced to submit to it. His messengers conveyed the dispiriting intelligence to the devoted city, which learned thereby that it must rely wholly upon its own exertions.

Nothing now remained but to organize sallies on a large scale and attack the besieger's works. Such attempts were made from time to time with some success; and on one occasion two Gaulish legions, banished to the East for their adherence to the cause of Magnentius, penetrated, by night, into the heart of the besieging camp, and brought the person of the monarch into danger. This peril was, however, escaped; the legions were repulsed with the loss of a sixth of their number; and nothing was gained by the audacious enterprise beyond a truce of three days, during which each side mourned its dead, and sought to repair its losses.

The fate of the doomed city drew on. Pestilence was added to the calamities which the besieged had to endure. Desertion and treachery were arrayed against them. One of the natives of Amida, going over to the Persians, informed them that on the southern side of the city a neglected staircase led up from the margin of the Tigris through underground corridors to one of the principal bastions; and under his guidance seventy archers of the Persian guard, picked men, ascended the dark passage at dead of night, occupied the tower, and when morning broke displayed from it a scarlet flag, as a sign to their countrymen that a portion of the wall was taken. The Persians were upon the alert, and an instant assault was made. But the garrison, by extraordinary efforts, succeeded in recapturing the tower before any support

reached its occupants; and then, directing their artillery and missiles against the assailing columns, inflicted on them tremendous losses, and soon compelled them to return hastily to the shelter of their camp. The Verte, who maintained the siege on the south side of the city, were the chief sufferers in this abortive attempt.

Sapor had now spent seventy days before the place, and had made no perceptible impression. Autumn was already far advanced, and the season for military operations would, soon be over. It was necessary, therefore, either to take the city speedily or to give up the siege and retire. Under these circumstances Sapor resolved on a last effort. He had constructed towers of such a height that they overtopped the wall, and poured their discharges on the defenders from a superior elevation. He had brought his mounds in places to a level with the ramparts, and had compelled the garrison to raise countermounds within the walls for their protection. He now determined on pressing the assault day after day, until he either carried the town or found all his resources exhausted. His artillery, his foot, and his elephants were all employed in turn or together; he allowed the garrison no rest. Not content with directing the operations, he himself took part in the supreme struggle, exposing his own person freely to the enemy's weapons, and losing many of his attendants. After the contest had lasted three continuous days from morn to night, fortune at last favored him. One of the inner mounds, raised by the besieged behind their wall, suddenly gave way, involving its defenders in its fall, and at the same time filling up the entire space between the wall and the mound raised outside by the Persians. A way into the town was thus laid open, and the besiegers instantly occupied it. It was in vain that the flower of the garrison threw itself across the path of the entering columns--nothing could withstand the ardor of the Persian troops. In a little time all resistance was at an end; those who could quitted the city and fled--the remainder, whatever their sex, age, or calling, whether armed or unarmed, were slaughtered like sheep by the conquerors.

Thus fell Amida after a siege of seventy-three days. Sapor, who on other occasions showed himself not deficient in clemency, was exasperated by the prolonged resistance and the losses which he had sustained in the course of it. Thirty thousand of his best soldiers had fallen; the son of his chief ally had perished; he himself had been brought into imminent danger. Such audacity on the part of a petty town seemed no doubt to him to deserve a severe retribution. The place was therefore given over to the infuriated soldiery, who were allowed to slay and plunder at their pleasure. Of the captives taken, all belonging to the five provinces across the Tigris, claimed as his own by Sapor, though ceded to Rome by his grandfather, were massacred in cold blood. The Count Elian, and the commanders of the legions who had conducted the gallant defence, were barbarously crucified. Many other Romans of high rank were subjected to the indignity of being manacled, and were dragged into Persia as slaves rather than as prisoners.

The campaign of A.D. 359 terminated with this dearly bought victory. The season was too far advanced for any fresh enterprise of importance; and Sapor was probably glad to give his army a rest after the toils and perils of the last three months. Accordingly he retired across the Tigris, without leaving (so far as appears) any garrisons in Mesopotamia, and began preparations for the campaign of A.D. 360. Stores of all kinds were accumulated during the winter; and, when the spring came, the indefatigable monarch once more invaded the enemy's country, pouring into Mesopotamia an army even more numerous and better appointed than that which he had led against Amida in the preceding year. His first object now was to capture Singara, a town of some consequence, which was, however, defended by only two

Roman legions and a certain number of native soldiers. After a vain attempt to persuade the garrison to a surrender, the attack was made in the usual way, chiefly by scaling parties with ladders, and by battering parties which shook the walls with the ram. The defenders kept the sealers at bay by a constant discharge of stones and darts from their artillery, arrows from their bows, and leaden bullets from their slings. They met the assaults of the ram by attempts to fire the wooden covering which protected it and those who worked it. For some days these efforts sufficed; but after a while the besiegers found a weak point in the defences of the place--a tower so recently built that the mortar in which the stones were laid was still moist, and which consequently crumbled rapidly before the blows of a strong and heavy battering-ram, and in a short time fell to the ground. The Persians poured in through the gap, and were at once masters of the entire town, which ceased to resist after the catastrophe. This easy victory allowed Sapor to exhibit the better side of his character; he forbade the further shedding of blood, and ordered that as many as possible of the garrisons and citizens should be taken alive. Reviving a favorite policy of Oriental rulers from very remote times, he transported these captives to the extreme eastern parts of his empire, where they might be of the greatest service to him in defending his frontier against the Scythians and Indians.

It is not really surprising, though the historian of the war regards it as needing explanation, that no attempt was made to relieve Singara by the Romans. The siege was short; the place was considered strong; the nearest point held by a powerful Roman force was Nisibis, which was at least sixty miles distant from Singara. The neighborhood of Singara was, moreover, ill supplied with water; and a relieving army would probably have soon found itself in difficulties. Singara, on the verge of the desert, was always perilously situated. Rome valued it as an outpost from which her enemy might be watched, and which might advertise her of a sudden danger, but could not venture to undertake its defence in case of an attack in force, and was prepared to hear of its capture with equanimity.

From Singara Sapor directed his march almost due northwards, and, leaving Nisibis unassailed upon his left, proceeded to attack the strong fort known indifferently as Phoenica or Bezabde. This was a position on the east bank of the Tigris, near the point where that river quits the mountains and debouches upon the plain; though not on the site, it may be considered the representative of the modern Jezireh, which commands the passes from the low country into the Kurdish mountains. Bezabde was the chief city of the province, called after it Zabdicene, one of the five ceded by Narses and greatly coveted by his grandson. It was much valued by Rome, was fortified in places with a double wall, and was guarded by three legions and a large body of Kurdish archers. Sapor, having reconnoitred the place, and, with his usual hardihood, exposed himself to danger in doing so, sent a flag of truce to demand a surrender, joining with the messengers some prisoners of high rank taken at Singara, lest the enemy should open fire upon his envoys. The device was successful; but the garrison proved stanch, and determined on resisting to the last. Once more all the known resources of attack and defence were brought into play; and after a long siege, of which the most important incident was an attempt made by the bishop of the place to induce Sapor to withdraw, the wall was at last breached, the city taken, and its defenders indiscriminately massacred. Regarding the position as one of first-rate importance, Sapor, who had destroyed Singara, carefully repaired the defences of Bezabde, provisioned it abundantly, and garrisoned it with some of his best troops. He was well aware that the Romans would feel keenly the loss of so important a post, and expected that it would not be long before they made an effort to recover possession of it.

The winter was now approaching, but the Persian monarch still kept the field. The capture of Bezabde was followed by that of many other less important strongholds, which offered little resistance. At last, towards the close of the year, an attack was made upon a place called Virta, said to have been a fortress of great strength, and by some moderns identified with Tekrit, an important city upon the Tigris between Mosul and Bagdad. Here the career of the conqueror was at last arrested. Persuasion and force proved alike unavailing to induce or compel a surrender; and, after wasting the small remainder of the year, and suffering considerable loss, the Persian monarch reluctantly gave up the siege, and returned to his own country.

Meanwhile the movements of the Roman emperor had been slow and uncertain. Distracted between a jealous fear of his cousin Julian's proceedings in the West, and a desire of checking the advance of his rival Sapor in the East, he had left Constantinople in the early spring, but had journeyed leisurely through Cappadocia and Armenia Minor to Samosata, whence, after crossing the Euphrates, he had proceeded to Edessa, and there fixed himself. While in Cappadocia he had summoned to his presence Arsaces, the tributary king of Armenia, had reminded him of his engagements, and had endeavored to quicken his gratitude by bestowing on him liberal presents. At Edessa he employed himself during the whole of the summer in collecting troops and stores; nor was it till the autumnal equinox was past that he took the field, and, after weeping over the smoking ruins of Amida, marched to Bezabde, and, when the defenders rejected his overtures of peace, formed the siege of the place. Sapor was, we must suppose, now engaged before Virta, and it is probable that he thought Bezabde strong enough to defend itself. At any rate, he made no effort to afford it any relief; and the Roman emperor was allowed to employ all the resources at his disposal in reiterated assaults upon the walls. The defence, however, proved stronger than the attack. Time after time the bold sallies of the besieged destroyed the Roman works. At last the rainy season set in, and the low ground outside the town became a glutinous and adhesive marsh. It was no longer possible to continue the siege; and the disappointed emperor reluctantly drew off his troops, recrossed the Euphrates, and retired into winter quarters at Antioch.

The successes of Sapor in the campaigns of A.D. 359 and 360, his captures of Amida, Singara, and Bezabde, together with the unfortunate issue of the expedition made by Constantius against the last-named place, had a tendency to shake the fidelity of the Roman vassal-kings, Arsaces of Armenia, and Meribanes of Iberia. Constantius, therefore, during the winter of A.D. 360-1, which he passed at Antioch, sent emissaries to the courts of these monarchs, and endeavored to secure their fidelity by loading them with costly presents. His policy seems to have been so far successful that no revolt of these kingdoms took place; they did not as yet desert the Romans or make their submission to Sapor. Their monarchs seem to have simply watched events, prepared to declare themselves distinctly on the winning side so soon as fortune should incline unmistakably to one or the other combatant. Meanwhile they maintained the fiction of a nominal dependence upon Rome.

It might have been expected that the year A.D. 361 would have been a turning-point in the war, and that, if Rome did not by a great effort assert herself and recover her prestige, the advance of Persia would have been marked and rapid. But the actual course of events was far different. Hesitation and diffidence characterize the movements of both parties to the contest, and the year is signalized by no important enterprise on the part of either monarch. Constantius reoccupied Edessa, and had (we are told) some thoughts of renewing the siege of Bezabde; actually, however, he did not advance further, but contented

himself with sending a part of his army to watch Sapor, giving them strict orders not to risk an engagement. Sapor, on his side, began the year with demonstrations which were taken to mean that he was about to pass the Euphrates; but in reality he never even brought his troops across the Tigris, or once set foot in Mesopotamia. After wasting weeks or months in a futile display of his armed strength upon the eastern bank of the river, and violently alarming the officers sent by Constantius to observe his movements, he suddenly, towards autumn, withdrew his troops, having attempted nothing, and quietly returned to his capital! It is by no means difficult to understand the motives which actuated Constantius. He was, month after month, receiving intelligence from the West of steps taken by Julian which amounted to open rebellion, and challenged him to engage in civil war. So long as Sapor threatened invasion he did not like to quit Mesopotamia, lest he might appear to have sacrificed the interests of his country to his own private quarrels; but he must have been anxious to return to the seat of empire from the first moment that intelligence reached him of Julian's assumption of the imperial name and dignity; and when Sapor's retreat was announced he naturally made all haste to reach his capital. Meanwhile the desire of keeping his army intact caused him to refrain from any movement which involved the slightest risk of bringing on a battle, and, in fact, reduced him to inaction. So much is readily intelligible. But what at this time withheld Sapor, when he had so grand an opportunity of making an impression upon Rome--what paralyzed his arm when it might have struck with such effect it is far from easy to understand, though perhaps not impossible to conjecture. The historian of the war ascribes his abstinence to a religious motive, telling us that the auguries were not favorable for the Persians crossing the Tigris. But there is no other evidence that the Persians of this period were the slaves of any such superstition as that noted by Ammianus, nor any probability that a monarch of Sapor's force of character would have suffered his military policy to be affected by omens. We must therefore ascribe the conduct of the Persian king to some cause not recorded by the historian--same failure of health, or some peril from internal or external enemies which called him away from the scene of his recent exploits, just at the time when his continued presence there was most important. Once before in his lifetime, an invasion of his eastern provinces had required his immediate presence, and allowed his adversary to quit Mesopotamia and march against Magnentius. It is not improbable that a fresh attack of the same or some other barbarians now again happened opportunely for the Romans, calling Sapor away, and thus enabling Constantius to turn his hack upon the East, and set out for Europe in order to meet Julian.

The meeting, however, was not destined to take place. On his way from Antioch to Constantinople the unfortunate Constantius, anxious and perhaps over-fatigued, fell sick at Mopsucrene, in Cilicia, and died there, after a short illness, towards the close of A.D. 361. Julian the Apostate succeeded peacefully to the empire whereto he was about to assert his right by force of arms; and Sapor found that the war which he had provoked with Rome, in reliance upon his adversary's weakness and incapacity, had to be carried on with a prince of far greater natural powers and of much superior military training.