PARTHIA

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CHAPTER XX. Accession of Volagases IV.

On the death of Volagases III., in A.D. 190 or 191, the Parthian crown fell to another prince of the same name, who was probably the eldest son of the late monarch. This prince was scarcely settled upon the throne when the whole of Western Asia was violently disturbed by the commotions which shook the Roman Empire after the murder of Commodus. The virtuous Pertinax was allowed to reign but three months (A.D. 193, January--March). His successor was scarcely proclaimed when in three different quarters the legionaries rose in arms, and, saluting their commanders as "Emperors," invested them with the purple. Clodius Albinus, in Britain; Severus, in Pannonia; and Pescennius Niger, in Syria, at one and the same time claimed the place which the wretched Julianus had bought, and prepared themselves to maintain their rights against all who should impugn them. It seems that, on the first proclamation of Niger, and before it had become evident that he would have to establish his authority by force of arms, either the Parthian monarch, or at any rate princes who were among his dependants, sent to congratulate the new Emperor on his accession and to offer him contingents of troops, if he required them. These spontaneous proposals were at the first politely declined, since Niger expected to find himself accepted joyfully as sovereign, and did not look to have to engage in war. When, however, the news reached him that he had formidable competitors, and that Severus, acknowledged Emperor at Rome, was about to set out for the East, at the head of vast forces, he saw that it would be necessary for him, if he were to make head against his powerful rival, to draw together troops from all quarters. Accordingly, towards the close of A.D. 193, he sent envoys to the princes beyond the Euphrates, and especially to the kings of Parthia, Armenia, and Hatra, entreating them to send their troops at once to his aid. Volagases, under these circumstances, appears to have hesitated. He sent an answer that he would issue orders to his satraps for the collection of a force, but made no haste to redeem his promise, and in fact refrained from despatching any body of distinctly Parthian troops to the assistance of Niger in the impending struggle.

While, however, thus abstaining from direct interference in the contest between the two Roman pretenders, Volagases appears to have allowed one of his dependent monarchs to mix himself up in the quarrel. Hatra, at this time the capital of an Arabian community, and the chief city of central Mesopotamia (or the tract between the Sinjar and the Babylonian alluvium), was a dependency of Parthia, and though, like so many other Parthian dependencies, it possessed its native kings, cannot have been in a position to engage in a great war without permission from the Court of Ctesiphon. When, therefore, we find that Barsemius, the King of Hatra, not only received the envoys of Niger favorably, but actually sent to his aid a body of archers, we must understand that Volagases sanctioned the measure. Probably he thought it prudent to secure the friendship of the pretender whom he expected to be successful, but sought to effect this in the way that would compromise him least if the result of the struggle should be other than he looked for. The sending of his own troops to the camp of Niger would have committed him irretrievably; but the actions of a vassal

monarch might with some plausibility be disclaimed.

As the struggle between the two pretenders progressed in the early months of A.D. 194, the nations beyond the Euphrates grew bolder, and allowed themselves to indulge their natural feelings of hostility towards the Romans. The newly subjected Mesopotamians flew to arms, massacred most of the Roman detachments stationed about their country, and laid siege to Nisibis, which since the cession Rome had made her head-quarters. The natives of the region were assisted by their kindred races across the Tigris, particularly by the people of Adiabene, who, like the Arabs of Hatra, were Parthian vassals. Severus had no sooner overcome his rival and slain him, than he hastened eastward with the object of relieving the troops shut up in Nisibis, and of chastising the rebels and their abettors. It was in vain that the Mesopotamians sought to disarm his resentment by declaring that they had taken up arms in his cause, and had been only anxious to distress and injure the partisans of his antagonist. Though they sent ambassadors to him with presents, and offered to make restitution of the Roman spoil still in their hands, and of the Roman prisoners, it was observed that they said nothing about restoring the strongholds which they had taken, or resuming the position of Roman tributaries. On the contrary, they required that all Roman soldiers still in their country should be withdrawn from it, and that their independence should henceforth be respected. As Severus was not inclined to surrender Roman territory without a contest, war was at once declared. His immediate adversaries were of no great account, being, as they were, the petty kings of Osrhoene, Adiabene, and Hatra; but behind them loomed the massive form of the Parthian State, which was attacked through them, and could not be indifferent to their fortunes.

In the spring of A.D. 195, Severus, at the head of his troops, crossed the Euphrates in person, and taking up his own quarters at Nisibis, which the Mesopotamians had been unable to capture, proceeded to employ his generals in the reduction of the rebels and the castigation of their aiders and abettors. Though his men suffered considerably from the scarcity and badness of the water, yet he seems to have found no great difficulty in reducing Mesopotamia once more into subjection. Having brought it completely under, and formally made Nisibis the capital, at the same time raising it to the dignified position of a Roman colony, he caused his troops to cross the Tigris into Adiabene, and, though the inhabitants offered a stout resistance, succeeded in making himself master of the country. The Parthian monarch seems to have made no effort to prevent the occupation of this province. He stood probably on the defensive, expecting to be attacked, in or near his capital. But Severus could not afford to remain in these remote regions. He had still a rival in the West in the person of Clodius Albinus, who might be expected to descend upon Italy, if it were left exposed to his attacks much longer. He therefore quitted the East early in A.D. 196, and returned to Rome with all speed, leaving Parthia very insufficiently chastised, and his new conquests very incompletely settled.

Scarcely was he gone when the war broke out with greater violence than ever. Volagases took the offensive, recovered Adiabene, and crossing the Tigris into Mesopotamia, swept the Romans from the open country. Nisibis alone, which two years before had defied all the efforts of the Mesopotamians, held out against him, and even this stronghold was within a little of being taken. According to one writer, the triumphant Parthians even crossed the Euphrates, and once more spread themselves over the fertile plains of Syria. Severus was forced in A.D. 197 to make a second Eastern expedition to recover his lost glory and justify the titles which he had taken. On his first arrival in Syria, he contented

himself with expelling the Parthians from the province, nor was it till late in the year, that, having first made ample preparation, he crossed the Euphrates into Mesopotamia.

The success of any expedition against Parthia depended greatly on the dispositions of the semi-dependent princes, who possessed territories bordering upon those of the two great empires. Among these the most important were at this time the kings of Armenia and Osrhoene. Armenia had at the period of Niger's attempt been solicited by his emissaries; but its monarch had then refused to take any part in the civil conflict. Subsequently, however, he in some way offended Severus who, when he reached the East, regarded Armenia as a hostile State requiring instant subjugation. It seems to have been in the summer of A.D. 197, soon after his first arrival in Syria, that Severus despatched a force against the Armenian prince, who was named (like the Parthian monarch of the time) Volagases. That prince mustered his troops and met the invaders at the frontier of his kingdom. A battle seemed imminent; but ere the fortune of war was tried the Armenian made an application for a truce, which was granted by the Roman leaders. A breathing-space being thus gained, Volagases sent ambassadors with presents and hostages to the Roman emperor in Syria, professed to be animated by friendly feelings towards Rome, and entreated Severus to allow him terms of peace. Severus permitted himself to be persuaded; a formal treaty was made, and the Armenian prince even received an enlargement of his previous territory at the hands of his mollified suzerain.

The Osrhoenian monarch, who bore the usual name of Abgarus, made a more complete and absolute submission. He came in person into the emperor's camp, accompanied by a numerous body of archers, and bringing with him his sons as hostages. Severus must have hailed with especial satisfaction the adhesion of this chieftain, which secured him the undisturbed possession of Western Mesopotamia as far as the junction of the Khabour with the Euphrates. It was his design to proceed himself by the Euphrates route, while he sent detachments under other leaders to ravage Eastern Mesopotamia and Adiabene, which had evidently been re-occupied by the Parthians. To secure his army from want, he determined, like Trajan, to build a fleet of ships in Upper Mesopotamia, where suitable timber abounded, and to march his army down the left bank of the Euphrates into Babylonia, while his transports, laden with stores, descended the course of the river. In this way he reached the neighborhood of Ctesiphon without suffering any loss, and easily captured the two great cities of Babylon and Seleucia, which on his approach were evacuated by their garrisons. He then proceeded to the attack of Ctesiphon itself, passing his ships probably through one of the canals which united the Tigris with the Euphrates, or else (like Trajan) conveying them on rollers across the neck of land which separates the two rivers.

Volagases had taken up his own position at Ctesiphon, bent on defending his capital. It is possible that the approach of Severus by the line of march which he pursued was unexpected, and that the sudden presence of the Romans before the walls of Ctesiphon came upon the Parthian monarch as a surprise. He seems, at any rate, to have made but a poor resistance. It may be gathered, indeed, from one author that he met the invaders in the open field, and fought a battle in defence of Ctesiphon before allowing himself to be shut up within its walls. But after the city was once invested it appears to have been quickly taken. We hear of no such resistance as that which was soon afterwards offered by Hatra. The soldiers of Severus succeeded in storming Ctesiphon on the first assault; the Parthian monarch betook himself to flight, accompanied by a few horsemen; and the seat of empire thus fell easily--a second time within the space of eighty-two years--into the hands of a foreign invader. The treatment of the city was such as we

might expect from the ordinary character of Roman warfare. A general massacre of the male population was made. The soldiers wore allowed to plunder both the public and the private buildings at their pleasure. The precious metals accumulated in the royal treasury were seized, and the chief ornaments of the palace were taken and carried off. Nor did blood and plunder content the victors. After slaughtering the adult males they made prize of the women and children, who were torn from their homes without compunction and led into captivity, to the number of a hundred thousand.

Notwithstanding the precautions which he had taken, Severus appears to have become straitened for supplies about the time that he captured Ctesiphon. His soldiers were compelled for some days to exist on roots, which produced a dangerous dysentery. He found himself unable to pursue Volagases, and recognized the necessity of retreating before disaster overtook him. He could not, however, return by the route of the Euphrates, since his army had upon its advance completely exhausted the resources of the Euphrates region. The line of the Tigris was therefore preferred for the retreat; and while the ships with difficulty made their way up the course of the stream, the army pursued its march upon the banks, without, so far as appears, any molestation. It happened, however, that the route selected led Severus near to the small state of Hatra, which had given him special offence by supporting the cause of his rival, Niger; and it seemed to him of importance that the inhabitants should receive condign punishment for this act of audacity. He may also have hoped to eclipse the fame of Trajan by the capture of a town which had successfully resisted that hero. He therefore stopped his march in order to lay siege to the place, which he attacked with military engines, and with all the other offensive means known at the time to the Romans. His first attempt was, however, easily repulsed. The walls of the town were strong, its defenders brave and full of enterprise. They burnt the siege-machines brought against them, and committed great havoc among the soldiers. Under these circumstances disorders broke out among the besiegers; mutinous words were heard; and the emperor thought himself compelled to have recourse to severe measures of repression. Having put to death two of his chief officers, and then found it necessary to deny that he had given orders for the execution of one of them, he broke up from before the place and removed his camp to a distance.

He had not, however, as yet relinquished the hope of bringing his enterprise to a successful issue. In the security of his distant camp he constructed fresh engines in increased numbers, collected an abundant supply of provisions, and made every preparation for renewing the siege with effect at no remote period. The treasures stored up in the city were reported to be great, especially those which the piety of successive generations had accumulated in the Temple of the Sun. This rich booty appealed forcibly to the cupidity of the emperor, while his honor seemed to require that he should not suffer a comparatively petty town to defy his arms with impunity. He, therefore, after a short absence retraced his steps, and appeared a second time before Hatrawith a stronger siege-train and a better appointed army than before. But the Hatreni met his attack with a resolution equal to his own. They were excellent archers; they possessed a powerful force of cavalry; they knew their walls to be strong; and they were masters of a peculiar kind of fire, which was calculated to terrify and alarm, if not greatly to injure, an enemy unacquainted with its qualities. Severus once more lost almost all his machines; the Hatrene cavalry severely handled his foragers; his men for a long time made but little impression upon the walls, while they suffered grievously from the enemy's slingers and archers, from his warlike engines, and especially, we are told, from the fiery darts

which were rained upon them incessantly. However, after enduring these various calamities for a length of time, the perseverance of the Romans was rewarded by the formation of a practicable breach in the outer wall; and the soldiers demanded to be led to the assault, confident in their power to force an entrance and carry the place. But the emperor resisted their inclination. He did not wish that the city should be stormed, since in that case it must have been given up to indiscriminate pillage, and the treasures which he coveted would have become the prey of the soldiery. The Hatreni, he thought, would make their submission, if he only gave them a little time, now that they must see further resistance to be hopeless. He waited therefore a day, expecting an offer of surrender. But the Hatreni made no sign, and in the night restored their wall where it had been broken down.

Severus then made up his mind to sacrifice the treasures on which his heart had been set, and, albeit with reluctance, gave the word for the assault. But now the legionaries refused. They had been forbidden to attack when success was certain and the danger trivial--they were now required to imperil their lives while the result could not but be doubtful. Perhaps they divined the emperor's motive in withholding them from the assault, and resented it; at any rate they openly declined to execute his orders. After a vain attempt to force an entrance by means of his Asiatic allies, Severus desisted from his undertaking. The summer was far advanced the heat was great; disease had broken out among his troops; above all, they had become demoralized, and their obedience could no longer be depended on. Severus broke up from before Hatra a second time, after having besieged it for twenty days, and returned--by what route we are not told--into Syria.

Nothing is more surprising in the history of this campaign than the inaction and apparent apathy of the Parthians. Volagases, after quitting his capital, seems to have made no effort at all to hamper or harass his adversary. The prolonged resistance of Hatra, the sufferings of the Romans, their increasing difficulties with respect to provisions, the injurious effect of the summer heats upon their unacclimatized constitutions, would have been irresistible temptations to a prince of any spirit or energy, inducing him to advance as the Romans retired, to hang upon their rear, to cut off their supplies, and to render their retreat difficult, if not disastrous. Volagases appears to have remained wholly inert and passive. His conduct is only explicable by the consideration of the rapid decline which Parthia was now undergoing, of the general decay of patriotic spirit, and the sea of difficulties into which a monarch was plunged who had to retreat before an invader.

The expedition of Severus was on the whole glorious for Rome, and disastrous for Parthia, though the glory of the victor was tarnished at the close by his failure before Hatra. It cost Parthia a second province. The Roman emperor not only recovered his previous position in Mesopotamia, but overstepping the Tigris, established the Roman dominion firmly in the fertile tract between that stream and the Zagros mountain-range. The title of "Adiabenicus" became no empty boast. Adiabene, or the tract between the Zab rivers--probably including at this time the entire low region at the foot of Zagros from the eastern Khabour on the north to the Adhem towards the south--passed under the dominion of Rome, the monarch of the country, hitherto a Parthian vassal, becoming her tributary. Thus the imperial standards were planted permanently at a distance less than a degree from the Parthian capital, which, with the great cities of Seleucia and Babylon in its neighborhood, was exposed to be captured almost at any moment by a sudden and rapid inroad.

Volagases survived his defeat by Severus about ten or eleven years. For this space Parthian history is once more a blank, our authorities containing no notice that directly

touches Parthia during the period in question. The stay of Severus in the East during the years A.D. 200 and 201, would seem to indicate that the condition of the Oriental provinces was unsettled and required the presence of the Imperator. But we hear of no effort made by Parthia at this time to recover her losses--of no further collision between her troops and those of Rome; and we may assume therefore that peace was preserved, and that the Parthian monarch acquiesced, however unwillingly, in the curtailment of his territory. Probably internal, no less than external, difficulties pressed upon him. The diminution of Parthian prestige which had been brought about by the successive victories of Trajan, Avidius Cassius, and Severus must have loosened the ties which bound to Parthia the several vassal kingdoms. Her suzerainty had been accepted as that of the Asiatic nation most competent to make head against European intruders, and secure the native races in continued independence of a wholly alien power. It may well have appeared at this time to the various vassal states that the Parthian vigor had become _effete_, that the qualities which had advanced the race to the leadership of Western Asia were gone, and that unless some new power could be raised up to act energetically against Rome, the West would obtain complete dominion over the East, and Asia be absorbed into Europe. Thoughts of this kind, fermenting among the subject populations, would produce a general debility, a want both of power and of inclination to make any combined effort, a desire to wait until an opportunity of acting with effect should offer. Hence probably the deadness and apathy which characterize this period, and which seem at first sight so astonishing. Distrust of their actual leader paralyzed the nations of Western Asia, and they did not as yet see their way clearly towards placing themselves under any other guidance.

Volagases IV. reigned till A.D. 208-9, dying thus about two years before his great adversary, who expired at York, February 4, A.D. 211.

CHAPTER XXI. Struggle between the two Sons of Volagases IV.

On the death of Volagases IV., the Parthian crown was disputed between his two sons, Artabanus and Volagases. According to the classical writers, the contest resulted in favor of the former, whom they regard as undisputed sovereign of the Parthians, at any rate from the year A.D. 216. It appears, however, from the Parthian coins, that both the brothers claimed and exercised sovereignty during the entire term of seventeen or eighteen years which intervened between the death of Volagases IV. and the revolt of the Persians. Artabanus must beyond all doubt have acquired the sole rule in the western portions of the empire, since (from A.D. 216 to A.D. 226) he was the only monarch known to the Romans. But Volagases may at the same time have been recognized in the more eastern provinces, and may have maintained himself in power in those remote regions without interfering with his brother's dominion in the West. Still this division of the empire must naturally have tended to weaken it; and the position of Volagases has to be taken into account in estimating the difficulties under which the last monarch of the Arsacid series found himself placed--difficulties to which, after a struggle, he was at last forced to succumb. Domestic dissension, wars with a powerful neighbor (Rome), and internal disaffection and rebellion formed a combination, against which the last Parthian monarch, albeit a man of considerable energy, strove in vain. But he strove bravely; and the closing scenes of the empire, in which he bore the chief part, are not unworthy of its best and palmiest days.

An actual civil war appears to have raged between the two brothers for some years. Caracallus, who in A.D. 211 succeeded his father, Severus, as Emperor of Rome, congratulated the Senate in A.D. 212 on the strife still going on in Parthia, which could not

fail (he said) to inflict serious injury on that hostile state. The balance of advantage seems at first to have inclined towards Volagases, whom Caracallus acknowledged as monarch of Parthia in the year A.D. 215. But soon after this the fortune of war must have turned; for subsequently to the year A.D. 215, we hear nothing more of Volagases, but find Caracallus negotiating with Artabanus instead, and treating with him as undisputed monarch of the entire Parthian empire. That this was not his real position, appears from the coins; but the classical evidence may be accepted as showing that from the year A.D. 216, Volagases ceased to have much power, sinking from the rank of a rival monarch into that of a mere pretender, who may have caused some trouble to the established sovereign, but did not inspire serious alarm.

Artabanus, having succeeded in reducing his brother to this condition, and obtained a general acknowledgment of his claims, found himself almost immediately in circumstances of much difficulty. From the moment of his accession, Caracallus had exhibited an inordinate ambition; and this ambition had early taken the shape of a special desire for the glory of Oriental conquests. The weak and dissolute son of Severus fancied himself, and called himself, a second Alexander; and thus he was in honor bound to imitate that hero's marvellous exploits. The extension of the Roman territory towards the East became very soon his great object, and he shrank from no steps, however base and dishonorable, which promised to conduce towards the accomplishment of his wishes. As early as A.D. 212 he summoned Abgarus, the tributary king of Osrhoene, into his presence, and when he unsuspectingly complied, seized him, threw him into prison, and declaring his territories forfeited, reduced them into the form of a Roman province. Successful in this bold proceeding, he attempted to deal with Armenia in the same way; but, though the monarch fell foolishly into the trap set for him, the nation was not so easily managed. The Armenians flew to arms on learning the imprisonment of their king and royal family; and when, three year afterwards (A.D. 215), Caracallus sent a Roman army under Theocritus, one of his favorites, to chastise them, they inflicted a severe defeat on their assailant. But the desire of Caracallus to effect Oriental conquests was increased, rather than diminished, by this occurrence. He had sought a quarrel with Parthia as early as A.D. 214, when he demanded of Volagases the surrender of two refugees of distinction. The rupture, which he courted, was deferred by the discreditable compliance of the Great King with his requisition.

Volagases surrendered the two unfortunates; and the Roman Emperor was compelled to declare himself satisfied with the concession. But a year had not elapsed before he had devised a new plan of attack and proceeded to put it in execution.

Volagases V. was about this time compelled to yield the western capital to his brother; and Artabanus IV. became the representative of Parthian power in the eyes of the Romans. Caracallus in the summer of A.D. 215, having transferred his residence from Nicomedia to Antioch, sent ambassadors from the last-named place to Artabanus, who were to present the Parthian monarch with presents of unusual magnificence, and to make him an unheard-of proposition. "The Roman Emperor," said the despatch with which they were intrusted, "could not fitly wed the daughter of a subject or accept the position of son-in-law to a private person. No one could be a suitable wife to him who was not a princess." He therefore asked the Parthian monarch for the hand of his daughter. Rome and Parthia divided between them the sovereignty of the world; united, as they would be by this marriage, no longer recognizing any boundary as separating them, they would constitute a power that could not but be irresistible. It would be easy for them to reduce under their sway all the barbarous races on the skirts of their empires, and to hold them in subjection by a

flexible system of administration and government. The Roman infantry was the best in the world, and in steady hand-to-hand fighting must be allowed to be unrivalled. The Parthians surpassed all nations in the number of their cavalry and in the excellency of their archers. If these advantages, instead of being separated, were combined, and the various elements on which success in war depends were thus brought into harmonious union, there could be no difficulty in establishing and maintaining a universal monarchy. Were that done, the Parthian spices and rare stuffs, as also the Roman metals and manufactures, would no longer need to be imported secretly and in small quantities by merchants, but, as the two countries would form together but one nation and one state, there would be a free interchange among all the citizens of their various products and commodities.

The recital of this despatch threw the Parthian monarch into extreme perplexity. He did not believe that the proposals made to him were serious, or intended to have an honorable issue. The project broached appeared to him altogether extravagant, and such as no one in his senses could entertain for a moment. Yet he was anxious not to offend the master of two-and-thirty legions, nor even to give him a pretext for a rupture of amicable relations. Accordingly he temporized, contenting himself with setting forth some objections to the request of Caracallus, and asking to be excused compliance with it. "Such a union, as Caracallus proposed, could scarcely," he said, "prove a happy one. The wife and husband, differing in language, habits, and mode of life, could not but become estranged from one another. There was no lack of patricians at Rome, possessing daughters with whom the emperor might wed as suitably as the Parthian kings did with the females of their own royal house. It was not fit that either family should sully its blood by mixture with the other."

There is some doubt whether Caracallus construed this response as an absolute refusal, and thereupon undertook his expedition, or whether he regarded it as inviting further negotiation, and sent a second embassy, whose arguments and persuasions induced Artabanus to consent to the proposed alliance. The contemporary historian, Dio, states positively that Artabanus refused to give his daughter to the Roman monarch, and that Caracallus undertook his expedition to avenge this insult; but Herodian, another contemporary, declares exactly the reverse. According to him, the Roman Emperor, on receiving the reply of Artabanus, sent a new embassy to urge his suit, and to protest with oaths that he was in earnest and had the most friendly intentions. Artabanus upon this yielded, addressed Caracallus as his son-in-law, and invited him to come and fetch home his bride. Herodian describes with much minuteness, and with a good deal of picturesque effect, the stately march of the Imperial prince through the Parthian territory, the magnificent welcome which he received, and the peaceful meeting of the two kings in the plain before Ctesiphon, which was suddenly interrupted by the meditated treason of the crafty Roman. Taken at disadvantage, the Parthian monarch with difficulty escaped, while his soldiers and other subjects, incapable of making any resistance, were slaughtered like sheep by their assailants, who then plundered and ravaged the Parthian territory at their will, and returned laden with spoil into Mesopotamia. In general, Dio is a more trustworthy authority than Herodian, and most moderns have therefore preferred his version of the story. But it may be questioned whether in this particular case the truth has not been best preserved by the historian on whom under ordinary circumstances we place less dependence. If so disgraceful an outrage as that described by Herodian was, indeed, committed by the head of the Roman State on a foreign potentate, Dio, as a great State official, would naturally be anxious to

gloss it over. There are, moreover, internal difficulties in his narrative; and on more than one point of importance he contradicts not only Herodian, but also Spartianus. It is therefore not improbable that Herodian has given with most truth the general outline of the expedition of Caracallus, though, with that love of effect which characterizes him, he may have unduly embellished the narrative.

The advance of Caracallus was, if Spartianus is to be believed, through Babylonia. The return may have been (as Dio seems to indicate that it was) by the way of the Tigris, through Adiabene and Upper Mesopotamia. It was doubtless on the return that Caracallus committed a second and wholly wanton outrage upon the feelings of his adversary, by violating the sanctity of the Parthian royal sepulchres, and dispersing their contents to the four winds. These tombs were situated at Arbela, in Adiabene, a place which seems to have been always regarded as in some sort a City of the Dead. The useless insult and impiety were worthy of one who, like Caracallus, was "equally devoid of judgment and humanity," and who has been pronounced by the most unimpassioned of historians to have been "the common enemy of mankind." A severe reckoning was afterwards exacted for the indignity, which was felt by the Parthians with all the keenness wherewith Orientals are wont to regard any infringement of the sanctity of the grave.

Caracallus appears to have passed the winter at Edessa, amusing himself with hunting and charioteering after the fatigues of his campaign. In the spring he threatened another advance into Parthian territory, and threw the Medes and Parthians into great alarm. He had not, however, the opportunity of renewing his attack. On April 8, A.D. 217, having quitted Edessa with a small retinue for the purpose of visiting a famous temple of the Moon-God near Carrhaa, he was surprised and murdered on the way by Julius Martialis, one of his guards. His successor, Macrinus, though a Praetorian prefect, was no soldier, and would willingly have retired at once from the war. But the passions of the Parthians had been roused. Artahanus possessed the energy and spirit which most of the recent monarchs had lacked; and though defeated when taken at disadvantage, and unable for some months to obtain any revenge, had employed the winter in the collection of a vast army, and was determined to exact a heavy retribution for the treacherous massacre of Ctesiphon and the wanton impiety of Arbela. He had already taken the field and conducted his troops to the neighborhood of the Roman frontier when Caracallus lost his life. Macrinus was scarcely acknowledged emperor when he found that the Parthians were close at hand, that the frontier was crossed, and that unless a treaty could be concluded he must risk a battle.

Under these circumstances the unwarlike emperor hurriedly, sent ambassadors to the Parthian camp, with an offer to restore all the prisoners made in the late campaign as the price of peace. Artabanus unhesitatingly rejected the overture, but at the same time informed his adversary of the terms on which he was willing to treat. Macrinus, he said, must not only restore the prisoners, but must also consent to rebuild all the towns and castles which Caracallus had laid in ruins, must make compensation for the injury done to the tombs of the kings, and further must cede Mesopotamia to the Parthians. It was impossible for a Roman Emperor to consent to such demands without first trying the fortune of war, and Macrinus accordingly made up his mind to fight a battle. The Parthian prince had by this time advanced as far as Nisibis, and it was in the neighborhood of that city that the great struggle took place.

The battle of Nisibis, which terminated the long contest between Rome and Parthia, was the fiercest and best-contested which was ever fought between the rival powers. It lasted for the space of three days. The army of Artabanus was numerous and well-

appointed: like almost every Parthian force, it was strong in cavalry and archers; and it had moreover a novel addition of considerable importance, consisting of a corps of picked soldiers, clad in complete armor, and carrying long spears or lances, who were mounted on camels. The Roman legionaries were supported by numerous light-armed troops, and a powerful body of Mauritanian cavalry. According to Dio, the first engagement was brought on accidentally by a contest which arose among the soldiers for the possession of a watering-place. Herodian tells us that it commenced with a fierce assault of the Parthian cavalry, who charged the Romans with loud shouts, and poured into their ranks flight after flight of arrows. A long struggle followed. The Romans suffered greatly from the bows of the horse-archers, and from the lances of the corps mounted on camels; and though, when they could reach their enemy, they had always the superiority in close combat, yet after a while their losses from the cavalry and camels forced them to retreat. As they retired they strewed the ground with spiked balls and other contrivances for injuring the feet of animals; and this stratagem was so far successful that the pursuers soon found themselves in difficulties, and the armies respectively retired, without any decisive result, to their camps.

The next day there was again a combat from morning to night, of which we have no description, but which equally terminated without any clear advantage to either side. The fight was then renewed for the third time on the third day, with the difference that the Parthians now directed all their efforts towards surrounding the enemy, and thus capturing their entire force. As they greatly outnumbered the Romans, these last found themselves compelled to extend their line unduly, in order to meet the Parthian tactics; and the weakness of the extended line seems to have given the Parthians an opportunity of throwing it into confusion, and thus causing the Roman defeat. Macrinus took to flight among the first; and his hasty retreat discouraged his troops, who soon afterwards acknowledged themselves beaten, and retired within the lines of their camp. Both armies had suffered severely. Herodian describes the heaps of dead as piled to such a height that the manoeuvres of the troops were impeded by them, and at last the two contending hosts could scarcely see one another! Both armies, therefore, desired peace. The soldiers of Macrinus, who had never had much confidence in their leader, were demoralized by ill success, and showed themselves inclined to throw off the restraints of discipline. Those of Artabanus, a militia rather than a standing force, were unaccustomed to sustained efforts; and having been now for some months in the field, had grown weary, and wished to return home. Macrinus under these circumstances re-opened negotiations with his adversary. He was prepared to concede something more than he had proposed originally, and he had reason to believe that the Parthian monarch, having found the Roman resistance so stubborn, would be content to insist on less. The event justified his expectations. Artabanus relinquished his demand for the cession of Mesopotamia, and accepted a pecuniary compensation for his wrongs. Besides restoring the captives and the booty carried off by Caracallus in his raid, Macrinus had to pay a sum exceeding a million and a half of our money. Rome thus concluded her transactions with Parthia, after nearly three centuries of struggle, by ignominiously purchasing a peace.

It might have been expected that the glory of this achievement would have brought the troubles of Artabanus to a close; and if they did not cause the pretender who still disputed his possession of the throne to submit, would at any rate have put an end to any disaffection on the part of the subject nations that the previous ill-success of Parthia in her Roman wars might have provoked. But in the histories of nations and empires we constantly find that noble and gallant efforts

to retrieve disaster and prevent the ruin consequent upon it come too late. When matters have gathered to a head, when steps that commit important persons have been taken, when classes or races have been encouraged to cherish hopes, when plans have been formed and advanced to a certain point, the course of action that has been contemplated and arranged for cannot suddenly be given up. The cause of discontent is removed, but the effects remain. Affections have been alienated, and the alienation still continues. A certain additional resentment is even felt at the tardy repentance, or revival, which seems to cheat the discontented of that general sympathy whereof without it they would have been secure. In default of their original grievance, it is easy for them to discover minor ones, to exaggerate these into importance, and to find in them a sufficient reason for persistence in the intended course. Hence revolutions often take place just when the necessity for them seems to be past, and kingdoms perish at a time when they have begun to show themselves deserving of a longer term of life.

It is impossible at the present day to form any trustworthy estimate of the real value of those grounds of complaint which the Persians, in common doubtless with other subject races, thought that they had against the Parthian rule. We can well understand that the supremacy of any dominant race is irksome to the aliens who have to submit to it; but such information as we possess fails to show us either anything seriously oppressive in the general system of the Parthian government, or any special grievance whereof the Persians had to complain. The Parthians were tolerant; they did not interfere with the religious prejudices of their subjects, or attempt to enforce uniformity of creed or worship. Their military system did not press over-heavily on the subject peoples, nor is there any reason to believe that the scale of their taxation was excessive. Such tyranny as is charged upon certain Parthian monarchs is not of a kind that would have been sensibly felt by the conquered nations, for it was exercised upon none who were not Parthians. If we endeavor to form a distinct notion of the grievances under which the Persians suffered, they seem to have amounted to no more than this: 1. That high offices, whether military or civil, were for the most part confined to those of Parthian blood, and not thrown open to Parthian subjects generally; 2. That the priests of the Persian religion were not held in any special honor, but placed merely on a par with the religious ministers of the other subject races; 3. That no advantage in any respect was allowed to the Persians over the rest of the conquered peoples, notwithstanding that they had for so many years exercised supremacy over Western Asia, and given to the list of Asiatic worthies such names as those of Cyrus and Darius Hystaspis. It must, however, be confessed that the account which has come down to us of the times in question is exceedingly meagre and incomplete; that we cannot say whether the Persians had not also other grounds of complaint besides those that are known to us; and, more especially, that we have no means of determining what the actual pressure of the grievances complained of was, or whether it did not reach to that degree of severity which moderns mostly hold to justify disaffection and rebellion. On the whole, perhaps, our conclusion must be, that the best justification of the outbreak is to be found in its success. The Parthians had no right to their position but such as arose out of the law of the stronger--

> The ancient rule, the good old plan, That those shall take who have the power, And those shall keep who can--

when the time came that they had lost this pre-eminence, superiority in strength having passed from them to a nation hitherto counted among their subjects, it was natural and right that the seat of authority should shift with the shift in the balance of power, and that the leadership of the Persians should be once more recognized.

If the motives which actuated the nation of the Persians in rising against their masters are thus obscure and difficult to be estimated, still less can we form any decided judgment upon those which caused their leader, Artaxerxes, to attempt his perilous enterprise. Could we trust implicitly the statement of Agathias, that Artaxerxes was himself a Magus, initiated in the deepest mysteries of the Order, we should have grounds for considering that religious zeal was, at any rate, a leading motive of his conduct. It is certain that among the principal changes consequent upon his success was a religious revolution--the substitution for Parthian tolerance of all faiths and worships, of a rigidly enforced uniformity in religion, the establishment of the Magi in power, and the bloody persecution of all such as declined obedience to the precepts of Zoroaster. But the conjecture has been made, and cannot be refuted, that the proceedings of Artaxerxes in this matter should be ascribed to policy rather than to bigotry, and in that case we could not regard him, as originally inspired by a religious sentiment. Perhaps it is best to suppose that, like most founders of empires, he was mainly prompted by ambition; that he saw in the distracted state of Parthia and in the awakening of hope among the subject races, an occasion of which he determined to avail himself as far as he could, and that he was gradually led on to enlarge his views and to effect the great revolution, which he brought about, by the force of circumstances, the wishes of others, and the occurrence of opportunities which at first he neither foresaw nor desired.

It has been observed, that Parthia was, during the whole reign of Artaxerxes, distracted by the claims of a pretender, Volagases V. According to Moses of Chorene, two branches of the Arsacid family, both of them settled in Bactria, were at feud with the reigning prince; and these offended relatives carried their enmity to such a length as to consider submission to a foreigner a less evil than subjection to the _de facto_ head of their house. The success of Artabanus in the war against Rome had no effect upon his domestic foes; and Artaxerxes undoubtedly knew that, if he raised the standard of revolt, he might count on a certain amount of support from discontented Arsacids and their followers. But his main reliance must have been on the Persians. The Persians had, in the original arrangements of the Parthian empire, been treated with a certain amount of favor. They had been allowed to retain their native monarchs, a concession which naturally involved the continuance of the nation's laws, customs, and traditions. Their religion had not been persecuted, and had even in the early times attracted a considerable amount of Court favor. But it would seem that latterly the privileges of the nation had been diminished, while their prejudices were wantonly shocked. The Magi had ceased to be regarded as of much account, and, if they still formed nominally a portion of the king's council, can have had little influence on the conduct of affairs by the government. Such a custom as that of burning the dead, which seems to have been the rule in the later Parthian times, could never have maintained its ground, if the opinion of the Magi, or their coreligionists, had been considered of much account.

Encouraged by the dissensions prevailing in the Parthian royal house, strong in the knowledge of his fellow-countrymen's discontent, and perhaps thinking that the losses which Artabanus had sustained in his three days' battle against the Romans under Macrinus had seriously weakened his military strength, Artaxerxes, tributary king of Persia under Parthia, about A.D. 220, or a little later, took up arms against his master, and in a little time succeeded in establishing the independence of Persia Proper, or the modern province of Fars. Artabanus is said to have taken no steps at first to crush the rebellion, or to re-establish his authority over his revolted vassal. Thus the Persian monarch, finding himself unmolested, was free to enlarge his plans, and having

originally, as is probable, designed only the liberation of his own people, began to contemplate conquests. Turning his arms eastwards against Carmania (Kerman), he easily reduced that scantily-peopled tract under his dominion, after which he made war towards the north, and added to his kingdom some of the outlying regions of Media. Artabanus now at length resolved to bestir himself, and collecting his forces, took the field in person. Invading Persia Proper, he engaged in a desperate struggle with his rival. Three great battles were fought between the contending powers. In the last, which took place in the plain of Hormuz, between Bebahan and Shuster, on the course of the Jerahi river, Artabanus was, after a desperate conflict, completely defeated, and not only defeated but slain (A.D. 226).

The victory of Hormuz did not, however, absolutely decide the contest, or determine at once that the Parthian empire should fall, and the new Persian kingdom succeed into its place. Artabanus had left sons; and there were not wanting those among the feudatories of the empire, and even among the neighboring potentates, who were well inclined to embrace their cause. A certain Artavasdes seems to have claimed the throne, and to have been accepted as king, at least by a portion of the Parthians, in the year following the death of Artabanus (A.D. 227), when he certainly issued coins. The Armenian monarch, who had been set on his throne by Artabanus, and was uncle to the young princes, was especially anxious to maintain the Arsacids in power; he gave them a refuge in Armenia, collected an army on their behalf, and engaging Artaxerxes, is even said to have defeated him in a battle. But his efforts, and those of Artavasdes, were unavailing. The arms of Artaxerxes in the end everywhere prevailed. After a struggle, which cannot have lasted more than a few years, the provinces of the old Parthian empire submitted; the last Arsacid prince fell into the hands of the Persian king; and the founder of the new dynasty sought to give legitimacy to his rule by taking to wife an Arsacid princess.

Thus perished the great Parthian monarchy after an existence of nearly five centuries. Its end must be attributed in the main to internal decay, working itself out especially in two directions. The Arsacid race, with which the idea of the empire was bound up, instead of clinging together with that close "union" which is "strength," allowed itself to be torn to pieces by dissensions, to waste its force in quarrels, and to be made a handle of by every foreign invader, or domestic rebel, who chose to use its name in order to cloak his own selfish projects. The race itself does not seem to have become exhausted. Its chiefs, the successive occupants of the throne, never sank into mere weaklings or faineants, never shut themselves up in their seraglios, or ceased to take a leading part, alike in civil broils, and in struggles with foreign rivals. But the hold which the race had on the population, native and foreign, was gradually weakened by the feuds which raged within it, by the profusion with which the sacred blood was shed by those in whose veins it ran, and the difficulty of knowing which living member of it was its true head, and so entitled to the allegiance of those who wished to be faithful Parthian subjects. Further, the vigor of the Parthian soldiery must have gradually declined, and their superiority over the mass of the nations under their dominion have diminished. We found reasons for believing that, as early as A.D. 58, Hyrcania succeeded in throwing off the Parthian yoke, and thus setting an example of successful rebellion to the subject peoples. The example may have been followed in cases of which we hear nothing; for the condition of the more remote portions of the empire was for the most part unknown to the Romans. When Persia, about A.D. 220, revolted from Artabanus, it was no doubt with a conviction that the Parthians were no longer the terrible warriors who under Mithridates I. had driven all the armies of the East before them like chaff, or who under Orodes and Phraates IV.

had gained signal victories over the Romans. It is true that Artabanus had contended not unsuccessfully with Macrinus. But the prestige of Parthia was far from being re-established by the result of his three days' battle. Rome retained as her own, notwithstanding his success, the old Parthian province of Mesopotamia, and was thus, even in the moment of her weakness, acknowledged by Parthia to be the stronger. The Persians are not likely to have been braver or more warlike at the time of their revolt from Artabanus than in the days when they were subjected by Mithridates. Any alteration, therefore, in the relative strength of the two peoples must be ascribed to Parthian decline, since it cannot have been owing to Persian advance and improvement. To conclude, we may perhaps allow something to the personal qualities of Artaxerxes, who appears to have possessed all the merits of the typical Oriental conqueror. Artabanus was among the most able of the later Parthian monarchs; but his antagonist was more than this, possessing true military genius. It is quite possible that, if the leaders on the two sides had changed places, the victory might have rested, not with the Persians, but with the Parthians.

CHAPTER XXII. On the Architecture and Ornamental Art of the Parthians.

The modern historian of Architecture observes, when he reaches the period with which we have had to deal in this volume, that, with the advent of Alexander, Oriental architecture disappears, and that its history is an absolute blank from the downfall of the Achaemenians in B.C. 331 to the rise of the Sassanians, about A.D. 226. The statement made involves a certain amount of exaggeration; but still it expresses, roughly and strongly, a curious and important fact. The Parthians were not, in any full or pregnant sense of the word, builders. They did not aim at leaving a material mark upon the world by means of edifices or other great works. They lacked the spirit which had impelled successively the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians to cover Western Asia with architectural monuments, proofs at once of the wealth, and the grand ideas, of those who raised them. Parthia, compared to these pretentious empires, was retiring and modest. The monarchs, however rich they may have been, affected something of primitive rudeness and simplicity in their habits and style of life, their dwellings and temples, their palaces and tombs. It is difficult indeed to draw the line in every case between pure Parthian work and Sassanian; but on the whole there is, no doubt, reason to believe that the architectural remains in Mesopotamia and Persia which belong to the period between Alexander and the Arab conquest, are mainly the work of the Sassanian or New Persian kingdom, and that comparatively few of them can be ascribed with confidence to a time anterior to A.D. 227. Still a certain number, which have about them indications of greater antiquity than the rest, or which belong to sites famous in Parthian rather than in Persian times, may reasonably be regarded as in all probability structures of the Arsacid period; and from these we may gather at least the leading characteristics of the Parthian architecture, its aims and resources, its style and general effect, while from other remains--scanty indeed, and often mutilated--we may obtain a tolerable notion of their sculpture and other ornamental art.

The most imposing remains which seem certainly assignable to the Parthian period are those of Hatra, or El-Hadhr, visited by Mr. Layard in 1846, and described at length by Mr. Ross in the ninth volume of the "Journal of the Royal Geographical Society," as well as by Mr. Fergusson, in his "History of Architecture." Hatra became known as a place of importance in the early part of the second century after Christ. It successfully resisted Trajan in A.D. 116, and Severus in A.D. 198. It is then described as a large and populous city, defended by strong and extensive walls, and containing within it a temple of the Sun, celebrated for the great value of its offerings.

It enjoyed its own kings at this time, who were regarded as of Arabian stock, and were among the more important of the Parthian tributary monarchs. By the year A.D. 363 Hatra had gone to ruin, and is then described as "long since deserted." Its flourishing period thus belongs to the space between A.D. 100 and A.D. 300; and its remains, to which Mr. Fergusson assigns the date A.D. 250, must be regarded as probably at least a century earlier, and consequently as indicating the character of the architecture which prevailed under the later Parthians, and which, if Sassanian improvements had not obliterated them, we should have found upon the site of Ctesiphon.

The city of Hatra was enclosed by a circular wall of great thickness, built of large square-cut stones, and strengthened at intervals of about 170 yards by square towers or bastions. [PLATE IV. Fig. 1.] Its circumference considerably exceeded three miles. Outside the wall was a broad and very deep ditch, and on the further side of the ditch was an earthen rampart of considerable height and thickness. Two detached forts, situated on eminences, commanded the approaches to the place, one towards the east, and the other towards the north. The wall was pierced by four gateways, of which the principal one faced the east.

[Illustration: PLATE 4.]

The circular space within the walls was divided into two portions by a water-course passing across it from north to south, and running somewhat east of the centre, which thus divided the circle into two unequal parts. The eastern portion was left comparatively clear of buildings, and seems to have been used mainly as a burial-ground; in the western were the public edifices and the more important houses of the inhabitants. Of the former by far the most remarkable was one which stood nearly in the centre of the city, and which has been called by some a palace, by others a temple, but which may best be regarded as combining both uses.

[PLATE IV. Fig. 2.] This building stood within a walled enclosure of an oblong square shape, about 800 feet long by 700 broad. The wall surrounding it was strengthened with bastions, like the wall around the city. The enclosure comprised two courts, an inner and an outer. The outer court, which lay towards the east, and was first entered, was entirely clear of buildings, while the inner court contained two considerable edifices. Of these the less important was one which stretched from north to south across the entire inclosure, and abutted upon the outer court; this was confused in plan, and consisted chiefly of a number of small apartments, which have been regarded as guard-rooms. The other was a building of greater pretensions. It was composed mainly of seven vaulted halls, all of them parallel one to another, and all facing eastward, three being of superior and four of inferior size. The smaller halls (Nos. I., III., IV., and VI., on the plan) were about thirty feet long by twenty wide, and had a height of thirty feet; the larger ones measured ninety feet in length, and were from thirty-five to forty feet broad, with a height of sixty feet. All were upon the same plan. They had semicircular vaulted roofs, no windows, and received their light from the archway at the east end, which was either left entirely open, or perhaps closed with curtains.

Externally, the eastern facade of the building, which was evidently its main front, had for ornament, besides the row of seven arches, a series of pillars, or rather pilasters, from which the arches sprang, some sculptures on the stones composing the arches, and one or two emblematic figures in the spaces left between the pilasters. The sculptures on the stones of the arches consisted either of human heads, or of representations of a female form, apparently floating in air. [PLATE IV. Fig. 3.] An emblematic sculpture between the fourth and fifth arch represented a griffin with twisted tail, raised about 5 feet above the ground. The entire length of the facade was about 300 feet.

The interior of the smaller halls had no ornament; but the larger ones were decorated somewhat elaborately. Here the side walls were broken by three squared pilasters, rising to the commencement of the vaulting, and terminated by a quasi-capital of ornamental work, consisting of a series of ovals, each oval containing in its centre a round ball of dark stone.

Underneath these quasi-capitals, at the distance of from two to three feet, ran a cornice, which crossed the pilasters, and extended the whole length of the apartment, consisting of flowers and half-ovals, each oval containing a half-ball of the same dark stone as the capitals. [PLATE IV. Fig. 4.] Finally, on the pilasters, immediately below the cornice, were sculptured commonly either two or three human heads, the length of each head being about two feet, and the faces representing diverse types of humanity, some old and some young, some male and some female, some apparently realistic, some idealized and more or less grotesque in their accompaniments. The drawing of the heads is said to have been full of spirit, and their general effect is pronounced life-like and striking.

The seven halls, which have been described, were divided into two groups, of three and four respectively, by a low fence, which ran from east to west across the inner court, from the partition wall separating the third and fourth halls to the buildings which divided the inner court from the outer. It is probable that this division separated the male and female apartments. The female ornamentation of the large hall (No. II.) belonging to the southern group is perhaps an indication of the sex of its inmates; and another sign that these were the female quarters is to be found in the direct communication existing between this portion of the building and "the Temple" (No. VIII.), which could not be reached from the male apartments except by a long circuit round the building.

The "Temple" itself was an apartment of a square shape, each side being about forty feet. It was completely surrounded by a vaulted passage, into which light came from two windows at its south-west and north-west corners. The Temple was entered by a single doorway, the position of which was directly opposite an opening leading into the passage from Hall No. II. Above this doorway was a magnificent frieze, the character of which is thought to indicate the religious purpose of the structure. [PLATE V. Fig. 1.] The interior of the Temple was without ornamentation, vaulted, and except for the feeble light which entered by the single doorway, dark. On the west side a portal led into the passage from the outer air.

[Illustration: PLATE 5.]

Besides these main apartments, the edifice which we are describing contained a certain number of small rooms, lying behind the halls, and entered by doorways opening from them. One or two such rooms are found behind each of the smaller halls; and another of somewhat larger dimensions lay behind the great hall (numbered VII. in the plan), forming the extreme north-western corner of the building. These rooms were vaulted and had no windows, receiving their only light from the small doorways by which they were entered.

It is believed that the entire edifice, or at any rate the greater portion of it, had an upper story. Traces of such a structure appear over the halls numbered I and VI.; and it is thought that the story extended over the entire range of halls. One traveller, on conjectural grounds, even assigns to the building an elevation of three stories, and ventures to restore the second and third in the mode represented in the woodcut. [PLATE V. Fig. 2.] According to this author the upper portion of the edifice resembled in many respects the great palace of the Sassanian monarchs, of which splendid remains still exist on the site of Ctesiphon, where they are known as the Takht-i-Khuzroo, or Palace of Chosroes. That palace

was, however, on a very different plan from the Hatra one, comprising as it did one hall only, but of a size vastly superior to any of those at Hatra, and two wings, one on either side of the hall, made up of dwelling and sleeping apartments.

The few windows which exist at Hatra are oblong square in shape, as in general are the doorways connecting one apartment with another. In one case there is an arched doorway, or niche, which has been blocked up. There are no passages except the one which surrounds "the Temple," the apartments generally leading directly one into another. In some cases the lintel of a doorway is formed of a single stone, and ornamented with very delicate carving. The doorways are for the most part towards the corners of apartments; that of the Temple, however, is in the centre of its eastern wall.

The general style of the buildings at Hatra has been said to be "Roman or Byzantine;" and it has even been supposed that in the style of the ornaments and sculptured figures may be traced the corrupt taste and feeble outline of the artists of Constantinople. But there is abundant reason to believe that the Hatra Palace was built nearly two centuries before Constantinople came into existence; and, although the large-use of the round arch in vaulting may be due to the spread of Roman architectural ideas, yet there are no grounds for supposing that any but native artists, Parthian subjects, were employed in the work, or that it is other than a fair specimen of what was achieved by the Parthian builders during the later period of the empire. The palace of Volagases III. at Ctesiphon, which Avidius Cassius destroyed in his invasion, was most likely of the same general character--a combination of lofty halls suitable for ceremonies and audiences with small and dark sleeping or living rooms, opening out of them, the whole placed in the middle of a paved court, and the male apartments carefully divided from those of the women.

The remains at Hatra are further remarkable for a considerable number of reservoirs and tombs. The open space between the town proper and the eastern wall and gate is dotted with edifices of a square shape, standing apart from one another, which are reasonably regarded as sepulchres. These are built in a solid way, of hewn stone, and consist either of one or two chambers. They vary in size from twenty feet square to forty, and are generally of about the same height. Some are perfectly plain, but the exteriors of others are ornamented with pilasters. The reservoirs occur in the paved court which surrounds the main building; they have narrow apertures, but expand below the aperture into the shape of a bell, and are carefully constructed of well-cut stones closely fitted together.

The material used at Hatra is uniformly a brownish gray limestone; and the cutting is so clean and smooth that it is doubted whether the stones have needed any cement. If cement has been employed, at any rate it cannot now be seen, the stones everywhere appearing to touch one another.

There are several buildings remaining in Persia, the date of which cannot be much later than that of the Hatra edifice; but, as it is on the whole more probable that they belong to the Sassanian than to the Parthian period, no account of them will be given here. It will be sufficient to observe that their architecture grows naturally out of that which was in use at Hatra, and that thus we are entitled to ascribe to Parthian times and to subjects of the Parthian Empire that impulse to Oriental architecture which awoke it to renewed life after a sleep of ages, and which in a short time produced such imposing results as the Takht-i-Khuzroo at Ctesiphon, the ruins of Shapur, and the triumphal arch at Takht-i-Bostan.

The decorative and fictile art of the Parthians has received no inconsiderable amount of illustration from remains discovered, in the years 1850-1852, in Babylonia. In combination with a series of Parthian coins were found by Mr. Loftus, on the site of the

ancient Erech (now Warka), a number of objects in clay, plaster, and metal, enabling us to form a fair idea of the mode in which purely Parthian edifices were decorated during the best times of the empire, and of the style that then prevailed in respect of personal ornaments, domestic utensils, and other objects capable, more or less, of aesthetic handling. The remains discovered comprised numerous architectural fragments in plaster and brick; a large number of ornamental coffins; several statuettes in terra-cotta; jars, jugs, vases, and lamps in earthenware; some small glass bottles; and various personal decorations, such as beads, rings, and earrings.

The architectural fragments consisted of capitals of pillars [PLATE V. Fig. 3], portions of cornices, and specimens of a sort of diapering which seems to have been applied to screens or thin partitions. The capitals were somewhat heavy in design, and at first sight struck the spectator as barbarous; but they exhibited a good deal of ingenious boldness, an absence of conventionality, and an occasional quaintness of design not unworthy of a Gothic decorator. One especially, which combines the upper portion of a human figure, wearing the puffed-out hair or wig, which the Parthians affected, with an elegant leaf rising from the neck of the capital, and curving gracefully under the abacus, has decided merit, and is "suggestive of the later Byzantine style." The cornices occasionally reminded the discoverer of the remarkable frieze at El-Hadhr, and were characterized by the same freedom and boldness of invention as the capitals. But the most curious remains were the fragments of a sort of screen work, pieces of plaster covered with geometric designs upon both sides, the patterns on the two sides differing. [PLATE V. Fig. 4.] These designs, though unlike in many respects the arabesques of the Mohammedans, yet seemed on the whole to be their precursors, the "geometric curves and tracery" appearing to "shadow forth the beauty and richness of a style which afterwards followed the tide of Mohammedan conquest to the remotest corners of the known world."

The ornamental coffins were of a coarse glazed earthenware, bluish-green in hue, and belonged to the kind which has been called "slipper-shaped." [PLATE VI. Fig. 1.] They varied in length from three feet to six, and had a large aperture at their upper end, by means of which the body was placed in them, and a flat lid to close this aperture, ornamented like the coffin, and fixed in its place by a fine lime cement. A second aperture at the lower extremity of the coffin allowed for the escape of the gases disengaged during decomposition. The ornamentation of the coffins varied, but consisted generally of small figures of men, about six or seven inches in length, the most usual figure being a warrior with his arms akimbo and his legs astride, wearing on his head a coiffure, like that which is seen on the Parthian coins, and having a sword hanging from the belt. [PLATE VI. Fig. 2.]

[Illustration: PLATE 6.]

Of the statuettes in terra-cotta, one of the most curious represented a Parthian warrior, recumbent, and apparently about to drink out of a cup held in the left hand. [PLATE VI. Fig. 3.] The figure was clad in a long coat of mail, with greaves on the legs and a helmet upon the head. Others represented females; these had lofty head-dresses, which sometimes rose into two peaks or horns, recalling the costume of English ladies in the time of Henry IV. These figures were veiled and carefully draped about the upper part of the person, but showed the face, and had the legs bare from the knee downwards.

The jars, jugs, vases, and lamps greatly resembled those of the Assyrian and Babylonian periods, but were on the whole more elegant and artistic. The forms appended will give a tolerable idea of the general character of these vessels. [PLATE VI. Fig. 4.] They were of various sizes, and appear to have been placed in the tombs, partly as

the offerings of friends and well-wishers, partly with the more superstitious object of actually supplying the deceased with the drink and light needful for him on his passage from earth to the realms of the dead.

The glass bottles were, perhaps, lachrymatories. They had no peculiar characteristics, but were almost exactly similar to objects of the same kind belonging to the times of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. They exhibited the same lovely prismatic colors, which have been so admired in the glass of those kingdoms, an effect of decomposition, which, elsewhere generally disfiguring, in the case of this material enhances the original beauty of the object tenfold by clothing it in hues of the utmost brilliance and delicacy.

The personal decorations consisted chiefly of armlets, bangles, beads, rings, and ear-rings. They were in gold, silver, copper, and brass. Some of the smaller gold ornaments, such as earrings, and small plates or beads for necklaces and fillets, were "of a tasteful and elegant design." The finger-rings were coarser, while the toe-rings, armlets, and bangles, were for the most part exceedingly rude and barbarous. Head-dresses in gold, tall and pointed, are said to have been found occasionally; but the museums of Europe have not yet been able to secure any, as they are usually melted down by the finders. Broad ribbons of gold, which may have depended like strings from a cap, are commoner, and were seen by Mr. Loftus. Altogether, the ornaments indicated a strong love of personal display, and the possession of considerable wealth, but no general diffusion of a correct taste, nor any very advanced skill in design or metallurgy.

Of purely aesthetic art--art, that is, into which the idea of the useful does not enter at all--the Parthians appear scarcely to have had an idea. During the five centuries of their sway, they seem to have set up no more than some half dozen bas-reliefs. There is, indeed, only one such work which can be positively identified as belonging to the Parthian period by the inscription which accompanies it. The other presumedly Parthian reliefs are adjudged to the people by art critics merely from their style and their locality, occurring as they do within the limits of the Parthian kingdom, and lacking the characteristics which attach to the art of those who preceded and of those who followed the Parthians in these countries.

[Illustration: PLATE 7.]

The one certainly Parthian bas-relief is that which still exists on the great rock of Behistun, at the foot of the mountain, raised but slightly above the plain. It seems to have contained a series of tall figures, looking towards the right, and apparently engaged in a march or procession, while above and between them were smaller figures on horseback, armed with lances, and galloping in the same direction. One of these was attended by a figure of Fame or Victory, flying in the air, and about to place a diadem around his brow. The present condition of the sculpture is extremely bad. Atmospheric influences have worn away the larger figures to such an extent that they are discerned with difficulty; and a recent Governor of Kirmanshah has barbarously inserted into the middle of the relief an arched niche, in which he has placed a worthless Arabic inscription. It is with difficulty that we form any judgment of the original artistic merit of a work which presents itself to us in such a worn and mutilated form; but, on the whole, we are perhaps justified in pronouncing that it must at its best have been one of inferior quality, even when compared only with the similar productions of Asiatics. The general character is rather that of the Sassanian than of the Assyrian or Persian period. The human figures have a heavy clumsiness about them that is unpleasant to contemplate; the horses are rudely outlined, and are too small for the men; the figure of Fame is out of all proportion to the hero whom she crowns, and the diadem which she places on his head is

ridiculous, being nearly as large as herself! On the other hand, there is spirit in the attitudes of both men and horses; the Fame floats well in air; and the relief is free from that coarse grotesqueness which offends us in the productions of the Sassanian artists.

Another, bas-relief, probably, but not quite certainly Parthian, exists in the gorge of Sir-pul-i-zohab, and has been recently published in the great work of M. Flandin. [PLATE VIII.] The inscription on this monument, though it has not yet been deciphered, appears to be written in the alphabet found upon the Parthian coins. The monument seems to represent a Parthian king, mounted on horseback, and receiving a chaplet at the hand of a subject. The king wears a cap bound round with the diadem, the long ends of which depend over his shoulder. He is clothed in a close-fitting tunic and loose trowsers, which hang down upon his boots, and wears also a short cloak fastened under the chin, and reaching nearly to the knee. The horse which he bestrides is small, but strongly made; the tail is long, and the mane seems to be plaited. Thus far the representation, though somewhat heavy and clumsy, is not ill-drawn; but the remaining figure--that of the Parthian subject--is wholly without merit. The back of the man is turned, but the legs are in profile; one arm is ridiculously short, and the head is placed too near the left shoulder. It would seem that the artist, while he took pains with the representation of the monarch, did not care how ill he rendered the subordinate figure, which he left in the unsatisfactory condition that may be seen in the preceding woodcut.

[Illustration: PLATE 8.]

A set of reliefs, discovered by the Baron de Bode in the year 1841, are also thought by the best judges to be Parthian. The most important of them represents a personage of consequence, apparently a Magus, who seems to be in the act of consecrating a sacred cippus, round which have been placed wreaths or chaplets. (PLATE IX.) Fifteen spectators are present, arranged in two rows, one above the other, all except the first of them standing. The first sits upon a rude chair or stool. The figures generally are in an advanced stage of decay; but that of the Magus is tolerably well preserved, and probably indicates with sufficient accuracy the costume and appearance of the great hierarchs under the Parthians, The conical cap described by Strabo is very conspicuous. Below this the hair is worn in the puffed-out fashion of the later Parthian period. The upper lip is ornamented by moustaches, and the chin covered by a straight beard. The figure is dressed in a long sleeved tunic, over which is worn a cloak, fastened at the neck by a round brooch, and descending a little below the knees. The legs are encased in a longer and shorter pair of trowsers, the former plain, the latter striped perpendicularly. Round the neck is worn a collar or necklace; and on the right arm are three armlets and three bracelets. The conical cap appears to be striped or fluted.

[Illustration: PLATE 9.]

On the same rock, but in no very evident connection with the main representation, is a second relief, in which a Parthian cavalier, armed with a bow and arrows, and a spear, contends with a wild animal, seemingly a bear. [PLATE X. Fig. 1.] A long flowing robe here takes the place of the more ordinary tunic and trowsers. On the head is worn a rounded cap or tiara. The hair has the usual puffed-out appearance. The bow is carried in the left hand, and the quiver hangs from, the saddle behind the rider, while with his right hand he thrusts his spear into the beast's neck. The execution of the whole tablet seems to have been rude; but it has suffered so much from time and weather, that no very decided judgment can be passed upon it.

[Illustration: PLATE 10.]

Another still ruder representation occurs also on another face of the same rock. This consists of a female figure reclining upon a couch, and guarded by three male attendants,

one at the head of the couch unarmed, and the remaining two at its foot, seated, and armed with spears. The female has puffed-out hair, and carries in her right hand, which is outstretched, a wreath or chaplet. One of the spearmen has a curious rayed head-dress; and the other has a short streamer attached to the head of his spear. Below the main tablet are three rudely carved standing figures, representing probably other attendants.

This set of reliefs may perhaps be best regarded as forming a single series, the Parthian king being represented as engaged in hunting the bear, while the queen awaits his return upon her couch, and the chief Magus attached to the court makes prayer for the monarch's safety.

Such are the chief remains of Parthian aesthetic art. They convey an idea of decline below the standard reached by the Persians of the Achaemenian times, which was itself a decline from the earlier art of the Assyrians. Had they been the efforts of a race devoid of models, they might fairly have been regarded as not altogether without promise. But, considered as the work of a nation which possessed the Achaemenian sculptures, and which had moreover, to a certain extent, access to Greek examples, a they must be pronounced clumsy, coarse, and wanting in all the higher qualities of Fine Art. It is no wonder that they are scanty and exceptional. The nation which could produce nothing better must have felt that its vocation was not towards the artistic, and that its powers had better be employed in other directions, e.g. in conquest and in organization. It would seem that the Parthians perceived this, and therefore devoted slight attention to the Fine Arts, preferring to occupy themselves mainly with those pursuits in which they excelled; viz. war, hunting, and government.

CHAPTER XXIII. Customs of the Parthians.

Very little is known as to the religion of the Parthians. It seems probable that during the Persian period they submitted to the Zoroastrian system, which was generally maintained by the Achaemenian kings, acquiescing, like the great bulk of the conquered nations, in the religious views of their conquerors; but as this was not their own religion, we may conclude that they were at no time very zealous followers of the Bactrian prophet, and that as age succeeded age they became continually more lukewarm in their feelings, and more lax in their religious practice. The essence of Zoroastrian belief was dualism--recognition of Ormazd as the great Principle of Good, and of Ahriman as the Principle of Evil. We need not doubt that, in word, the Parthians from first to last admitted this antagonism, and professed a belief in Ormazd as the supreme god, and a dread of Ahriman and his ministers. But practically, their religious aspirations rested, not on these dim abstractions, but on beings whose existence they could better realize, and whom they could feel to be less remote from themselves. The actual devotion of the Parthians was offered to the Sun and Moon, to deities who were supposed to preside over the royal house, and to ancestral idols which each family possessed, and conveyed with it from place to place with every change of habitation. The Sun was saluted at his rising, was worshipped in temples, under the name of Mithra, with sacrifices and offerings; had statues erected in his honor, and was usually associated with the lesser luminary. The deities of the royal house were probably either genii, ministers of Ormazd, to whom was committed the special protection of the monarchs and their families, like the _bagaha vithiya_ of the Persians, or else the ancestors of the reigning monarch, to whom a qualified divinity seems to have been assigned in the later times of the empire. The Parthians kings usually swore by these deities on solemn occasions; and other members of the royal family made use of the same oath. The main worship, however, of the great mass of the people, even when they were of the royal stock, was concentrated upon ancestral images, which had a place sacred to them in

each house, and received the constant adoration of the household.

In the early times of the empire the Magi were held in high repute, and most of the peculiar tenets and rites of the Magian religion were professed and followed by the Parthians. Elemental worship was practised. Fire was, no doubt, held sacred, and there was an especial reverence for rivers. Dead bodies were not burned, but were exposed to be devoured by birds and beasts of prey, after which the dry bones were collected and placed in tombs. The Magi formed a large portion of the great national council, which elected and, if need were, deposed the kings. But in course of time much laxity was introduced. The Arsacid monarchs of Armenia allowed the Sacred Fire of Ormazd, which ought to have been kept continually burning, to go out; and we can scarcely suppose but that the Parthian Arsacidae shared their negligence. Respect for the element of fire so entirely passed away, that we hear of the later Parthians burning their dead. The Magi fell into disrepute, and, if not expelled from their place in the council, at any rate found themselves despised and deprived of influence. The later Parthian religion can have been little more than a worship of the Sun and Moon, and of the teraphim, or sacred images, which were the most precious possession of each household.

While thus lax and changeful in their own religious practice, the Parthians were, naturally, tolerant of a variety of creeds among their subjects. Fire altars were maintained, and Zoroastrian zeal was allowed to nourish in the dependent kingdom of Persia. In the Greek cities the Olympian gods were permitted to receive the veneration of thousands, while in Babylon, Nearda, and Nisibis the Jews enjoyed the free exercise of their comparatively pure and elevated religion. No restrictions seem to have been placed on proselytism, and Judaism certainly boasted many converts from the heathen in Adiabene, Charax Spasini, and elsewhere.

Christianity also penetrated the Parthian provinces to a considerable extent, and in one Parthian country, at any rate, seems to have become the state religion. The kings of Osrhoene are thought to have been Christians from the time of the Antonines, if not from that of our Lord; and a nourishing church was certainly established at Edessa before the end of the second century. The Parthian Jews who were witnesses of the miraculous events which signalized the day of Pentecost may have, in some cases, taken with them the new religion to the land where they had their residence; or the Apostle, St. Thomas, may (as Eusebius declares) have carried the Gospel into the regions beyond the Euphrates, and have planted the Christian Church in the countries out of which the Jewish Church sprang. Besides the nourishing community of Edessa, which was predominantly, if not wholly, Christian from the middle of the second century, many converts were, we are told, to be found among the inhabitants of Persia, Media, Parthia Proper, and even Bactria. The infusion, however, was not sufficient to leaven to any serious extent the corrupt mass of heathenism into which it was projected; and we cannot say that the general character of the Parthian empire, or of the manners and customs of its subjects, was importantly affected by the new religion, though it had an extraordinary influence over individuals.

The Parthians were essentially a warlike people; and the chief interest which attaches to them is connected with their military vigor and ability. It is worth while to consider at some length the peculiarities of that military system which proved itself superior to the organization of the Macedonians, and able to maintain for nearly three hundred years a doubtful contest with the otherwise irresistible Romans.

We are told that the Parthians had no standing army. When war was proclaimed and the monarch needed a force, he made his immediate vassals acquainted with the fact,

and requested each of them to marshal their troops, and bring them to a fixed rendezvous by a certain day. The troops thus summoned were of two kinds, Parthian and foreign. The governors of the provinces, whether tributary kings or satraps, called out the military strength of their respective districts, saw to their arming and provisioning, and, marching each at the head of his contingent, brought a foreign auxiliary force to the assistance of the Great King. But the back-bone of the army, its main strength, the portion on which alone much reliance was placed, consisted of Parthians. Each Parthian noble was bound to call out his slaves and his retainers, to arm and equip them at his own expense, and bring them to the rendezvous by the time named. The number of troops furnished by each noble varied according to his position and his means; we bear in one instance of their amounting to as many as 10,000, while in another recorded case the average number which each furnished was no more than 125. The various contingents had their own baggage-trains, consisting ordinarily of camels, in the proportion (as it would seem) of one to every ten fighting-men.

A Parthian army consisted usually of both horse and foot, but in proportions unusual elsewhere. The foot soldiers were comparatively few in number, and were regarded as of small account. Every effort was made to increase the amount and improve the equipment of the horsemen, who bore the brunt of every fight, and from whose exertions alone victory was hoped. Sometimes armies consisted of horsemen only, or rather of horsemen followed by a baggage train composed of camels and chariots.

The horse were of two kinds, heavy and light. The heavy horsemen wore coats of mail, reaching to their knees, composed of rawhide covered with scales of iron or steel, very bright, and capable of resisting a strong blow. They had on their heads burnished helmets of Margian steel, whose glitter dazzled the spectator. Their legs seem not to have been greaved, but encased in a loose trouser, which hung about the ankles and embarrassed the feet, if by any chance the horseman was forced to dismount. They carried no shield, being sufficiently defended by their coats of mail. Their offensive arms were a long spear, which was of great strength and thickness, and a bow and arrows of unusual size. They likewise carried in their girdle a short sword or knife, which might be used in close combat. Their horses were, like themselves, protected by a defence of scale armor, which was either of steel or bronze.

The light horse was armed with the same sort of bows and arrows as the heavy, but carried no spear and wore no armor. It was carefully trained to the management of the horse and the bow, and was unequalled in the rapidity and dexterity of its movements. The archer delivered his arrows with as much precision and force in retreat as in advance, and was almost more feared when he retired than when he charged his foe. Besides his arrows, the light horseman seems to have carried a sword, and he no doubt wore also the customary knife in his belt.

We are told by one writer that it was a practice of the Parthians to bring into battle a number of led horses, and that the riders from time to time exchanged their tired steeds for fresh ones, thus obtaining a great advantage over enemies who had no such practice. But the accounts which we have of Parthian engagements make no reference to this usage, which we can therefore scarcely suppose to have been adopted to any large extent. It may be doubted, also, if the practice could ever be one of much value, since the difficulty of managing led horses amid the tumult of a battle would probably more than counterbalance the advantage derivable from relays of fresh steeds.

During the later period of the monarchy, the Parthians, who had always employed camels largely in the conveyance of stores and baggage, are said to have introduced a camel

corps into the army itself, and to have derived considerable advantage from the new arm. The camels could bear the weight of the mailed warrior and of their own armor better than horses, and their riders were at once more safe in their elevated position and more capable of dealing effective blows upon the enemy. As a set-off, however, against those advantages, the spongy feet of the camel were found to be more readily injured by the _tribulus_, or caltrop, than the harder feet of the horse, and the corps was thus more easily disabled than an equal force of cavalry, if it could be tempted to pass over ground on which caltrops had been previously scattered.

The Parthian tactics were of a simple kind, and differed little from those of other nations in the same region, which have depended mainly on their cavalry. To surround their foe, to involve him in difficulties, to cut off: his supplies and his stragglers, and ultimately to bring him into a position where he might be overwhelmed by missiles, was the aim of all Parthian commanders of any military capacity. Their warfare was suited for defence rather than for attack, unless against contemptible enemies. They were bad hands at sieges, and seldom ventured to engage in them, though they would do so if circumstances required it. They wearied of long campaigns, and if they did not find victory tolerably easy, were apt to retire and allow their foe to escape, or baffle him by withdrawing their forces into a distant and inaccessible region. After their early victories over Crassus and Antony, they never succeeded in preventing the steady advance of a Roman army into their territory, or in repulsing a determined attack upon their capital. Still they generally had their revenge after a short time. It was easy for the Romans to overrun Mesopotamia, but it was not so easy for them to hold it; and it was scarcely possible for them to retire from it after an occupation without disaster. The clouds of Parthian horse hung upon their retreating columns, straitened them for provisions, galled them with missiles, and destroyed those who could not keep up with the main body. The towns upon the line of their retreat revolted and shut their gates, defying even such commanders as Severus and Trajan. Of the six great expeditions of Rome against Parthia, one only, that of Avidius Cassius, was entirely successful. In every other case either the failure of the expedition was complete, or the glory of the advance was tarnished by disaster and suffering during the retreat.

The results of invading Parthia would have been even more calamitous to an assailant but for one weak point in the military system of the Parthians. They were excessively unwilling to venture near an enemy at night, and as a general rule abstained from all military movements during the hours of darkness. As evening approached, they drew off to a considerable distance from their foe, and left him unmolested to retreat in any direction that he pleased. The reason of this probably was, not merely that they did not fortify their camps; but that, depending wholly on their horses, and being forced to hobble or tether them at night, they could not readily get into fighting order on a sudden during darkness. Once or twice in the course of their history, we find them departing from their policy of extreme precaution, and recommencing the pursuit of a flying foe before dawn; but it is noted as an unusual occurrence.

It was also a general principle of Parthian warfare to abstain from campaigning during the winter. So much depended upon the tension of their bow-strings, which any dampness relaxed, that their rule was to make all their expeditions in the dry time of their year, which lasted from early in the spring until late in the autumn. The rule was, however, transgressed upon occasions. Phraates II. made his attack upon Antiochus Sidetes, while the snow was still upon the ground; and Volagases I. fell upon Paetus after the latter had sent his troops into winter quarters. The Parthians could bear cold no less than heat; though it was perhaps rather

in the endurance of the latter than of the former that they surpassed the Romans. The sun's rays were never too hot for them; and they did not need water frequently or in large quantities. The Romans believed that they increased their ability of bearing thirst by means of certain drugs which they consumed; but it may be questioned whether they really employed any other remedies than habit and resolution.

We find no use of chariots among the Parthians, except for the conveyance of the females, who accompanied the nobles upon their expeditions. The wives and concubines of the chiefs followed the camp in great numbers; and women of a less reputable class, singers, dancers, and musicians, swelled the ranks of the supernumeraries. Many of these were Greeks from Seleucia and other Macedonian towns. The commissariat and transport departments are said to have been badly organized; but some thousands of baggage camels always accompanied an army, carrying stores and provisions. Of these a considerable portion were laden with arrows, of which the supply was in this way rendered inexhaustible.

The use of the elephant in war was still more rare in Parthia than that of the chariot. While the Seleucid kings employed the animal to a large extent, and its use was also probably known to the Greek princes of Bactria, the Arsacidae appear to have almost entirely neglected it. On one occasion alone do we find their employment of it mentioned, and then we hear of only a single animal, which is ridden by the monarch. Probably the unwieldy creature was regarded by the Parthians as too heavy and clumsy for the light and rapid movements of their armies, and was thus disused during the period of their supremacy, though again employed, after Parthia had fallen, by the Sassanidse.

The Parthians entered into battle with much noise and shouting. They made no use of trumpets or horns, but employed instead the kettledrum, which resounded from all parts of the field when they made their onset. Their attack was furious. The mailed horsemen charged at speed, and often drove their spears through the bodies of two enemies at a blow. The light horse and the foot, when any was present, delivered their arrows with precision and with extraordinary force. But if the assailants were met with a stout resistance, the first vigor of the attack was rarely long maintained. The Parthian warriors grew quickly weary of an equal contest, and, if they could not force their enemy to give way, soon changed their tactics. Pretending panic, dispersing, and beating a hasty retreat, they endeavored to induce their foe to pursue hurriedly and in disorder, being ready at any moment to turn and take advantage of the least appearance of confusion. If these tactics failed, as they commonly did after they came to be known, the simulated flight was generally converted into a real one; further conflict was avoided, or at any rate deferred to another occasion.

When the Parthians wished to parley with an enemy, they unstrung their bows, and advancing with the right hand outstretched, asked for a conference. They are accused by the Romans of sometimes using treachery on such occasions, but, except in the single case of Crassus, the charge of bad faith cannot be sustained against them. On solemn occasions, when the intention was to discuss grounds of complaint or to bring a war to an end by the arrangement of terms of peace, a formal meeting was arranged between their representatives and those of their enemy, generally on neutral ground, as on an island in the Euphrates, or on a bridge constructed across it. Here the chiefs of the respective nations met, accompanied by an equal number of guards, while the remainder of their forces occupied the opposite banks of the river. Matters were discussed in friendly fashion, the Greek language being commonly employed as the vehicle of communication; after which festivities usually took place, the two chiefs mutually entertaining each other, or accepting in common the hospitalities of a

third party. The terms of peace agreed upon were reduced to writing; hands were grasped as a sign that faith was pledged; and oaths having been interchanged, the conference broke up, and the chiefs returned to their respective residences.

Besides negotiating by means of conferences, the Parthian monarchs often sent out to neighboring states, and in return received from them formal embassies. The ambassadors in every case conveyed, as a matter of course, gifts to the prince to whom they were accredited, which might consist of articles of value, or of persons. Augustus included an Italian slave-girl among the presents which he transmitted to Phraates IV.; and Artabanus III. sent a Jewish giant to Tiberius. The object of an embassy was sometimes simply to congratulate; but more often the ambassadors were instructed to convey certain demands, or proposals, from their own prince to the head of the other nation, whereto his assent was required, or requested. These proposals were commonly formulated in a letter from the one prince to the other, which it was the chief duty of the ambassadors to convey safely. Free powers to conclude a treaty at their discretion were rarely, or never, entrusted to them. Their task was merely to deliver the royal letter, to explain its terms, if they were ambiguous, and to carry back to their own monarch the reply of the foreign sovereign. The sanctity of the ambassadorial character was invariably respected by the Parthians, who are never even taxed with a violation of it.

As a security for the performance of engagements, or for the permanent maintenance of a friendly attitude, it was usual in the East during the Parthian period to require, and give, hostages. The princes who occupied the position of Parthian feudatories gave hostages to their suzerain, who were frequently their near relations, as sons or brothers. And a practice grew up of the Parthian monarchs themselves depositing their own sons or brothers with the Roman Emperor, at first perhaps merely for their own security, but afterwards as pledges for their good behavior. Such hostages lived at the expense of the Roman court, and were usually treated with distinction. In the event of a rupture between their country and Rome, they had little to fear. Rome found her advantage in employing them as rivals to a monarch with whom she had quarrelled, and did not think it necessary to punish them for his treachery or inconstancy.

The magnificence of the Parthian court is celebrated in general terms by various writers, but not very many particulars have come down to us respecting it. We know that it was migratory, moving from one of the chief cities of the empire to another at different seasons of the year, and that owing to the vast number of the persons composing it, there was a difficulty sometimes in providing for their subsistence upon the road. The court comprised the usual extensive harem of an Oriental prince, consisting of a single recognized queen, and a multitude of secondary wives or concubines. The legitimate wife of the prince was commonly a native, and in most cases was selected from the royal race of the Arsacidae but sometimes she was the daughter of a dependent monarch, and she might even be a slave raised by royal favor from that humble position. The concubines were frequently Greeks. Both wives and concubines remained ordinarily in close seclusion, and we have little mention of them, in the Parthian annals. But in one instance, at any rate, a queen, brought up in the notions of the West, succeeded in setting Oriental etiquette at defiance, took the direction of affairs out of the hands of her husband, and subsequently ruled the empire in conjunction with her son. Generally, however, the Parthian kings were remarkably free from the weakness of subservience to women, and managed their kingdom with a firm hand, without allowing either wives or ministers to obtain any undue ascendency over them. In particular, we may note that they never, so far as appears, fell

under the baleful influence of eunuchs, who, from first to last, play a very subordinate part in the Parthian history.

The dress of the monarch was commonly the loose Median robe, which had been adopted from the Medes by the Persians. This flowed down to the feet in numerous folds, enveloping and concealing the entire figure. Trousers and a tunic were probably worn beneath it, the latter of linen, the former of silk or wool. As head-dress, the king wore either the mere diadem, which was a band or ribbon, passed once or oftener round the head, and terminating in two long ends which fell down behind, or else a more pretentious cap, which in the earlier times was a sort of Scythian pointed helmet, and in the later a rounded tiara, sometimes adorned with pearls or gems. His neck appears to have been generally encircled with two or three collars or necklaces, and he frequently wore ear-rings in his ears. The beard was almost always cultivated, and, with the hair, was worn variously. Generally both hair and beard were carefully curled; but sometimes they depended in long straight locks, Mostly the beard was pointed, but occasionally it was worn square. In later times a fashion arose of puffing out the hair at either side extravagantly, so as to give it the appearance of a large bushy wig.

In war the monarch seems to have exchanged his Median robe for a short cloak, reaching half way down the thigh. His head was protected by a helmet, and he carried the national arm of offence, the bow. He usually took the field on horseback, but was sometimes mounted on an elephant, trained to encounter the shock of battle. Gold and silver were abundantly used in the trappings of his steed and in his arms. He generally took the command, and mingled freely in the fight, though he might sometimes shrink without reproach from adventuring his own person. His guards fought about him; and he was accompanied by attendants, whose duty it was to assist him in mounting on horseback and dismounting.

The status of the queen was not much below that of her royal consort. She wore a tiara far more elaborate than his, and, like him, exhibited the diadem. Her neck was encircled with several necklaces. As the title of Theos, "God," was often assumed by her husband, so she was allowed the title of "Goddess", or "Heavenly Goddess".

Separate apartments were of course assigned to the queen, and to the royal concubines in the various palaces. These were buildings on a magnificent scale, and adorned with the utmost richness. Philostratus, who wrote in Parthian times, thus describes the royal palace at Babylon. "The palace is roofed with brass, and a bright light flashes from it. It has chambers for the women, and chambers for the men, and porticos, partly glittering with silver, partly with cloth-of-gold embroideries, partly with solid slabs of gold, let into the walls, like pictures. The subjects of the embroideries are taken from the Greek mythology, and include representations of Andromeda, of Amymone, and of Orpheus, who is frequently repeated.... Datis is moreover represented, destroying Naxos with his fleet, and Artaphernes besieging Eretria, and Xerxes gaining his famous victories. You behold the occupation of Athens, and the battle of Thermopylae, and other points still more characteristic of the great Persian war, rivers drunk up and disappearing from the face of the earth, and a bridge stretched across the sea, and a canal cut through Athos.... One chamber for the men has a roof fashioned into a vault like the heaven, composed entirely of sapphires, which are the bluest of stones, and resemble the sky in color. Golden images of the gods whom they worship, are set up about the vault, and show like stars in the firmament. This is the chamber in which the king delivers his judgments. Four golden magic-wheels hang from its roof, and threaten the monarch with the Divine Nemesis, if he exalts himself

above the condition of man. These wheels are called 'the tongues of the gods,' and are set in their places by the Magi who frequent the palace."

The state and pomp which surrounded the monarch seem scarcely to have fallen short of the Achaemenian standard. Regarded as in some sort divine during his life, and always an object of national worship after his death, the "Brother of the Sun and Moon" occupied a position far above that of the most exalted of his subjects. Tributary monarchs were shocked, when, in times of misfortune, the "Great King" stooped to solicit their aid, and appeared before them in the character of a suppliant, shorn of his customary splendor. Nobles coveted the dignity of "King's Friend," and were content to submit to blows and buffets at the caprice of their royal master, before whom they prostrated themselves in adoration after each castigation. The Parthian monarch dined in solitary grandeur, extended on his own special couch, and eating from his own special table, which was placed at a greater elevation than those of his guests. His "friend" sat on the ground at his feet, and was fed like a dog by scraps from his master's board. Guards, ministers, and attendants of various kinds surrounded him, and were ready at the slightest sign to do his bidding. Throughout the country he had numerous "Eyes" and "Ears"--officers who watched his interests and sent him word of whatever touched his safety. The bed on which the monarch slept was of gold, and subjects were forbidden to take their repose on couches of this rich material. No stranger could obtain access to him unless introduced by the proper officer; and it was expected that all who asked an audience would be prepared with some present of high value. For the gifts received the monarch made a suitable return, allowing those whom he especially favored to choose the presents that they preferred.

The power and dignity of the Parthian nobles was greater than that usually enjoyed by any subjects of an Oriental king. Rank in Parthia being hereditary and not simply official, the "megistanes" were no mere creatures of the monarch, but a class which stood upon its own indefeasible rights. As they had the privilege of electing to the throne upon a vacancy, and even that of deposing a duly elected monarch, the king could not but stand in wholesome awe of them, and feel compelled to treat them with considerable respect and deference. Moreover, they were not without a material force calculated to give powerful support to their constitutional privileges. Each stood at the head of a body of retainers accustomed to bear arms and to serve in the wars of the Empire. Together these bodies constituted the strength of the army; and though the royal bodyguard might perhaps have been capable of dealing successfully with each group of retainers separately, yet such an _esprit de corps_ was sure to animate the nobles generally, that they would make common cause in case one of their number were attacked, and would support him against the crown with the zeal inspired by self-interest. Thus the Parthian nobility were far more powerful and independent than any similar class under the Achaemenian, Sassanian, Modern Persian, or Turkish sovereigns. They exercised a real control over the monarch, and had a voice in the direction of the Empire. Like the great feudal vassals of the Middle Ages, they from time to time quarrelled with their liege lord, and disturbed the tranquillity of the kingdom by prolonged and dangerous civil wars; but these contentions served to keep alive a vigor, a life, and a spirit of sturdy independence very unusual in the East, and gave a stubborn strength to the Parthian monarchy, in which Oriental governments have for the most part been wanting.

There were probably several grades of rank among the nobles. The highest dignity in the kingdom, next to the Crown, was that of Surena, or "Field-Marshal;" and this position was hereditary in a particular family, which can have stood but a little below the royal house in wealth and consequence. The head

of this noble house is stated to have at one time brought into the field as many as 10,000 retainers and slaves, of whom a thousand were heavy-armed. It was his right to place the diadem on the king's brow at his coronation. The other nobles lived for the most part on their domains, but took the field at the head of their retainers in case of war, and in peace sometimes served the offices of satrap, vizier, or royal councillor. The wealth of the class was great; its members were inclined to be turbulent, and, like the barons of the European kingdoms, acted as a constant check and counterpoise to the royal dignity.

Next to war, the favorite employment of the king and of the nobles was hunting. The lion continued in the wild state an occupant of the Mesopotamian river-banks and marshes; and in other parts of the empire bears, leopards, and even tigers abounded. Thus the higher kinds of sport were readily obtainable. The ordinary practice, however, of the monarch and his courtiers seems to have fallen short of the true sportsman's ideal. Instead of seeking the more dangerous kinds of wild beasts in their native haunts, and engaging with them under the conditions designed by nature, the Parthians were generally content with a poorer and tamer method. They kept lions, leopards, and bears in enclosed parks, or "paradises," and found pleasure in the pursuit and slaughter of these denaturalized and half-domesticated animals. The employment may still, even under these circumstances, have contained an element of danger which rendered it exciting; but it was a poor substitute for the true sport which the "mighty Hunter before the Lord" had first practised in these regions.

The ordinary dress of the Parthian noble was a long loose robe reaching to the feet, under which he wore a vest and trousers. Bright and varied colors were affected, and sometimes dresses were interwoven or embroidered with gold. In seasons of festivity garlands of fresh flowers were worn upon the head. A long knife or dagger was carried at all times, which might be used either as an implement or as a weapon.

In the earlier period of the empire the Parthian was noted as a spare liver; but, as time went on, he aped the vices of more civilized peoples, and became an indiscriminate eater and a hard drinker. Game formed a main portion of his diet; but he occasionally indulged in pork, and probably in other sorts of butcher's meat. He ate leavened bread, with his meat, and various kinds of vegetables. The bread, which was particularly light and porous, seems to have been imported sometimes by the Romans, who knew it as _panis aquaticus_ or _panis Parthicus_. Dates were also consumed largely by the Parthians, and in some parts of the country grew to an extraordinary size. A kind of wine was made from them; and this seems to have been the intoxicating drink in which the nation generally indulged too freely. That made from the dates of Babylon was the most highly esteemed, and was reserved for the use of the king and the higher order of satraps.

Of the Parthian feasts, music was commonly an accompaniment. The flute, the pipe, the drum, and the instrument called eambuca, appear to have been known to them; and they understood how to combine these instruments in concerted harmony. They are said to have closed their feasts with dancing--an amusement of which they were inordinately fond--but this was probably the case only with the lower class of people. Dancing in the East, if not associated with religion, is viewed as degrading, and, except as a religious exercise, is not indulged in by respectable persons.

The separation of the sexes was very decided in Parthia. The women took their meals, and passed the greater portion of their life, apart from the men. Veils were commonly worn, as in modern Mohammedan countries; and it was regarded as essential to female delicacy that women, whether married or single,

should converse freely with no males but either their near relations or eunuchs. Adultery was punished with great severity; but divorce was not difficult, and women of rank released themselves from the nuptial bond on light grounds of complaint, without much trouble. Polygamy was the established law; and every Parthian was entitled, besides his chief wife, to maintain as many concubines as he thought desirable. Some of the nobles supported an excessive number; but the expenses of the seraglio prevented the generality from taking much advantage of the indulgence which the law permitted.

The degree of refinement and civilization which the Parthians reached is difficult to determine with accuracy. In mimetic art their remains certainly do not show much taste or sense of beauty. There is some ground to believe that their architecture had merit; but the existing monuments can scarcely be taken as representations of pure Parthian work, and may have owed their excellence (in some measure, at any rate) to foreign influence. Still, the following particulars, for which there is good evidence, seem to imply that the nation had risen in reality far above that "barbarism" which it was the fashion of the Greek and Roman writers to ascribe to it. In the first place, the Parthians had a considerable knowledge of foreign languages. Plutarch tells us that Orodes, the opponent of Crassus, was acquainted with the Greek language and literature, and could enjoy the representation of a play of Euripides. The general possession of such knowledge, at any rate by the kings and the upper classes, seems to be implied by the use of the Greek letters and language in the legends upon coins and in inscriptions. Other languages were also to some extent cultivated. The later kings almost invariably placed a Semitic legend upon their coins; and there is one instance of a Parthian prince adopting an Aryan legend of the type known as Bactrian. Josephus, moreover, regarded the Parthians as familiar with Hebrew, or Syro-Chaldaic, and wrote his history of the Jewish War in his own native tongue, before he put out his Greek version, for the benefit especially of the Parthians, among whom he declares that he had many readers.

Though the Parthians had, so far as we can tell, no native literature, yet writing was familiar to them, and was widely used in matters of business. Not only were negotiations carried on with foreign powers by means of despatches, but the affairs of the empire generally were conducted by writing. A custom-house system was established along the frontier, and all commodities liable to duty that entered the country were registered in a book at the time of entry by the custom-house officer. In the great cities where the Court passed a portion of the year, account was kept of the arrival of strangers, whose names and descriptions were placed upon record by the keepers of the gates. The orders of the Crown were signified in writing to the satraps; and they doubtless corresponded with the Court in the same way. In the earlier times the writing material commonly used was linen; but shortly before the time of Pliny, the Parthians began to make paper from the papyrus, which grew in the neighborhood of Babylon, though they still employed in preference the old material.

There was a considerable trade between Parthia and Rome, carried on by means of a class of merchants. Parthia imported from Rome various metals, and numerous manufactured articles of a high class. Her principal exports were textile fabrics and spices. The textile fabrics seem to have been produced chiefly in Babylonia, and to have consisted of silks, carpets, and coverlets. The silks were largely used by the Roman ladies. The coverlets, which were patterned with various colors, fetched enormous prices, and were regarded as fit adornments of the Imperial palace. Among the spices exported, the most celebrated wore bdellium, and the _juncus odoratus_ or odoriferous bulrush.

The Parthians had many liberal usages which imply a fairly advanced civilization. Their

tolerance of varieties in religion has been already mentioned. Even in political matters they seem to have been free from the narrowness which generally characterizes barbarous nations. They behaved well to prisoners, admitted foreigners freely to offices of high trust, gave an asylum to refugees, and treated them with respect and kindness, were scrupulous observers of their pledged word, and eminently faithful to their treaty obligations. On the other hand, it must be admitted that they had some customs which indicate a tinge of barbarism. They used torture for the extraction of answers from reluctant persons, employed the scourge to punish trifling offences, and, in certain cases, condescended to mutilate the bodies of their dead enemies. Their addiction to intemperance is also a barbaric trait. They were, no doubt, on the whole, less civilized than either the Greeks or Romans; but the difference does not seem to have been so great as represented by the classical writers.

Speaking broadly, the position that they occupied was somewhat similar to that which the Turks hold in the system of modern Europe. They had a military strength which caused them to be feared and respected, a vigor of administration which was felt to imply many sterling qualities. A certain coarseness and rudeness attached to them which they found it impossible to shake off; and this drawback was exaggerated by their rivals into an indication of irreclaimable barbarity. Except in respect of their military prowess, it may be doubtful if justice is done them by any classical writer. They were not merely the sole rival which dared to stand up against Rome in the interval between B.C. 65 and A.D. 226, but they were a rival falling in many respects very little below the great power whose glories have thrown them so much into the shade. They maintained from first to last a freedom unknown to later Rome; they excelled the Romans in toleration and in liberal treatment of foreigners, they equalled them in manufactures and in material prosperity, and they fell but little short of them in the extent and productiveness of their dominions. They were the second power in the world for nearly three centuries, and formed a counterpoise to Rome which greatly checked Roman decline, and, by forcing the Empire to exert itself, prevented stagnation and corruption.

It must, however, be confessed, that the tendency of the Parthians was to degenerate. Although the final blow was struck in an unexpected quarter, and perhaps surprised the victors as much as the vanquished, still it is apparent that for a considerable space before the revolt of Artaxerxes the Parthian Empire had shown signs of failing strength, and had tended rapidly towards decay and ruin. The constant quarrels among the Arsacidae and the incipient disintegration of the Empire have been noticed. It may be added here that a growing barbarism, a decline in art and letters, is observable in the Parthian remains, such as have usually been found to accompany the decrepitude of a nation. The coinage has from first to last a somewhat rude character, which indicates that it is native, and not the production of Greek artists. But on the earlier coins the type, though not indicative of high art, is respectable, and the legends are, with few exceptions, perfectly correct and classical. Barbarism first creeps in about the reign of Gotarzes, A.D. 42-51. It increases as time goes on, until, from about A.D. 133, the Greek legend upon the coins becomes indistinct and finally unintelligible, the letters being strewn about the surface of the coin, like dead soldiers over a field of battle. It is, clear that the later directors of the mint were completely ignorant of Greek, and merely attempted to reproduce on the coin some semblance of a language which neither they nor their countrymen understood. Such a condition of a coinage is almost without parallel, and indicates a want of truth and honesty in the conduct of affairs which implies deep-seated corruption. The Parthians must have lost the knowledge of Greek about A.D. 130, yet still a pretence of

using the language was kept up. On the tetra-drachms--comparatively rare coins--no important mistake was committed; but on the more usual drachm, from the time of Gotarzes, the most absurd errors were introduced, and thenceforth perpetuated. The old inscription was, in a certain sense, imitated, but every word of it ceased to be legible: the old figures disappeared in an indistinct haze, and--if we except the head and name of the king (written now in a Semitic character)--the whole emblazonment of the coin became unmeaning. A degeneracy less marked, but still sufficiently clear to the numismatic critic, is observable in the heads of the kings, which, in the earlier times, if a little coarse, are striking and characteristic; while in the later they sink to a conventional type, rudely and poorly rendered, and so uniform that the power of distinguishing one sovereign from another rests no longer upon feature, but upon mere differences in the arrangement of hair, or beard, or head-dress.