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ASSYRIA

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CHAPTER II. Climate and Productions

Media, like Assyria, is a country of such extent and variety that, in order to give a correct description of its climate, we must divide it into regions. Azerbaijan, or Atropatene, the most northern portion, has a climate altogether cooler than the rest of Media; while in the more southern division of the country there is a marked difference between the climate of the east and of the west, of the tracts lying on the high plateau and skirting the Great Salt Desert, and of those contained within or closely abutting upon the Zagros mountain range. The difference here is due to the difference of physical conformation, which is as great as possible, the broad mountainous plains about Kasvin, Koum, and Kashan, divided from each other by low rocky ridges, offering the strongest conceivable contrast to the perpetual alternations of mountain and valley, precipitous height and deep wooded glen, which compose the greater part of the Zagros region.

The climate of Azerbaijan is temperate and pleasant, though perhaps somewhat overwarm, in summer; while in winter it is bitterly severe, colder than that of almost any other region in the same latitude. This extreme rigor seems to be mainly owing to elevation, the very valleys and valley plains of the tract being at a height of from 4000 to 5000 feet above the sea level. Frost commonly sets in towards the end of

November--or at latest early in December; snow soon covers the ground to the depth of several feet; the thermometer falls below zero; the sun shines brightly except when from time to time fresh deposits of snow occur; but a keen and strong wind usually prevails, which is represented as "cutting like a sword," and being a very "assassin of life." Deaths from cold are of daily occurrence; and it is impossible to travel without the greatest risk. Whole companies or caravans occasionally perish beneath the drift, when the wind is violent, especially if a heavy fall happen to coincide with one of the frequent easterly gales. The severe weather commonly continues till March, when travelling becomes possible, but the snow remains on much of the ground till May, and on the mountains still longer. The spring, which begins in April, is temperate and delightful; a sudden burst of vegetation succeeds to the long winter lethargy; the air is fresh and balmy, the sun pleasantly warm, the sky generally cloudless. In the month of May the heat increases--thunder hangs in the air--and the valleys are often close and sultry. Frequent showers occur, and the hail-storms are sometimes so violent as to kill the cattle in the fields. As the summer advances the heats increase, but the thermometer rarely reaches 90 deg. in the shade, and except in the narrow valleys the air is never oppressive. The autumn is generally very fine. Foggy mornings are common; but they are succeeded by bright pleasant days, without wind or rain. On the whole the climate is pronounced healthy, though somewhat trying to Europeans, who do not readily adapt themselves to a country where the range of the thermometer is as much as 90 deg. or 100 deg.. In the part of Media situated on the great plateau--the modern Irak Ajemi--in which are the important towns of Teheran, Isfahan, Hamadan, Kashan, Kasvin, and Koum. the climate is altogether warmer than in Azerbaijan, the summers being hotter, and the winters shorter and much less cold. Snow indeed covers the ground for about three

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months, from early in December till March; but the thermometer rarely shows more than ten or twelve degrees of frost, and death from cold is uncommon. The spring sets in about the beginning of March, and is at first somewhat cool, owing to the prevalence of the _baude caucasian_ or north wind, which blows from districts where the snow still lies. But after a little time the weather becomes delicious; the orchards are a mass of blossom; the rose gardens come into bloom; the cultivated lands are covered with springing crops; the desert itself wears a light livery of green. Every sense is gratified; the nightingale bursts out with a full gush of song; the air plays softly upon the cheek, and comes loaded with fragrance. Too soon, however, this charming time passes away, and the summer heats begin, in some places as early as June 18 The thermometer at midday rises to 90 or 100 degrees. Hot gusts blow from the desert, sometimes with great violence. The atmosphere is described as choking; and in parts of the plateau it is usual for the inhabitants to quit their towns almost in a body, and retire for several months into the mountains. This extreme heat is, however, exceptional; in most parts of the plateau the summer warmth is tempered by cool breezes from the surrounding mountains, on which there is always a good deal of snow. At Hamadan, which, though on the plain, is close to the mountains, the thermometer seems scarcely ever to rise above 90 deg., and that degree of heat is attained only for a few hours in the day. The mornings and evenings are cool and refreshing; and altogether the climate quite justifies the choice of the Persian monarchs, who selected Ecbatana for their place of residence during the hottest portion of the year. Even at Isfahan, which is on the edge of the desert, the heat is neither extreme nor prolonged. The hot gusts which blow from the east and from the south raise the temperature at times nearly to a hundred degrees; but these oppressive winds alternate with cooler breezes from the west, often accompanied by rain; and the average highest

temperature during the day in the hottest month, which is August, does not exceed 90 deg..

A peculiarity in the climate of the plateau which deserves to be noticed is the extreme dryness of the atmosphere. In summer the rains which fall are slight, and they are soon absorbed by the thirsty soil. There is a little dew at nights, especially in the vicinity of the few streams; but it disappears with the first hour of sunshine, and the air is left without a particle of moisture. In winter the dryness is equally great; frost taking the place of heat, with the same effect upon the atmosphere. Unhealthy exhalations are thus avoided, and the salubrity of the climate is increased; but the European will sometimes sigh for the soft, balmy airs of his own land, which have come flying over the sea, and seem to bring their wings still dank with the ocean spray.

Another peculiarity of this region, produced by the unequal rarefaction of the air over its different portions, is the occurrence, especially in spring and summer, of sudden gusts, hot or cold, which blow with great violence. These gusts are sometimes accompanied with, whirlwinds, which sweep the country in different directions, carrying away with them leaves, branches, stubble, sand, and other light substances, and causing great annoyance to the traveller. They occur chiefly in connection with a change of wind, and are no doubt consequent on the meeting of two opposite currents. Their violence, however, is moderate, compared with that of tropical tornadoes, and it is not often that they do any considerable damage to the crops over which they sweep.

One further characteristic of the flat region may be noticed. The intense heat of the summer sun striking on the dry sand or the saline efflorescence of the desert throws the air over them into such a state of quivering undulation as produces the most wonderful and varying effects, distorting the forms of objects, and rendering the most familiar strange and hard to be recognized. A mud

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bank furrowed by the rain will exhibit the appearance of a magnificent city, with columns, domes, minarets, and pyramids; a few stunted bushes will be transformed into a forest of stately trees; a distant mountain will, in the space of a minute, assume first the appearance of a lofty peak, then swell out at the top, and resemble a mighty mushroom, next split into several parts, and finally settle down into a flat tableland. Occasionally, though not very often that semblance of water is produced which Europeans are apt to suppose the usual effect of mirage. The images of objects are reflected at their base in an inverted position; the desert seems converted into a vast lake; and the thirsty traveller, advancing towards it, finds himself the victim of an illusion, which is none the less successful because he has been a thousand times forewarned of its deceptive power.

In the mountain range or Zagros and the tracts adjacent to it, the climate, owing to the great differences of elevation, is more varied than in the other parts of the ancient Media. Severe cold prevails in the higher mountain regions for seven months out of the twelve, while during the remaining five the heat is never more than moderate. In the low valleys, on the contrary, and in other favored situations, the winters are often milder than on the plateau; while in the summers, if the heat is not greater, at any rate it is more oppressive. Owing to the abundance of the streams and proximity of the melting snows, the air is moist; and the damp heat, which stagnates in the valleys, broods fever and ague. Between these extremes of climate and elevation, every variety is to be found; and, except in winter, a few hours' journey will almost always bring the traveller into a temperate region.

In respect of natural productiveness, Media (as already observed) differs exceedingly in different, and even in adjacent, districts. The rocky ridges of the great plateau, destitute of all vegetable mold, are wholly bare and arid,

admitting not the slightest degree of cultivation. Many of the mountains of Azerbaijan, naked, rigid, and furrowed, may compare even with these desert ranges for sterility. The higher parts of Zagros and Elburz are sometimes of the same character; but more often they are thickly clothed with forests, affording excellent timber and other valuable commodities. In the Elburz pines are found near the summit, while lower down there occur, first the wild almond and the dwarf oak, and then the usual timber-trees of the country, the Oriental plane, the willow, the poplar, and the walnut. The walnut grows to a large size both here and in Azerbaijan, but the poplar is the wood most commonly used for building purposes. In Zagros, besides most of these trees, the ash and the terebinth or turpentine-tree are common; the oak bears gall-nuts of a large size; and the gum-tragacanth plant frequently clothes the mountain-sides. The valleys of this region are full of magnificent orchards, as are the low grounds and more sheltered nooks of Azerbaijan. The fruit-trees comprise, besides vines and mulberries, the apple, the pear, the quince, the plum, the cherry, the almond, the nut, the chestnut, the olive, the peach, the nectarine, and the apricot.

On the plains of the high plateau there is a great scarcity of vegetation. Trees of a large size grow only in the few places which are well watered, as in the neighborhood of Hamadan, Isfahan, and in a less degree of Kashan. The principal tree is the Oriental plane, which flourishes together with poplars and willows along the water-courses; cypresses also grow freely; elms and cedars are found, and the orchards and gardens contain not only the fruit-trees mentioned above, but also the jujube, the cornel, the filbert, the medlar, the pistachio nut, the pomegranate, and the fig. Away from the immediate vicinity of the rivers and the towns, not a tree, scarcely a bush, is to be seen. The common thorn is indeed tolerably abundant in a few places; but elsewhere the tamarisk and a few other sapless shrubs are

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the only natural products of this bare and arid region.

In remarkable contrast with the natural barrenness of this wide tract are certain favored districts in Zagros and Azerbaijan, where the herbage is constant throughout the summer, and sometimes only too luxuriant. Such are the rich and extensive grazing grounds of Khawah and Alishtar, near Kermanshah, the pastures near Ojan and Marand, and the celebrated Chowal Moghan or plain of Moghan, on the lower course of the Araxes river, where the grass is said to grow sufficiently high to cover a man on horseback. These, however, are rare exceptions to the general character of the country, which is by nature unproductive, and scarcely deserving even of the qualified encomium of Strabo.

Still Media, though deficient in natural products, is not ill adapted for cultivation. The Zagros valleys and hillsides produce under a very rude system of agriculture, besides the fruits already noticed, rice, wheat, barley, millet, sesame, Indian corn, cotton, tobacco, mulberries, cucumbers, melons, pumpkins, and the castor-oilplant. In Azerbaijan the soil is almost all cultivable, and if ploughed and sown will bring good crops of the ordinary kinds of grain. Even on the side of the desert, where Nature has shown herself most niggardly, and may seem perhaps to deserve the reproach of Cicero, that she behaves as a step mother to a man rather than as a mother, a certain amount of care and scientific labor may render considerable tracts fairly productive. The only want of this region is water; and if the natural deficiency of this necessary fluid can be anyhow supplied, all parts of the plateau will bear crops, except those which form the actual Salt Desert. In modern, and still more in ancient times, this fact has been clearly perceived, and an elaborate system of artificial irrigation, suitable to the peculiar circumstances of the country, has been very widely established. The system of *_kanats_*, as they are called at the present day, aims at utilizing to the

uttermost all the small streams and rills which descend towards the desert from the surrounding mountains, and at conveying as far as possible into the plain the spring water, which is the indispensable condition of cultivation in a country where--except for a few days in the spring and autumn--rain scarcely ever falls. As the precious element would rapidly evaporate if exposed to the rays of the summer sun, the Iranian husbandman carries his conduit underground, laboriously tunnelling through the stiff argillaceous soil, at a depth of many feet below the surface. The mode in which he proceeds is as follows. At intervals along the line of his intended conduit he first sinks shafts, which he then connects with one another by galleries, seven or eight feet in height, giving his galleries a slight incline, so that the water may run down them freely, and continuing them till he reaches a point where he wishes to bring the water out upon the surface of the plain. Here and there, at the foot of his shafts, he digs wells, from which the fluid can readily be raised by means of a bucket and a windlass; and he thus brings under cultivation a considerable belt of land along the whole line of the *_kanat_*, as well as a large tract at its termination. These conduits, on which the cultivation of the plateau depends, were established at so remote a date that they were popularly ascribed to the mythic Semiramis, the supposed wife of Ninus. It is thought that in ancient times they were longer and more numerous than at present, when they occur only occasionally, and seldom extend more than a few miles from the base of the hills.

By help of the irrigation thus contrived, the great plateau of Iran will produce good crops of grain, rice, wheat, barley, Indian corn, doura, millet, and sesame. It will also bear cotton, tobacco, saffron, rhubarb, madder, poppies which give a good opium, senna, and assafoetida. Its garden vegetables are excellent, and include potatoes, cabbages, lentils, kidney-beans, peas, turnips, carrots, spinach, beetroot, and cucumbers. The

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variety of its fruit-trees has been already noticed. The flavor of their produce is in general good, and in some cases surpassingly excellent. No quinces are so fine as those of Isfahan, and no melons have a more delicate flavor. The grapes of Kasvin are celebrated, and make a remarkably good wine.

Among the flowers of the country must be noted, first of all, its roses, which flourish in the most luxuriant abundance, and are of every variety of hue. The size to which the tree will grow is extraordinary, standards sometimes exceeding the height of fourteen or fifteen feet. Lilacs, jasmines, and many other flowering shrubs are common in the gardens, while among wild flowers may be noticed hollyhocks, lilies, tulips, crocuses, anemones, lilies of the valley, fritillaries, gentians, primroses, convolvuluses, chrysanthemums, heliotropes, pinks, water-lilies, ranunculuses, jonquils, narcissuses, hyacinths, mallows, stocks, violets, a fine campanula (*Michauxia levigata*), a mint (*Nepeta longiflora*), several sages, salsolas, and fagonias. In many places the wild flowers during the spring months cover the ground, painting it with a thousand dazzling or delicate hues.

The mineral products of Media are numerous and valuable. Excellent stone of many kinds abounds in almost every part of the country, the most important and valuable being the famous Tabriz marble. This curious substance appears to be a petrification formed by natural springs, which deposit carbonate of lime in large quantities. It is found only in one place, on the flanks of the hills, not far from the Urumiyeh lake. The slabs are used for tombstones, for the skirting of rooms, and for the pavements of baths and palaces; when cut thin they often take the place of glass in windows, being semi-transparent. The marble is commonly of a pale yellow color, but occasionally it is streaked with red, green, or copper-colored veins.

In metals the country is thought to be rich, but no satisfactory examination of it has been

as yet made. Iron, copper, and native steel are derived from mines actually at work; while Europeans have observed indications of lead, arsenic, and antimony in Azerbaijan, in Kurdistan, and in the rocky ridges which intersect the desert. Tradition speaks of a time when gold and silver were procured from mountains near Takht-i-Suleman, and it is not unlikely that they may exist both there and in the Zagros range. Quartz, the well-known matrix of the precious metal, abounds in Kurdistan.

Of all the mineral products, none is more abundant than salt. On the side of the desert, and again near Tabriz at the mouth of the Aji Su, are vast plains which glisten with the substance, and yield it readily to all who care to gather it up. Saline springs and streams are also numerous, from which salt can be obtained by evaporation. But, besides these sources of supply, rock salt is found in places, and this is largely quarried, and is preferred by the natives.

Other important products of the earth are saltpetre, which is found in the Elburz, and in Azerbaijan; sulphur, which abounds in the same regions, and likewise on the high plateau; alum, which is quarried near Tabriz; naphtha and gypsum, which are found in Kurdistan; and talc, which exists in the mountains near Koum, in the vicinity of Tabriz, and probably in other places.

The chief wild animals which have been observed within the limits of the ancient Media are the lion, the tiger, the leopard, the bear, the beaver, the jackal, the wolf, the wild ass, the ibex or wild goat, the wild sheep, the stag, the antelope, the wild boar, the fox, the hare, the rabbit, the ferret, the rat, the jerboa, the porcupine, the mole, and the marmot. The lion and tiger are exceedingly rare; they seem to be found only in Azerbaijan, and we may perhaps best account for their presence there by considering that a few of these animals occasionally stray out of Mazanderan, which is their only proper locality in this part of Asia. Of all the beasts, the most abundant are

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the stag and the wild goat, which are numerous in the Elburz, and in parts of Azerbaijan, the wild boar, which abounds both in Azerbaijan, and in the country about Hamadan, and the jackal, which is found everywhere. Bears flourish in Zagros, antelopes in Azerbaijan, in the Elburz, and on the plains near Sultaniyeh. The wild ass is found only in the desert parts of the high plateau; the beaver only in Lake Zeribar, near Sulefmaniyeh.

The Iranian wild ass differs in some respects from the Mesopotamian. His skin is smooth, like that of a deer, and of a reddish color, the belly and hinder parts partaking of a silvery gray; his head and ears are large and somewhat clumsy; but his neck is fine, and his legs are beautifully slender. His mane is short and black, and he has a black tuft at the end of his tail, but no dark line runs along his back or crosses his shoulders. The Persians call him the *_gur-khur_*, and chase him with occasional success, regarding his flesh as a great delicacy. He appears to be the *_Asinus onager_* of naturalists, a distinct species from the *_Asinus hemippus_* of Mesopotamia, and the *_Asinus hemionus_* of Thibet and Tartary.

It is doubtful whether some kind of wild cattle does not still inhabit the more remote tracts of Kurdistan. The natives mention among the animals of their country "the mountain ox;" and though it has been suggested that the beast intended is the elk, it is perhaps as likely to be the Aurochs, which seems certainly to have been a native of the adjacent country of Mesopotamia in ancient times. At any rate, until Zagros has been thoroughly explored by Europeans, it must remain uncertain what animal is meant. Meanwhile we may be tolerably sure that, besides the species enumerated, Mount Zagros contains within its folds some large and rare ruminant.

Among the birds the most remarkable are the eagle, the bustard, the pelican, the stork, the pheasant, several kinds of partridges, the quail, the woodpecker, the bee-eater, the

hoopoe, and the nightingale. Besides these, doves and pigeons, both wild and tame, are common; as are swallows, goldfinches, sparrows, larks, blackbirds, thrushes, linnets, magpies, crows, hawks, falcons, teal, snipe, wild ducks, and many other kinds of waterfowl. The most common partridge is a red-legged species (*_Caccabis chukar_* of naturalists), which is unable to fly far, and is hunted until it drops. Another kind, common both in Azerbaijan and in the Elburz, is the black-breasted partridge (*_Perdix nigra_*)--a bird not known in many countries. Besides these, there is a small gray partridge in the Zagros range, which the Kurds call *seslca*. The bee-eater (*_Merops Persicus_*) is rare. It is a bird of passage, and only visits Media in the autumn, preparatory to retreating into the warm district of Mazandoran for the winter months. The hoopoe (*_Upupa_*) is probably still rarer, since very few travellers mention it. The woodpecker is found in Zagros, and is a beautiful bird, red and gray in color.

Media is, on the whole, but scantily provided with fish. Lake Urumiyeh produces none, as its waters are so salt that they even destroy all the river-fish which enter them. Salt streams, like the Aji Su, are equally unproductive, and the fresh-water rivers of the plateau fall so low in summer that fish cannot become numerous in them. Thus it is only in Zagros, in Azerbaijan, and in the Elburz, that the streams furnish any considerable quantity. The kinds most common are barbel, carp, dace, bleak, and gudgeon. In a comparatively few streams, more especially those of Zagros, trout are found, which are handsome and of excellent quality. The river of Isfahan produces a kind of crayfish, which is taken in the bushes along its banks, and is very delicate eating.

It is remarkable that fish are caught not only in the open streams of Media, but also in the *_kanats_* or underground conduits, from which the light of day is very nearly excluded. They appear to be of one sort only, viz., barbel, but are abundant, and often grow to a

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considerable size. Chardin supposed them to be unfit for food; but a later observer declares that, though of no great delicacy, they are "perfectly sweet and wholesome."

Of reptiles, the most common are snakes, lizards, and tortoises. In the long grass of the Moghan district, on the lower course of the Araxes, the snakes are so numerous and venomous that many parts of the plain are thereby rendered impassable in the summer-time. A similar abundance of this reptile near the western entrance of the Girduni Siyaluk pass induces the natives to abstain from using it except in winter. Lizards of many forms and hues disport themselves about the rocks and stones, some quite small, others two feet or more in length. They are quite harmless, and appear to be in general very tame. Land tortoises are also common in the sandy regions. In Kurdistan there is a remarkable frog, with a smooth skin and of an apple-green color, which lives chiefly in trees, roosting in them at night, and during the day employing itself in catching flies and locusts, which it strikes with its fore paw, as a cat strikes a bird or a mouse.

Among insects, travellers chiefly notice the mosquito, which is in many places a cruel torment; the centipede, which grows to an unusual size; the locust, of which there is more than one variety; and the scorpion, whose sting is sometimes fatal.

The destructive locust (the *Acridium peregrinum*, probably) comes suddenly into Kurdistan and southern Media in clouds that obscure the air, moving with a slow and steady flight and with a sound like that of heavy rain, and settling in myriads on the fields, the gardens, the trees, the terraces of the houses, and even the streets, which they sometimes cover completely. Where they fall, vegetation presently disappears; the leaves, and even the stems of the plants, are devoured; the labors of the husbandman through many a weary month perish in a day; and the curse of famine is brought upon the land which but now enjoyed the prospect of

an abundant harvest. It is true that the devourers are themselves devoured to some extent by the poorer sort of people; but the compensation is slight and temporary; in a few days, when all verdure is gone, either the swarms move to fresh pastures, or they perish and cover the fields with their dead bodies, while the desolation which they have created continues.

Another kind of locust, observed by Mr. Rich in Kurdistan, is called by the natives *_shira-kulla_*, a name seemingly identical with the *_chargol_* of the Jews, and perhaps the best clue which we possess to the identification of that species. Mr. Rich describes it as "a large insect, about four inches long, with no wings, but a kind of sword projecting from the tail. It bites," he says, "pretty severely, but does no harm to the cultivation." We may recognize in this description a variety of the great green grasshopper (*_Locusta viridissima_*), many species of which are destitute of wings, or have wing-covers only, and those of a very small size.

The scorpion of the country (*_Scorpio crassicauda_*) has been represented as peculiarly venomous, more especially that which abounds in the city and neighborhood of Kashan; but the most judicious observers deny that there is any difference between the Kashan scorpion and that of other parts of the plateau, while at the same time they maintain that if the sting be properly treated, no danger need be apprehended from it. The scorpion infests houses, hiding itself under cushions and coverlets, and stings the moment it is pressed upon; some caution is thus requisite in avoiding it; but it hurts no one unless molested, and many Europeans have resided for years in the country without having ever been stung by it.

The domestic animals existing at present within the limits of the ancient Media are the camel, the horse, the mule, the ass, the cow, the goat, the sheep, the dog, the cat, and the buffalo. The camel is the ordinary beast of burden in the flat country, and can carry an

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enormous weight. Three kinds are employed--the Bactrian or two-humped camel, which is coarse and low; the taller and lighter Arabian breed; and a cross between the two, which is called _ner_, and is valued very highly. The ordinary burden of the Arabian camel is from seven to eight hundredweight; while the Bactrian variety is said to be capable of bearing a load nearly twice as heavy.

Next to the camel, as a beast of burden, must be placed the mule the mules of the country are small, but finely proportioned, and carry a considerable weight. They travel thirty miles a day with ease, and are preferred for journeys on which it is necessary to cross the mountains. The ass is very inferior, and is only used by the poorer classes.

Two distinct breeds of horses are now found in Media, both of which seem to be foreign--the Turkoman and the Arabian. The Turkoman is a large, powerful, enduring animal, with long legs, a light body, and a big head. The Arab is much smaller, but perfectly shaped, and sometimes not greatly inferior to the very best produce of Nejd. A third breed is obtained by an intermixture of those two, which is called the _bid-pai_, or "wind footed," and is the most prized of all.

The dogs are of various breeds, but the most esteemed is a large kind of gray hound, which some suppose to have been introduced into this part of Asia by the Macedonians, and which is chiefly employed in the chase of the antelope. The animal is about the height of a full sized English grayhound, but rather stouter; he is deep-chested, has long, smooth hair, and the tail considerably feathered. His pace is inferior to that of our grayhounds, but in strength and sagacity he far surpasses them.

We do not find many of the products of Media celebrated by ancient writers. Of its animals, those which had the highest reputation were its horses, distinguished into two breeds, an ordinary kind, of which Media produced annually many thousands, and a kind of rare size and excellence, known under the name of

Nisaeen. These last are celebrated by Herodotus, Strabo, Arrian, Ammianus Marcellinus, Suidas, and others. They are said to have been of a peculiar shape; and they were equally famous for size, speed, and stoutness. Strabo remarks that they resemble the horses known in his own time as Parthian; and this observation seems distinctly to connect them with the Turkoman breed mentioned above, which is derived exactly from the old Parthian country. In color they were often, if not always, white. We have no representation on the monuments which we can regard as certainly intended for a Nisaeen horse, but perhaps the figure from Persepolis may be a Persian sketch of the animal.

The mules and small cattle (sheep and goats) were in sufficient repute to be required, together with horses, in the annual tribute paid to the Persian king.

Of vegetable products assigned to Media by ancient writers, the most remarkable is the "Median apple," or citron. Pliny says it was the sole tree for which Media was famous, and that it would only grow there and in Persia. Theophrastus, Dioscorides, Virgil, and other writers, celebrate its wonderful qualities, distinctly assigning it to the same region. The citron, however, will not grow in the country which has been here termed Media. It flourishes only in the warm tract between Shiraz and the Persian Gulf, and in the low sheltered region, south of the Caspian, the modern Ghilan and Mazanderan. No doubt it was the inclusion of this latter region within the limits of Media by many of the later geographers that gave to this product of the Caspian country an appellation which is really a misnomer.

Another product whereto Media gave name, and probably with more reason, was a kind of clover or lucerne, which was said to have been introduced into Greece by the Persians in the reign of Darius, and which was afterwards cultivated largely in Italy. Strabo considers this plant to have been the chief

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food of the Median horses, while Dioscorides assigns it certain medicinal qualities. Clover is still cultivated, in the Elburz region, but horses are now fed almost entirely on straw and barley.

Media was also famous for its silphium, or assafoetida, a plant which the country still produces, though not in any large quantity. No drug was in higher repute with the ancients for medicinal purposes; and though the Median variety was a coarse kind, inferior in repute, not only to the Cyrenaic, but also to the Parthian and the Syrian, it seems to have been exported both to Greece and Borne, and to have been largely used by druggists, however little esteemed by physicians.

The other vegetable products which Media furnished, or was believed to furnish, to the ancient world, were bdellium, amomum, cardamomum, gum tragacanth, wild-vine oil, and sagaponum, or the *Ferula persica*. Of these, gum tragacanth is still largely produced, and is an important article of commerce. Wild vines abound in Zagros and Elburz, but no oil is at present made from them. Bdelium, if it is benzoin, amomum, and cardamomum were perhaps rather imported through Media than the actual produce of the country, which is too cold in the winter to grow any good spices.

The mineral products of Media noted by the ancient writers are nitre, salt, and certain gems, as emeralds, lapis lazuli, and the following obscurer kinds, the zathene, the gassinades, and the narcissitis. The nitre of Media is noticed by Pliny, who says it was procured in small quantities, and was called "halmyraga." It was found in certain dry-looking glens, where the ground was white with it, and was obtained there purer than in other places. Saltpetre is still derived from the Elburz range, and also from Azerbaijan.

The salt of Lake Urumiyeh is mentioned by Strabo, who says that it forms naturally on the surface, which would imply a far more complete saturation of the water than at present exists, even in the driest seasons. The

gems above mentioned are assigned to Media chiefly by Pliny. The Median emeralds, according to him, were of the largest size; they varied considerably, sometimes approaching to the character of the sapphire, in which case they were apt to be veiny, and to have flaws in them. They were far less esteemed than the emeralds of many other countries. The Median lapis lazuli, on the other hand, was the best of its kind. It was of three colors--light blue, dark blue, and purple. The golden specks, however, with which it was sprinkled--really spots of yellow pyrites--rendered it useless to the gem-engravers of Pliny's time. The zathene, the gassinades, and the narcissitis were gems of inferior value. As they have not yet been identified with any known species, it will be unnecessary to prolong the present chapter by a consideration of them.

CHAPTER III. Character, Manners, Customs, Arts

"Pugnatrix natio et formidanda."--Amm. Marc, xxiii. 6.

The ethnic character of the Median people is at the present day scarcely a matter of doubt. The close connection which all history, sacred and profane, establishes between them and the Persians, the evidence of their proper names and of their language, so far as it is known to us, together with the express statements of Herodotus and Strabo, combine to prove that they belonged to that branch of the human family known to us as the Arian or Iranic, a leading subdivision of the great Indo-European race. The tie of a common language, common manners and customs, and to a great extent a common belief, united in ancient times all the dominant tribes of the great plateau, extending even beyond the plateau in one direction to the Jaxartes (Syhun) and in another to the Hyphasis (Sutlej). Persians, Medes, Sagartians, Chorasmians, Bactrians, Sogdians, Hyrcanians, Sarangians, Gandarians, and Sanskritic Indians belonged all to a single stock, differing from one another probably not much more than now

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differ the various subdivisions of the Teutonic or the Slavonic race. Between the tribes at the two extremities of the Arian territory the divergence was no doubt considerable; but between any two neighboring tribes the difference was probably in most cases exceedingly slight. At any rate this was the case towards the west, where the Medes and Persians, the two principal sections of the Arian body in that quarter, are scarcely distinguishable from one another in any of the features which constitute ethnic type.

The general physical character of the ancient Arian race is best gathered from the sculptures of the Achsemenian kings, which exhibit to us a very noble variety of the human species--a form tall, graceful, and stately; a physiognomy handsome and pleasing, often somewhat resembling the Greek; the forehead high and straight, the nose nearly in the same line, long and well formed, sometimes markedly aquiline, the upper lip short, commonly shaded by a moustache, the chin rounded and generally covered with a curly beard. The hair evidently grew in great plenty, and the race was proud of it. On the top of the head it was worn smooth, but it was drawn back from the forehead and twisted into a row or two of crisp curls, while at the same time it was arranged into a large mass of similar small close ringlets at the back of the head and over the ears.

Of the Median women we have no representations upon the sculptures; but we are informed by Xenophon that they were remarkable for their stature and their beauty. The same qualities were observable in the women of Persia, as we learn from Plutarch, Ammianus Marcellinus, and others. The Arian races seem in old times to have treated women with a certain chivalry, which allowed the full development of their physical powers, and rendered them specially attractive alike to their own husbands and to the men of other nations.

The modern Persian is a very degenerate representative of the ancient Arian stock. Slight and supple in person, with quick, glancing eyes, delicate features, and a vivacious manner, he lacks the dignity and strength, the calm repose and simple grace of the race from which he is sprung. Fourteen centuries of subjection to despotic sway have left their stamp upon his countenance and his frame, which, though still retaining some traces of the original type, have been sadly weakened and lowered by so long a term of subservience. Probably the wild Kurd or Lur of the present day more nearly corresponds in physique to the ancient Mede than do the softer inhabitants of the great plateau.

Among the moral characteristics of the Medes the one most obvious is their bravery.

"_Pugnatrix natio et formidanda_" says Ammianus Marcellinus in the fourth century of our era, summing up in a few words the general judgment of Antiquity. Originally equal, if not superior, to their close kindred, the Persians, they were throughout the whole period of Persian supremacy only second to them in courage and warlike qualities. Mardonius, when allowed to take his choice out of the entire host of Xerxes, selected the Median troops in immediate succession to the Persians. Similarly, when the time for battle came he kept the Medes near himself, giving them their place in the line close to that of the Persian contingent. It was no doubt on account of their valor, as Diodorus suggests, that the Medes were chosen to make the first attack upon the Greek position at Thermopylae, where, though unsuccessful, they evidently showed abundant courage. In the earlier times, before riches and luxury had eaten out the strength of the race, their valor and military prowess must have been even more conspicuous. It was then especially that Media deserved to be called, as she is in Scripture, "the mighty one of the heathen"--"the terrible of the nations."

Her valor, undoubtedly, was of the merciless kind. There was no tenderness, no hesitancy

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about it. Not only did her armies "dash to pieces" the fighting men of the nations opposed to her, allowing apparently no quarter, but the women and the children suffered indignities and cruelties at the hands of her savage warriors, which the pen unwillingly records. The Median conquests were accompanied by the worst atrocities which lust and hate combined are wont to commit when they obtain their full swing. Neither the virtue of women nor the innocence of children were a protection to them. The infant was slain before the very eye of the parent. The sanctity of the hearth was invaded, and the matron ravished beneath her own roof-tree. Spoil, it would seem, was disregarded in comparison with insult and vengeance; and the brutal soldiery cared little either for silver or gold, provided they could indulge freely in that thirst for blood which man shares with the hyena and the tiger.

The habits of the Medes in the early part of their career were undoubtedly simple and manly. It has been observed with justice that the same general features have at all times distinguished the rise and fall of Oriental kingdoms and dynasties. A brave and adventurous prince, at the head of a population at once poor, warlike, and greedy, overruns a vast tract, and acquires extensive dominion, while his successors, abandoning themselves to sensuality and sloth, probably also to oppressive and irascible dispositions, become in process of time victims to those same qualities in another prince and people which had enabled their own predecessor to establish their power. It was as being braver, simpler, and so stronger than the Assyrians that the Medes were able to dispossess them of their sovereignty over western Asia. But in this, as in most other cases of conquest throughout the East, success was followed almost immediately by degeneracy. As captive Greece captured her fierce conqueror, so the subdued Assyrians began at once to corrupt their subduers. Without condescending to a close imitation of Assyrian manners and customs, the Medes

proceeded directly after their conquest to relax the severity of their old habits and to indulge in the delights of soft and luxurious living. The historical romance of Xenophon presents us probably with a true picture when it describes the strong contrast which existed towards the close of the Median period between the luxury and magnificence which prevailed at Ecbatana, and the primitive simplicity of Persia Proper, where the old Arian habits, which had once been common to the two races, were still maintained in all their original severity. Xenophon's authority in this work is, it must be admitted, weak, and little trust can be placed in the historical accuracy of his details; but his general statement is both in itself probable, and is also borne out to a considerable extent by other authors.

Herodotus and Strabo note the luxury of the Median dress, while the latter author goes so far as to derive the whole of the later Persian splendor from an imitation of Median practices. We must hold then that towards the latter part of their empire the Medes became a comparatively luxurious people, not indeed laying aside altogether their manly habits, nor ceasing to be both brave men and good soldiers, but adopting an amount of pomp and magnificence to which they were previously strangers, affecting splendor in their dress and apparel, grandeur and rich ornament in their buildings, variety in their banquets, and attaining on the whole a degree of civilization not very greatly inferior to that of the Assyrians. In taste and real refinement they seem indeed to have fallen considerably below their teachers. A barbaric magnificence predominated in their ornamentation over artistic effort, richness in the material being preferred to skill in the manipulation. Literature, and even letters, were very sparingly cultivated. But little originality was developed. A stately dress, and a new style of architecture, are almost the only inventions to which the Medes can lay claim. They were brave, energetic, enterprising, fond of display, capable of appreciating to some extent the

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advantages of civilized life; but they had little genius, and the world is scarcely indebted to them for a single important addition to the general stock of its ideas.

Of the Median customs in war we know but little. Herodotus tells us that in the army of Xerxes the Medes were armed exactly as the Persians, carrying on their heads a soft felt cap, on their bodies a sleeved tunic, and on their legs trousers. Their offensive arms, he says, were the spear, the bow, and the dagger. They had large wicker shields, and bore their quivers suspended at their backs. Sometimes their tunic was made into a coat of mail by the addition to it on the outside of a number of small iron plates arranged so as to overlap each other, like the scales of a fish. They served both on horseback and on foot, with the same equipment in both cases.

There is no reason to doubt the correctness of this description of the Median military dress under the early Persian kings. The only question is how far the equipment was really the ancient warlike custom of the people. It seems in some respects too elaborate to be the armature of a simple and primitive race. We may reasonably suppose that at least the scale armor and the unwieldy wicker shields (yeppa), which required to be rested on the ground, were adopted at a somewhat late date from the Assyrians. At any rate the original character of the Median armies, as set before us in Scripture, and as indicated both by Strabo and Xenophon, is simpler than the Herodotean description. The primitive Modes seem to have been a nation of horse-archers. Trained from their early boyhood to a variety of equestrian exercises, and well practised in the use of the bow, they appear to have proceeded against their enemies with clouds of horse, almost in Scythian fashion, and to have gained their victories chiefly by the skill with which they shot their arrows as they advanced, retreated, or manoeuvred about their foe. No doubt they also used the sword and the spear. The employment of these weapons has been almost universal

throughout the East from a very remote antiquity, and there is some mention of them in connection with the Medes and their kindred, the Persians, in Scripture; but it is evident that the terror which the Medes inspired arose mainly from their dexterity as archers.

No representation of weapons which can be distinctly recognized as Median has come down to us. The general character of the military dress and of the arms appears, probably in the Persepolitan sculptures; but as these reliefs are in most cases representations, not of Medes, but of Persians, and as they must be hereafter adduced in illustration of the military customs of the latter people, only a very sparing use of them can be made in the present chapter. It would seem that the bow employed was short, and very much curved, and that, like the Assyrian it was usually carried in a bow-case, which might either be slung at the back, or hung from the girdle. The arrows, which were borne in a quiver slung behind the right shoulder, must have been short, certainly not exceeding the length of three feet. The quiver appears to have been round; it was covered at the top, and was fastened by means of a flap and strap, which last passed over, a button. The Median spear or lance was from six to seven feet in length. Its head was lozenge-shaped and flattish, but strengthened by a bar or line down the middle. It is uncertain whether the head was inserted into the top of the shaft, or whether it did not rather terminate in a ring or socket into which the upper end of the shaft was itself inserted. The shaft tapered gradually from bottom to top, and terminated below in a knob or ball, which was perhaps sometimes carved into the shape of some natural object. The sword was short, being in fact little more than a dagger. It depended at the right thigh from a belt which encircled the waist, and was further secured by a strap attached to the bottom of the sheath, and passing round the soldier's right leg a little above the knee.

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Median shields were probably either round or oval. The oval specimens bore a resemblance to the shield of the Boeotians, having a small oval aperture at either side, apparently for the sake of greater lightness. They were strengthened at the centre by a circular boss or disk, ornamented with knobs or circles. They would seem to have been made either of metal or wood.

The favorite dress of the Medes in peace is well known to us from the sculptures; there can be no reasonable doubt that the long flowing robe so remarkable for its graceful folds, which is the garb of the kings, the chief nobles, and the officers of the court in all the Persian bas-reliefs, and which is seen also upon the darics and the gems, is the famous "Median garment" of Herodotus, Xenophon, and Strabo. This garment fits the chest and shoulders closely, but falls over the arms in two large loose sleeves, open at the bottom. At the waist it is confined by a cincture. Below it is remarkably full and ample, drooping in two clusters of perpendicular folds at the two sides, and between these hanging in festoons like a curtain. It extends down to the ankles, where it is met by a high shoe or low boot, opening in front, and secured by buttons.

These Median robes were of many colors. Sometimes they were purple, sometimes scarlet, occasionally a dark gray, or a deep crimson. Procopius says that they were made of silk, and this statement is confirmed to some extent by Justin, who speaks of their transparency. It may be doubted, however, whether the material was always the same; probably it varied with the season, and also with the wealth of the wearer.

Besides this upper robe, which is the only garment shown in the sculptures, the Medes wore as under garments a sleeved shirt or tunic of a purple color, and embroidered drawers or trousers. They covered the head, not only out of doors, but in their houses, wearing either felt caps like the Persians, or a head-dress of a more elaborate character, which bore the name of _tiara_ or _cidaris_.

This appears to have been, not a turban, but rather a kind of high-crowned hat, either stiff or flexible, made probably of felt or cloth, and dyed of different hues, according to the fancy of the owner.

The Medes took a particular delight in the ornamentation of their persons. According to Xenophon, they were acquainted with most of the expedients by the help of which vanity attempts to conceal the ravages of time and to create an artificial beauty. They employed cosmetics, which they rubbed into the skin, for the sake of improving the complexion. They made use of an abundance of false hair. Like many other Oriental nations, both ancient and modern, they applied dyes to enhance the brilliancy of the eyes, and give them a greater apparent size and softness. They were also fond of wearing golden ornaments. Chains or collars of gold usually adorned their necks, bracelets of the same precious metal encircled their wrists, and earrings were inserted into their ears. Gold was also used in the caparisons of their horses, the bit and other parts of the harness being often of this valuable material.

We are told that the Medes were very luxurious at their banquets. Besides plain meat and game of different kinds, with the ordinary accompaniments of wine and bread, they were accustomed to place before their guests a vast number of side-dishes, together with a great variety of sauces. They ate with the hand, as is still the fashion in the East, and were sufficiently refined to make use of napkins. Each guest had his own dishes, and it was a mark of special honor to augment their number. Wine was drunk both at the meal and afterwards, often in an undue quantity; and the close of the feast was apt to be a scene of general turmoil and confusion. At the Court it was customary for the king to receive his wine at the hands of a cupbearer, who first tasted the draught, that the king might be sure that it was not poisoned, and then presented it to his master with much pomp and ceremony.

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The whole ceremonial of the court seems to have been imposing. Under ordinary circumstances the monarch kept himself secluded, and no one could obtain admission to him unless he formally requested an audience, and was introduced into the royal presence by the proper officer. On his admission he prostrated himself upon the ground with the same signs of adoration which were made on entering a temple. The king, surrounded by his attendants, eunuchs, and others, maintained a haughty reserve, and the stranger only beheld him from a distance. Business was transacted in a great measure by writing. The monarch rarely quitted his palace, contenting himself with such reports of the state of his empire as were transmitted to him from time to time by his officers.

The chief amusement of the court, in which however the king rarely partook, was hunting. Media always abounded in beasts of chase; and lions, bears, leopards, wild boars, stags, gazelles, wild sheep, and wild asses are mentioned among the animals hunted by the Median nobles. Of these the first four were reckoned dangerous, the others harmless. It was customary to pursue these animals on horseback, and to aim at them with the bow or the javelin. We may gather a lively idea of some of these hunts from the sculptures of the Parthians, who some centuries later inhabited the same region. We see in these the rush of great troops of boars through marshes dense with water-plants, the bands of beaters urging them on, the sportsmen aiming at them with their bows, and the game falling transfixed with two or three well-aimed shafts. Again we see herds of deer driven within enclosures, and there slain by archers who shoot from horseback, the monarch under his parasol looking on the while, pleased with the dexterity of his servants. It is thus exactly that Xenophon portrays Astyages as contemplating the sport of his courtiers, complacently viewing their enjoyment, but taking no active part in the work himself.

Like other Oriental sovereigns, the Median monarch maintained a seraglio of wives and concubines; and polygamy was commonly practised among the more wealthy classes. Strabo speaks of a strange law as obtaining with some of the Median tribes--a law which required that no man should be content with fewer wives than five. It is very unlikely that such a burden was really made obligatory on any: most probably five legitimate wives, and no more, were allowed by the law referred to, just as four wives, and no more, are lawful for Mohammedans. Polygamy, as usual, brought in its train the cruel practice of castration; and the court swarmed with eunuchs, chiefly foreigners purchased in their infancy. Towards the close of the Empire this despicable class appears to have been all-powerful with the monarch.

Thus the tide of corruption gradually advanced; and there is reason to believe that both court and people had in a great measure laid aside the hardy and simple customs of their forefathers, and become enervated through luxury, when the revolt of the Persians came to test the quality of their courage, and their ability to maintain their empire. It would be improper in this place to anticipate the account of this struggle, which must be reserved for the historical chapter; but the well-known result--the speedy and complete success of the Persians--must be adduced among the proofs of a rapid deterioration in the Median character between the accession of Cyaxares and the capture--less than a century later--of Astyages.

We have but little information with respect to the state of the arts among the Medes. A barbaric magnificence characterized, as has been already observed, their architecture, which differed from the Assyrian in being dependent for its effect on groups of pillars rather than on painting or sculpture. Still sculpture was, it is probable, practised to some extent by the Medes, who, it is almost certain, conveyed on to the Persians those

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modifications of Assyrian types which meet us everywhere in the remains of the Achsemenian monarch? The carving of winged genii, of massive forms of bulls and lions, of various grotesque monsters, and of certain clumsy representations of actual life, imitated from the bas-reliefs of the Assyrians, may be safely ascribed to the Medes; since, had they not carried on the traditions of their predecessors, Persian art could not have borne the resemblance that it does to Assyrian. But these first mimetic efforts of the Arian race have almost wholly perished, and there scarcely seems to remain more than a single fragment which can be assigned on even plausible grounds to the Median period. A portion of a colossal lion, greatly injured by time, is still to be seen at Hamadan, the site of the great Median capital, which the best judges regard as anterior to the Persian period, and as therefore most probably Median. It consists of the head and body of the animal, from which the four legs and the tail have been broken off, and measures between eleven and twelve feet from the crown of the head to the point from which the tail sprang. By the position of the head and what remains of the shoulders and thighs, it is evident that the animal was represented in a sitting posture, with the fore legs straight and the hind legs gathered up under it. To judge of the feeling and general character of the sculpture is difficult, owing to the worn and mutilated condition of the work; but we seem to trace in it the same air of calm and serene majesty that characterizes the colossal bulls and lions of Assyria, together with somewhat more of expression and of softness than are seen in the productions of that people. Its posture, which is unlike that of any Assyrian specimen, indicates a certain amount of originality as belonging to the Median artists, while its colossal size seems to show that the effect on the spectator was still to be produced, not so much by expression, finish, or truth to nature, as by mere grandeur of dimension.