

## THE TOMB OF CYRUS.

AFTER waging war victoriously for thirty years, Cyrus, who had made himself master of the whole of Western Asia, perished in a combat against the Scythians, led on by a woman. Thomyris, queen of the Massagetae, a people who occupied a tract of country from the north to the east of the Caspian Sea, burnt to revenge the death of her son, and it was by her order that the body of Cyrus was dragged from beneath the slain, and that the head of it was cut off and thrown into a vessel of human blood. "Though I am still alive and victorious," exclaimed the queen, "you have brought destruction on me, by causing the death of my son, who had allowed himself to be inveigled by your snares; but you shall now have your fill of blood, as I promised." It is also said that she addressed the pale face of the lifeless conqueror in the following violent words:—"Drink this blood, after which you ever thirsted, but by which your thirst was never allayed!"

Such was the end of this celebrated king, according to what was related to Herodotus in Persia; but the great historian adds: "There are various accounts concerning the death of Cyrus."

According to another tradition, Ctesias relates that the last enemies against whom Cyrus fought were the Derbices (Scythians of Margiana), who had Amoreus for their king. These people put the Persian cavalry to the rout by means of their elephants, which they suddenly led out of an ambuscade; Cyrus himself fell from his horse, and an Indian pierced his thigh with a javelin. Three days afterwards he died of his wound.

Then again, Xenophon declares that Cyrus died tranquilly in his bed, in the midst of his relations and his friends. He had been warned, in a dream, of his approaching end, by a man with a majestic bearing, who appeared to him much more than a mortal, and who said: "Prepare yourself, Cyrus, for you are soon about to go to where the gods abide." This dream awoke him; and he immediately offered up sacrifices on the summits of the mountains, not to implore Jupiter and the Sun to prolong his life, but to thank them for their constant protection. On the third day from that he gently breathed his last, after having administered consolation and advice to his sons and to the first magistrates of his empire.

Lucian thinks, in his turn, that Cyrus, after having attained the age of more than a hundred years, died of grief, because his son Cambyses had put most of his friends to death. This version is not at all improbable. Cambyses was quite capable of putting his father's friends to death, or even his father himself; for Cambyses also was a great conqueror. Writers have attempted to excuse his cruel extravagances on the ground that he was subject to cataleptic fits. If, however, he did not make his father happy when alive, he paid him all honour after his death, and raised a tomb to his memory at Passagarda, a city which Cyrus had built on the very spot where he had vanquished and dethroned Astyages, king of the Medes, and who, according to some historians, was no other than his own grandfather.

If the Massagetae put Cyrus to death near the Caspian Sea, they must have given up his body to the Persians, or the latter must have re-taken it. History is silent in this respect. The monument at Passagarda might also be nothing else but an empty tomb, simply commemorative, like the numerous cenotaphs of Æneas, or the sepulchres that certain Greek nations raised on the battle-field of Plataea.

This tomb has been described by Arrianus.\* It rose in the royal garden of Passagarda, in the midst of rare trees and tall shrubs, among which ran streams of limpid water. It was a square edifice standing on a stone platform, and consisted of one little vaulted chamber, which was entered with difficulty through a door, both very narrow and very low. In the middle of the chamber was a golden urn in which the remains of Cyrus were preserved. This urn was placed on

a table which was covered with rich stuffs from Babylon, and which had legs of massive gold. The chamber itself was covered with a purple carpet. Near the urn were seen the royal dress, magnificent Assyrian garments, with others of a hyacinth colour, Median armour, necklaces, rings, and ornaments, in which sparkled gold and precious stones. At a short distance from the steps which led to this tomb was another little edifice, where the magians, who were charged to watch over the remains of Cyrus, resided. It was the wish of Cambyses, that the fathers should be succeeded in this pious duty by their sons. Each day a sheep, flour, and wine were carried to the magians; and each month they were presented with a horse, which they sacrificed in memory of the great king. On the frontispiece of the tomb was the following epitaph: "Mortal, I am Cyrus, the son of Cambyses; I gave the Persians universal dominion, and I reigned over Asia; be not jealous of my monument."

When Alexander visited the tomb, says Arrianus, all that he found there was the urn and the bed. The remains of Cyrus had been carried off, and the most vigorous efforts had been made to displace the urn. The magians were suspected of being no strangers to this act of spoliation, or of being, at least, acquainted with the perpetrators of it. They were put to the torture; but they made no avowal, and they were graciously allowed to live. Alexander ordered Aristobulus to repair the monument, which was, doubtless, in a state of dilapidation; the door was afterwards walled up, and the royal seal was placed all over it.

Quintus Curtius relates this circumstance somewhat differently. "Alexander," he says, "ordered the tomb in which lay the body of Cyrus to be opened, as he wished to pay funeral honours to this monarch, believing, at the same time, that the tomb itself was full of gold and silver, as had been reported by the Persians; but he found in it nothing but an old rotten shield, two Scythians' bows, and a scimitar. The king placed a gold crown on the urn, and covered it with his cloak, at the same time expressing his astonishment that so powerful and renowned a king had not been more sumptuously interred than a man would be."

One of the courtiers remarked, on hearing him speak thus, that the tomb had contained three thousand talents, and insinuated that the treasure might have been carried off by Orsmes, a satrap of Passagarda. In consequence of this accusation, inspired by hatred, Alexander had Orsmes arrested, and the satrap, less lucky than the magians, because he was not so rich, perhaps, was condemned, without his guilt being proved, and put to death.

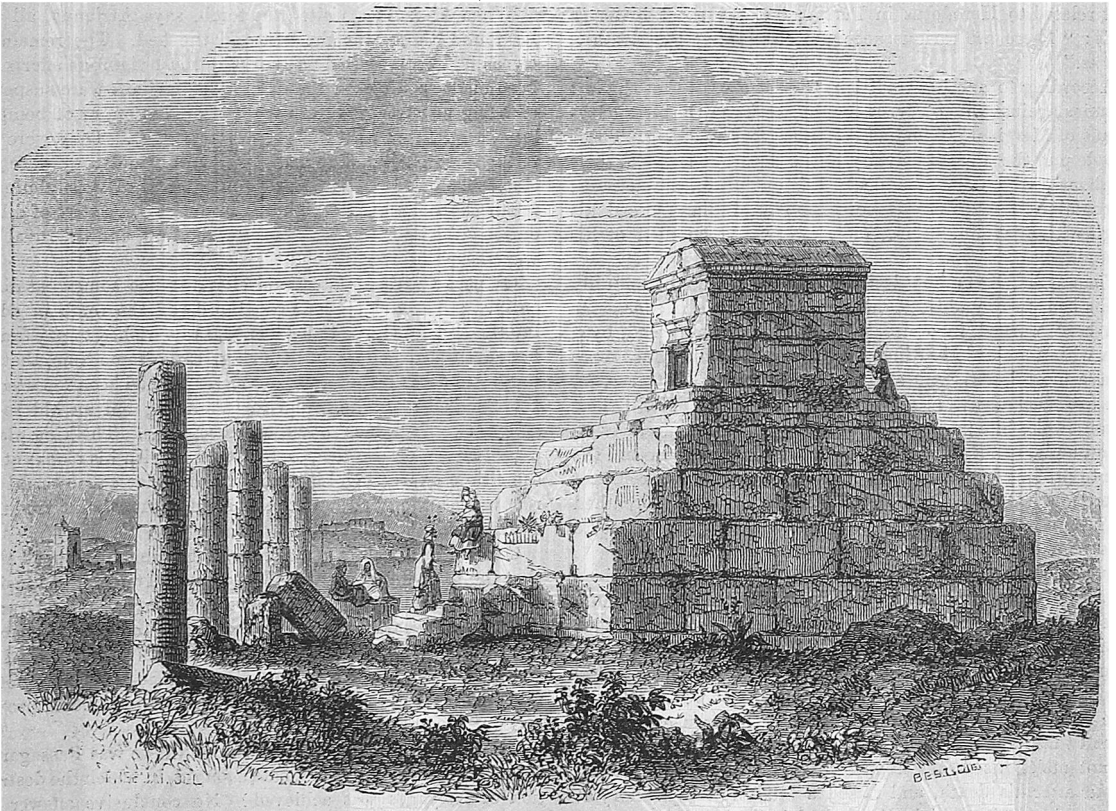
But does this tomb still exist? And where was Passagarda? On what spot was the great battle fought, in which the destruction of Astyages was achieved? No conclusive answer can be given to these questions; for it is as difficult to judge of the truth of the various historical facts, as it is to form an opinion from mere supposition, and men of learning are not less divided in this respect than theorizers. The battle took place in the southern part of Persia, which at present forms the province of Farsistan. Ancient ruins are by no means rare about this part of the country, formerly the theatre of so many revolutions. There are some near a little village called *Fossa*. Now the scientific world hardly make the shadow of difference between the two words *Fossa* and *Passa*; and, moreover, great use is made in the south of Persia of the Zend termination *gherd*; Fossagherd and Passagherd are therefore the same; and from the latter word comes Passagarda, the place where, without doubt, the tomb of Cyrus was erected. But then, on the other hand, the ruins of *Fossa* are of little importance, while there are others in every respect more worthy of attention at a few days' journey higher up the country, near the small town of Morghab, at a little distance from the ancient frontiers of Media, and it is very natural to suppose that the field of battle of the Medes and Persians was near the frontiers. It has been, therefore, presumed that

\* *Historica Indica*, lib. x.

Passargarda was situated in the environs of Morghab, and this notion is strengthened from the fact that, in the midst of a vast plain which exists in these parts, and among ruins of a truly antique appearance, there is a monument of an austere form and aspect which possesses all the characteristics of the mausoleum spoken of by Arrianus. Monsieur E. Flandin, the last traveller who has seen and sketched this tomb, describes it in the following manner:—

“The whole structure, which rises about thirty feet above its foundation, is divided into two parts of nearly the same size; the first, which is composed of six steps retreating one over the other, serves as the basis or pedestal to the second, which constitutes the funeral chamber. This chamber is rectangular in form, and is made, like the steps, of enormous blocks of white limestone highly polished. Each of the two narrowest lines of its roofing forms a fronton. The monument is so situated that the entrance, which consists of a little door surrounded with a case and surmounted by a

erection. It may be supposed that it was only after every thing it contained had disappeared that the Mussulmans be-thought themselves of turning it into a shrine for pilgrims, and of placing it under the protection of what they call *Mader-i-Suleiman*. But who is this Suleiman whose name is held in such veneration, and who has replaced him to whose memory the tomb was erected? Is it Solomon? or is it one of the modern heroes of Islamism? Whoever he may be, the tomb, after having been profaned, and then abandoned as an impure place, like all monuments of the same kind, has undergone a transformation both of name and purpose. It has been turned into one of those *imamzadeh* which attract the most devout believers in Persia from all quarters. This transformation has rendered it necessary to make some slight alterations in its interior. A few Arabian lines from the Koran have been engraved on the walls of the inner chamber, in front of a *kebleh*, traced on the stone on the southern side. The Persians have thus turned this antique tomb into a celebrated place of wor-



TOMB OF CYRUS. FROM A DRAWING BY FREEMAN.

cornice, looks towards the north-west. Though these different mouldings are, for the most part, destroyed, it is still easy to recognise their style, which is that of Grecian profile. The door is so low that you are obliged to stoop in order to penetrate into the tomb; after entering you find yourself, first of all, in a sort of little rectangular antechamber which is very narrow. Beyond is a second door, which was, doubtless, only opened after the first one was shut, so that the light and noise, or the eyes of persons from without, might not penetrate into the sanctuary, which is oblong, and has a ceiling composed of three courses, which rest on the side walls. It was in this sepulchral chamber that the sarcophagus was placed, or at least the mortal dust which had been enclosed in it, for we have no clue with respect to what it was that received the body of Cyrus within it. The walls, now black with smoke, bear no trace of either sculptures or inscriptions. This tomb must have been violated and sacked several times during the wars and invasions of all sorts which harassed Persia after its

ship, under the name of *Meched-i-Mader Suleiman*; it is principally used by women, who alone, it is said, have the right to enter it.”

The shafts of a few pillars are still seen standing around the tomb; but it is not at all certain that they are in their primitive places, or that they were erected at the same time as the mausoleum. It may be supposed that the modern Persians have taken away from the edifices, whose ruins are seen a little further off, fragments of pillars, in order to encircle the tomb they have restored in honour of the mother of their Suleiman.

At a few paces from the tomb is a ruin which has quite a modern appearance, although antique remains are found in it. It is said that it was formerly a *medreseh*, or convent, which served as a residence to the mollahs who guarded the tomb that is now abandoned. This tradition agrees in one respect so well with what Arrianus says, that it appears as if it should carry conviction with it.