

it in circulation in this corner of the kingdom, while we have it. Our alarming situation has arrested the attention of many enlightened and patriotic statesmen in different parts of the British Empire. When they have exposed errors, and offered many useful lessons for our instruction, shall we then disregard such important admonition, and by parting with what gold remains amongst us, assist in hurrying on all the evils of an inordinate issue of paper money?

J. P.

To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.

MY inquiry respecting an Ink that will stand the operation of bleaching, through the different processes, when the oxy-muriatic acid is used, still remains without a satisfactory answer. To be complete, it must resist the operation of the alkalies

which are used in the first processes of bleaching, and of the oxy-muriates, used in the latter stages. Your correspondent, Tyro, suggests printers' ink. It will, however, not answer, for even a weak alkaline solution discharges it. I particularly solicit practical information on the subject.

Weavers are in the practice of sometimes marking the progress of their work in a manner which is found to stand the operation of all the different processes of bleaching. And I have understood the instrument they use is a piece of the grey willow, made black in the fire, and then dipped in butter.

Might we not, from this circumstance, get a hint for making a permanent ink? In this case the component articles appear to be carbon and oil, perhaps combined with the peculiar matter of the grey willow.

A LINENDRAPER.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF DISTINGUISHED PERSONS.

THE HISTORY OF HAROUN AL-RASCHID.

THE name of Haroun Al-raschid is so familiar to most readers, that a compilation, purporting to relate the principal events of his life, might seem at first to require an apology. On perusal, however, it will be found, that the Haroun Al-raschid of history differs much from the facetious night-wanderer of Oriental romance, and that most of what is detailed of him by the historians of his reign, will present him in a point of view essentially different from that in which we are accustomed to behold him. If we chuse to moralise on the matter, we may reflect on the falsehood of those names too frequently bestowed on kings, which may have flattered their own blind vanity, but have afterwards accompanied their character downwards through time, with all the damning effect of sneering irony: for Al-raschid, or *the just*, seems to have been little deserved by this prince, who appears to have acted, in most instances, with the unfeeling caprice of a despot, and not with the mature deliberation of

one, who strove to award to all their due.

In the year of the Hegira 100, which answers to 718 of our era, Mahomet, great grandson of Abbas, the uncle of the impostor Mahomet, laid claim to the Khalifat, then in the possession of Omar II. His attempt succeeded, and he became the founder of the Abbasside race, which maintained their sway through a series of 37 Khalifs and a period of nearly 500 years.

Haroun Al-Raschid was the fifth Khalif of this race, and succeeded his brother Hadi according to the appointment of their father Mahadi. This appointment seems to have been displeasing to Hadi; who acted on every occasion toward Haroun, so as to testify his displeasure, and in some instances displayed great meanness of disposition. Mahadi had left to Haroun, as a pledge of the succession to which he had appointed him in the event of his brother's death, a remarkably handsome ruby set in a ring. This the Khalif wished much to get from Haroun, and sent an eunuch to demand it of him. Haroun was walk-

ing on the bank of the Tigris, when the messenger came. The demand enraged him, he reproached his brother with injustice, in seeking to wrest from him the only thing of value, which remained to him out of his father's possession, while he himself was in possession of such extensive territories, and such vast treasures. He then pulled off the ring, and threw it into the river. Haroun, after his accession to the Khalifat, bethought himself of the ring, and sent some divers to search where he had thrown it in; the attempt was successful; for the first thing the divers met with was the ring; and this was regarded as a pre-
 sage of good fortune in his ensuing reign.

Hadi did not confine himself to those petty mortifications of his brother; he endeavoured to set aside his father's appointment relative to Haroun, and substitute his own son Giafar; but death put an end to all his plans, about five months after the transaction of the ring. After his death, Giafar made some efforts to obtain the power, but the party of Haroun proved so formidable, that he thought it advisable to yield his pretensions with the best grace he could, and Haroun quietly ascended the throne, in the year of the Hegira, 170. While in a private station, and exposed to danger as well as mortifications from his brother, Haroun had vowed a pilgrimage to Mecca, in case he should be delivered from his difficulties. After he had obtained the supreme power, he consulted with his courtiers on the propriety of adhering to his vow; they unanimously declared it not binding on him. The doctors of their law being consulted, were as unanimous in maintaining the opposite opinion; he bowed to the decision of the latter, and set out on foot from Bagdad in the year of the Hegira, 179. Particular attention was paid to the accommodation of the noble pilgrim, and it is said, that the roads were strewn with tapestry, and the most valuable stuffs. A person attended as he was, and protected from all the difficulties and distresses of the journey, can scarcely be said to have travelled as a pilgrim; and in fact his pilgrimage is unmarked by a single incident or circumstance worth no-

tice, if we except his meeting with Ben Adhem, whose character and performances, as a pilgrim, form a singular contrast to those of Haroun. From his earliest youth he had devoted himself to religious pursuits, and at the proper age enrolled himself among the Sôfis, or religious, under the direction of Fodhail at Mecca. He undertook to perform his pilgrimage thither, under a vow of passing the desert alone, and without any store of provisions, making a thousand genuflexions at the end of every mile. This journey, it is said, occupied him twelve years, during which time, the Arab historians say, he was often tempted by evil spirits.

The Khalif, on their meeting, saluted him, and asked how he did. Adhem's reply was an Arabic quotation to the following effect...

“ With worldly rags we eke Religion's garb;

Vain toil ! which only to destroy it tends !
 Happy, whose master is the Almighty God,

Whose worldly mammon makes him heavenly friends !”

Mecca, whither the Khalif was proceeding, is situated in the midst of an extensive stony plain, which is bounded at the distance of about three miles by some mountains, in which a grotto named from Eve, attracts the reverence of the Mussulmen. There is another mountain to the South of it, where Mahomet hid himself when he had been driven out of Mecca, and had resolved on fixing himself at Medina, whence came the era of the Hegira, or *flight*, dated from this time.

All Mussulmen are bound to visit this city once in their lives, either in person or by proxy : and the principal objects of their reverence are the Caabah, or *square building*, supposed to have been built by Abraham, the Zenezem, or the well shown by the angel to Hagar in the wilderness, and the black Stone.

The Khalif in due order approached the Caabah on his knees, kissed the threshold under which was buried a fragment of the revered black Stone, drank abundantly of the Zenezem, which imparts wisdom, wit, valour, and every desirable qualification to those who drink plentifully, and most

reverently kissed a thousand times the wondrous Stone, which has the quality of swimming in water, though sometimes it is so heavy as to be immovable by the united force of men and beasts; he was the last Khalif who performed these holy rites.

Haroun, before his departure, had taken the illustrious family of the Barmecides under his patronage. Abu Ali Jahia, who had been his preceptor, was endowed with every civil and military qualification. His four sons were equally conspicuous for virtues and talents. Jahia, the father, was appointed Vizir, and Giafar, who appears to have been the eldest son, was chosen to the confidential post of instructor and governor of the young Khalif Almamon, the second son of Haroun, whom in a manner similar to that in which himself had been appointed by his father Mahadi, he ordered to be recognized as eventual successor of his eldest son, Mohammed, afterwards named Alamin.

The Grecian empire, which was about this time under the sway of the empress Irene, was tributary to the Khalifate: but Irene having been dethroned, her successor Nicephorus thought it unbecoming his dignity to pay this tribute, or perhaps conceived, that the refusal to pay it would procure popularity for him among his subjects, or still more probably, moved thereto by unprincipled folly.

His method of declaring his intentions, displayed braggart insolence: he sent a positive refusal of the tribute, in place of which he presented by ambassadors sent for the purpose, some swords. Haroun cut them in two with his own sword in their presence with the greatest ease, thus showing how little he regarded this covered declaration of war, and without awaiting an open avowal of what was plainly intended, he flew like an eagle to the gates of Constantinople, and took the city of Heraclea. Not content with this he assaulted the empire in various parts, until he compelled Nicephorus to sue in the most abject terms for a peace, which he forced him to purchase at a very dear rate. He turned his arms against Egypt, which

he subdued: - he was induced to this from an abhorrence of the pride and blasphemy of the King of Egypt, who commanded his subjects to look on him as their master and their God. In contrast to this, Haroun resolved on appointing the meanest of his slaves as governor of that country. He chose for this purpose one Hozail, an Ethiopian, in proof of whose ignorance and stupidity the following anecdote is related. The Egyptians complained to him of a heavy loss they had suffered in their cotton, which had been usually sown on the banks of the Nile, and at this time had been carried away by an unexpected flood. "Well," said he, "why did you not sow wool?" Most of the transactions of this prince, whether foreign or domestic, beneficent or vindictive, mark the impetuosity, precipitancy and caprice observable in the conduct of almost all, who have been cursed with the gift of despotic power. His wars were begun on slight provocations, entered on with haste, and brought to a precipitate conclusion. His benefits were given profusely: good sense was often seen to guide his conduct and answers, while at other times he seems the sport of the most infernal passions. Of prudence, the following is an instance: His son Amin demanded the punishment of a man, who had spoken disrespectfully of his mother: the Khalif, having weighed the matter, replied, "My son, I advise you to pardon the man: this would be the action, as it is the duty of a great prince: but if you cannot repress your desire of revenge, do you say as much evil of his mother, as he has of yours."

But this period of his reign is indelibly disgraced by an act of the most capricious cruelty; an act, in which no limits were set to his rage; but the innocent and the guilty alike involved in destruction stand recorded in history, as an instance of the effects of despotic power, in aggravating the evil dispositions of man.

An offence of the most venial kind, if indeed it could be called an offence, was committed: and this, which *should have* been pardoned, was visited with the most dreadful punishment extended even to those, who knew not of the of-

fence; and what brings Al-Raschid under heavier condemnation is, that his repentance is no where recorded. The transaction shall speak for itself, and perhaps will set forth the injustice and cruelty of the Khalif more strongly, than any comment however forcible.

Giafar, one of the four sons of Jahia Ben Barmek, was the chief favourite of Haroun; he was raised by him to the dignity of Vizir, and not only possessed the influence consequent on the post, but was able to resign the post in favour of one of his brothers, and still maintain his influence with the Khalif. Of his power there is a striking proof in the following occurrence. Abdalmalek Haschemi was a near relation to the Khalif, but not in the enjoyment of his favour, he applied to Giafar, lamenting his loss of the Khalif's favour, that he was deeply in debt to some who were pressing him for a payment he was unable to make, and that his son, now grown up, had no employment about the court. Giafar having heard his complaints, assured him, that the Khalif should the next forward behold him with favour, pay his debts, and give his daughter in marriage to Abdalmalek's son, with the government of Egypt as her dowry. One who heard these promises, thought them so far beyond his power, great as it was known to be, as to suppose he had heated himself with wine, and that when he cooled, they would be forgotten: but to the surprize of all on the following day, Haroun publicly declared, that he would punctually perform every thing, that had been promised in his name. Nor was this more than was due to Giafar for his past faithful and zealous services, as a minister: although his merits in this way, seem to have been comparatively small, when compared with the exercise of his superior understanding and penetration in cases requiring the greatest promptitude and presence of mind. An instance of this is on record, which at once displays the strange inconsistency of Haroun, the despotism of his power, and Giafar's presence of mind. A Jewish astrologer, had predicted, that Haroun should die in the following year: Giafar found the prince in deep melancholy on having heard the prediction, and having sent for the Jew immediately, he asked him what

he thought as to the length of his own life? The Jew replied, that his horoscope portended a long life. Giafar advised the Khalif to order the immediate execution of the Jew: the order was promptly performed, and the Khalif restored to peace of mind. The many great services performed by Giafar for the Khalif should have commanded some return; but the relief this last must have brought to his mind, when labouring under the pain of fear and dejection, we might expect to find repaid in the most grateful manner, and a lively affection to take possession of the Khalif's heart, so as to exclude every unkind thought.

Far different was the return. Giafar together with his other qualifications, possessed in an eminent degree, the graces of conversation: Haroun had therefinèd taste that can prize and enjoy those graces: he of course devoted much of his leisure to this enjoyment. His favourite sister was Abassa, whose society he was desirous of enjoying at the same time; but the customs of the Persians, enjoining the strictest retirement on the females, and making them inaccessible to any males, except their nearest relations, made this impracticable. To gratify two wishes equally strong, he resolved on giving his sister in marriage to Giafar, that so he might without interruption enjoy the society of both. In the true spirit however, of one, who consults his own gratification only, he subjected their union to the painful condition of their strictly abstaining from every intercourse, except what might take place in his presence. Giafar and Abassa were both beautiful and young; ardent and mutual love was the necessary consequence of free intercourse between them: and love triumphed over their prudence and broke through the painful condition. Abassa became a mother; but the child was conveyed away so secretly, that Haroun was ignorant of the whole transaction, till informed by a perfidious slave. Haroun made the necessary inquiries, and when he was fully informed, he resolved on destroying Giafar, and not content with that, he resolved to destroy his family and relations, numerous as they were.

The Arabian historian of the Barmecides, according to the superstition of even the learned among that people,

relates, that Giafar, designing, a little before he was surprised by death to visit the Khalif, consulted his ephemerides for a favourable time. He was then in his own house, which was situate on the banks of the Tigris; and while he was engaged in calculation, a man, who did not see him, passing by in a boat, recited some Arabic verses to the following purpose.

Man seeks to stars for guidance on his way;

Their rule is God, whose will must ever sway.

Giafar on hearing these words threw his ephemerides and astrolabe to the ground and mounted his horse to go to the palace, where he was shortly after put to death. In considering this dismal tragedy we shall search in vain for any extenuating circumstance: Haroun was acquainted with the birth of Giafar's child before he set out on his pilgrimage, and on his arrival at Mecca, whither he was informed it had been conveyed, he searched for it, but fortunately in vain, as it had been sent away into Remen.* On his return from pilgrimage he went to Anbar, whether Giafar accompanied him, and immediately on his arrival, dispatched a messenger secretly to Bagdat with orders to have the Barmecides, Jahia, the father of Giafar, and his three sons thrown into prison. This order was executed without the knowledge of Giafar, on whom Haroun in the mean time lavished more than ordinary caresses. At last, on the first day of the month, Sefer, in the year 187 of the Hegira, Haroun commanded one of his officers, named Jasser, to bring him the head of Giafar. The officer entered Giafar's house, and in a rude manner signified to him the Khalif's order. "Return," said Giafar, without showing any emotion,

"perhaps Haroun has given this order while heated with wine: tell him you have executed his command: if he repent, I shall save my life; if not, my head is always ready."

Jasser not being quite content with this expedient, Giafar went with him to the door of the Khalif's apartment, and said to him, "Go in, and tell him, you have brought my head, but have left it outside." Jassa did so; but as soon as he had said so, the Khalif ordered him to bring the head quickly into his presence: on this the Officer went out, and cut off the head of Giafar, which he threw at the feet of the Khalif.

This bloody scene was no sooner finished, than he ordered Jasser to call certain persons, whom he named. Jasser obeyed; when they entered, Haroun said to them, "cut off that man's head: for I cannot bear the murderer of Giafar in my presence."

Thus perished, by the most capricious cruelty, a man, who was the ornament and idol of his age. Of his generosity there is a pleasing trait on record. A person presented to him for sale a female slave, whom Giafar found so attractive, that he gave at once the price demanded for her, which was 40 000, crowns. The girl seemed to feel much anguish, and, in a voice expressive of the agony she suffered, "do you not," said she to the person who was selling her, "do you not remember the promise you so often made, that you would never sell me." Giafar, instantly on hearing this pathetic appeal, said to the seller, "Bring me evidence, that this girl is free and that you have married her, and I shall bestow on you the money I have now given you."

The memory of the family thus cruelly cut off, was dear to the people, and the conviction of this, urged Haroun to the puerile revenge of making it death for any person to mention them in any manner whatsoever. One person, an old man, named Mondir, was found courageous enough to despise this threat, and was in the habit of taking his station daily on a small eminence before one of the ruined houses of the family. There, as from a rostrum, he entertained the passengers with details of the worthy

* Or Arabia felix.

* The account given by Abulfarage of this whole transaction, as well as many other particulars of the Khalif's conduct, differs from what is related above. He says Giafar had twins by Abassa: that Haroun had Abassa thrown alive into a well, and when he sent for, and had looked at the twins, he burst into tears, and ordered them also to be thrown into the well, which was then stopped up.

actions of these nobles, and formally delivered their panegyric. The Khalif, on information of this boldness, ordered the man to be brought before him, and sentenced him to death. Mondir received his sentence with apparent satisfaction, and only begged the favour of being permitted to speak two words before his execution.

This favour was granted to him; but the two words extended into a long discourse, in which he extolled the obligations he owed to the Barmecides with such force of eloquence, that the Khalif, who had heard him at first with impatience, was moved, and not only gave him his life, but presented him with a gold plate from his table. Mondir, on receiving this valuable gift, bowed himself to the ground before the Khalif according to custom, saying, however, "Here is an additional favour I owe the Barmecides".

Before this time Haroun had declared his eldest son Mohammid Al-amin his successor; and now he appointed his second son Al-mamon successor to him.

In 192 of the Hegira he was at Raccah in Mesopotamia, where he was employed in preparing to suppress a rebellion, that had been excited in that neighbourhood. Here he was very much alarmed by a dream, in which he thought he saw a hand, which held above his head a handful of red earth, and, at the same time, that he heard the voice of some one distinctly pronounce the following words, "this is the earth, in which Haroun shall be buried;" that he thereupon asked, where the burial-place should be, and that the same voice answered, "at Thous".

Haroun awoke very much terrified by this dream, and fell into profound melancholy: His physician, Gabriel, a christian by profession, perceived it, and asked the cause. The Khalif recounted to him the substance of the dream; the physician told him what is usual in such cases, that dreams are but fancies produced by the fumes, which the humours of the body send to the brain, that there was no necessity for distressing his mind, and that the anxiety occasioned by the preparations he was making to suppress the rebellion, contributed to this fancy: and he prescribed diversions as the best means for dissipating this uneasiness.

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The Khalif in compliance with this advice, ordered a magnificent festival which was continued for some days, and thus got rid of his melancholy. At the conclusion of the festival, he put himself at the head of his army, and had arrived in the province of Georgian, when he was attacked by a sickness which at first seemed trifling.

As the country of Georgian was somewhat troubled, he resolved to pass to the province of Khorasan, that he might enjoy the repose, his situation required. When he arrived at a place called *Thous*, feeling his malady increase, he sent for Gabriel, and reminded him of what he had told him at Raccah. "Well" continued he "we are now at the Thous, where I shall be interred: send one of my eunuchs to look for a handful of the earth from some place round the town." His confidential eunuch Mesrou, went for some, and presented it, red as it was with his arm half stripped. Haroun no sooner saw it, than he exclaimed, "there is the earth, and there the very arm I saw in my dream." Terror seized his mind immediately, and he expired three days after.

Thus died a man, through fear of death, which he had often confronted in the field, during a life chequered with inconsistencies. He was deeply versed in learning and the sciences, yet absurdly addicted to judicial astrology. He cultivated his mind, and was a patron of learned men; yet was ferocious and tyrannical. He selected men of learning for his advisers, in their respective departments, and even prescribed to them with judgment the manner in which they should propose their advice. As to Asmai, a celebrated doctor of the law, he said, "do not instruct me in public; nor be too pressing with your advice in private: in general wait for my asking it, and be satisfied with a brief precise answer to my questions. Beware of attempting to obtain any influence over me with the view of acquiring authority," &c.

Yet his conduct proves his wisdom to have been merely the wisdom of words, too light to resist the tempest of his passions, and while his showy qualifications have given a semblance of foundation for his panegyrist, those who look beyond the surface of things, will stamp his conduct with decided reprobation.

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