what a lyre or a flute is." Psalm-singing and instrumentation were taken over by the Christians from the Jewish services, and restricted more or less entirely to organized choirs. Antiphonal singing was common. The congregation sang hymns—in unison, of course, for as yet part-singing had not been devised. It was a great outlet for suppressed emotions. There appeared a profusion of hymns in Greek and Latin; some are said to survive in existing hymns. St. Gregory, Gregory the Great, that mighty church organizer of whom we shall have more to tell in a subsequent chapter, established the liturgical music of the Church in the sixth century.

CHAPTER 29

THE HISTORY OF ASIA DURING THE DECAY OF THE WESTERN AND BYZANTINE EMPIRES

§ 1

In the preceding two chapters we have concentrated our attention chiefly on the collapse, in the comparatively short space of four centuries, of the political and social order of the western part of the great Roman Empire of Cæsar and Trajan. We have dwelt upon the completeness of that collapse. To any intelligent and public-spirited mind living in the time and under the circumstances of St. Benedict or Cassiodorus, it must have seemed, indeed, as if the light of civilization was waning and near extinction. But with the longer views a study of universal history gives us, we can view those centuries of shadow as a phase, and probably a necessary phase, in the onward march of social and political ideas and understandings. And if, during that time, a dark sense of calamity rested upon Western Europe, we must remember that over large portions of the world there was no retrogression.

With their Western prepossessions, European writers are much too prone to underrate the tenacity of the Eastern Empire that centred upon Constantinople. This empire embodied a tradition much more ancient than that of Rome. If the reader will look at the map we have given of its extent in the sixth century, and if he will reflect that its official language had then become Greek, he will realize that what we are dealing with here is only nominally a branch of the Roman Empire; it is really

the Hellenic Empire of which Herodotus dreamt and which Alexander the Great founded. True it called itself Roman and its people "Romans," and to this day modern Greek is called "Romaic." True also that Constantine the Great knew no Greek and that Justinian's accent was bad. These superficialities of name and form cannot alter the fact that the empire was in reality Hellenic, with a past of six centuries at the time of Constantine the Great, and that while the real Roman Empire crumpled up completely in four centuries, this Hellenic "Roman Empire" held out for more than eleven—from 312, the beginning of the reign of Constantine the Great, to 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks.

And while we have had to tell of something like a complete social collapse in the west, there were no such equivalent breakdowns in the east. Towns and cities flourished, the countryside was well cultivated, trade went on. For many centuries Constantinople was the greatest and richest city in the world. We will not trouble ourselves here with the names and follies, the crimes and intrigues, of its tale of emperors. As with most monarchs of great states, they did not guide their empire; they were carried by it. We have already dealt at some length with Constantine the Great (312–337), we have mentioned Theodosius the Great (379–395), who for a little while reunited the empire, and Justinian I (527–565). Presently we shall tell something of Heraclius (610–641).

Justinian, like Constantine, may have had Slav blood in his veins. He was a man of great ambition and great organizing power, and he had the good fortune to be married to a woman of equal or greater ability, the Empress Theodora, who had in her youth been an actress of doubtful reputation. But his ambitious attempts to restore the ancient greatness of the empire probably overtaxed its resources. As we have told, he reconquered the African province from the Vandals and most of Italy from the Goths. He also recovered the south of Spain. He built the great and beautiful Church of Sancta Sophia in Constantinople, founded a university, and codified the law. But against this we must set his closing of the schools of Athens. Meanwhile a great plague swept the world, and at his death this renewed and expanded empire of his collapsed like a pricked bladder. The greater part of his Italian conquests was lost to the Lombards. Italy was, indeed, at that time almost a desert; the Lombard historians assert they came into an empty country. The Avars and Slavs struck down from the Danube country toward the Adriatic, Slav populations establishing

themselves in what is now Serbia, Croatia, and Dalmatia, to become the Yugoslavs of to-day. Moreover, a great and exhausting struggle began with the Sassanid Empire in Persia.

But before we say anything of this struggle, in which the Persians thrice came near to taking Constantinople, and which was decided by a great Persian defeat at Nineveh (627), it is necessary to sketch very briefly the history of Persia from the Parthian days.

§ 2

The Sassanid Empire in Persia.

We have already drawn a comparison between the brief four centuries of Roman imperialism and the obstinate vitality of the imperialism of the Euphrates-Tigris country. We have glanced very transitorily at the Hellenized Bactrian and Seleucid monarchies that flourished in the eastern half of Alexander's area of conquest for three centuries, and told how the Parthians came down into Mesopotamia in the last century B.C. We have described the battle of Carrhæ and the end of Crassus. Thereafter for two centuries and a half the Parthian dynasty of the Arsacids ruled in the east and the Roman in the west, with Armenia and Syria between them, and the boundaries shifted east and west as either side grew stronger. We have marked the utmost eastward extension of the Roman Empire, under Trajan (see map to chap. 27, § 1), and we have noted that about the same time the Indo-Scythians (chap. 27, § 5) poured down into India.

In 226 occurred a revolution, and the Arsacid dynasty gave way to a more vigorous line, the Sassanid, a national Persian line, under Ardashir I. In one respect the empire of Ardashir I presented a curious parallelism with that of Constantine the Great, a hundred years later. Ardashir attempted to consolidate it by insisting upon religious unity, and adopted as the state religion the old Persian faith of Zoroaster, of which we shall have more to say later.

This new Sassanid Empire immediately became aggressive, and under Sapor I, the son and successor of Ardashir, took Antioch. We have already noted how the Emperor Valerian was defeated (260) and taken prisoner. But as Sapor was retiring from a victorious march into Asia Minor he was fallen upon and defeated by Odenathus, the Arab king of a great desert trading centre, Palmyra.

For a brief time under Odenathus, and then under his widow

Zenobia, Palmyra was a considerable state, wedged between the two empires. Then it fell to the Emperor Aurelian, who carried off Zenobia in chains to grace his triumph at Rome (272).

We will not attempt to trace the fluctuating fortunes of the Sassanids during the next three centuries. Throughout that time war between Persia and the empire of Constantinople wasted Asia Minor like a fever. Christianity spread widely and was persecuted, for after the Christianization of Rome the Persian monarch remained the only god-monarch on earth, and he saw in Christianity merely the propaganda of his Byzantine rival. Constantinople became the protector of the Christians and Persia of the Zoroastrians; in a treaty of 422 the one empire agreed to tolerate Zoroastrianism and the other Christianity. In 483 the Christians of the east split off from the Orthodox church and became the Nestorian church; which, as we have already noted, spread its missionaries far and wide throughout Central and Eastern Asia. This separation from Europe, since it freed the Christian bishops of the east from the rule of the Byzantine patriarchs, and so lifted from the Nestorian church the suspicion of political disloyalty, led to a complete toleration of Christianity in Persia.

With Chosroes I (531–579) came a last period of Sassanid vigour. He was the contemporary and parallel of Justinian. He reformed taxation, restored the orthodox Zoroastrianism, extended his power into Southern Arabia (Yemen), which he rescued from the rule of Abyssinian Christians, pushed his northern frontier into Western Turkestan, and carried on a series of wars with Justinian. His reputation as an enlightened ruler stood so high that, when Justinian closed the schools of Athens, the last Greek philosophers betook themselves to his Court. They sought in him the philosopher king—that mirage which, as we have noted, Confucius and Plato had sought in their day. The philosophers found the atmosphere of orthodox Zoroastrianism even less to their taste than orthodox Christianity, and in 549 Chosroes had the kindness to insert a clause in an armistice with Justinian permitting their return to Greece, and ensuring that they should not be molested for their pagan philosophy or their transitory pro-Persian behaviour.

It is in connection with Chosroes that we hear of a new Hunnish people in Central Asia, the Turks, who are, we learn, first in alliance with him and then with Constantinople.

Chosroes II (590–628), the grandson of Chosroes I, experienced extraordinary fluctuations of fortune. At the outset of his career he achieved astonishing successes against the empire of

Constantinople. Three times (in 608, 615, and 626) his armies reached Chalcedon, which is over against Constantinople; he took Antioch, Damascus, and Jerusalem (614), and from Jerusalem he carried off a cross, said to be the true cross on which Jesus was crucified, to his capital, Ctesiphon. (But some of this or some other true cross had already got to Rome. It had been brought from Jerusalem, it was said, by the "Empress Helena," the idealized and canonized mother of Constantine—a story for which Gibbon displayed small respect.[1]) In 619 Chosroes II conquered that facile country, Egypt. This career of conquest was at last arrested by the Emperor Heraclius (610), who set about restoring the ruined military power of Constantinople For some time Heraclius avoided a great battle while he gathered his forces. He took the field in good earnest in 623. The Persians experienced a series of defeats, culminating in the battle of Nineveh (627); but neither side had the strength for the complete defeat of the other. At the end of the struggle there was still an undefeated Persian army upon the Bosphorus, although there were victorious Byzantine forces in Mesopotamia.

In 628 Chosroes II was deposed and murdered by his son. An indecisive peace was concluded between the two exhausted empires a year or so later, restoring their old boundaries; and the true cross was sent back to Heraclius, who replaced it in Jerusalem with much pomp and ceremony.

§ 3

The Decay of Syria under the Sassanids.

So we give briefly the leading events in the history of the Persian as of the Byzantine Empire. What are more interesting for us and less easy to give are the changes that went on in the lives of the general population of those great empires during that time. The present writer can find little of a definite character about the great pestilences that we know swept the world in the second and sixth centuries of this era. Certainly they depleted population, and probably they disorganized social order in those regions just as much as we know they did in the Roman and Chinese empires.

The late Sir Mark Sykes—whose untimely death in Paris during the influenza epidemic of 1919 was an irreparable loss to Great Britain—wrote in *The Caliph's Last Heritage* a vivid review of the general life of Nearer Asia during the period we are considering. In the opening centuries of the present era, he says:

[1] *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. xxiii.

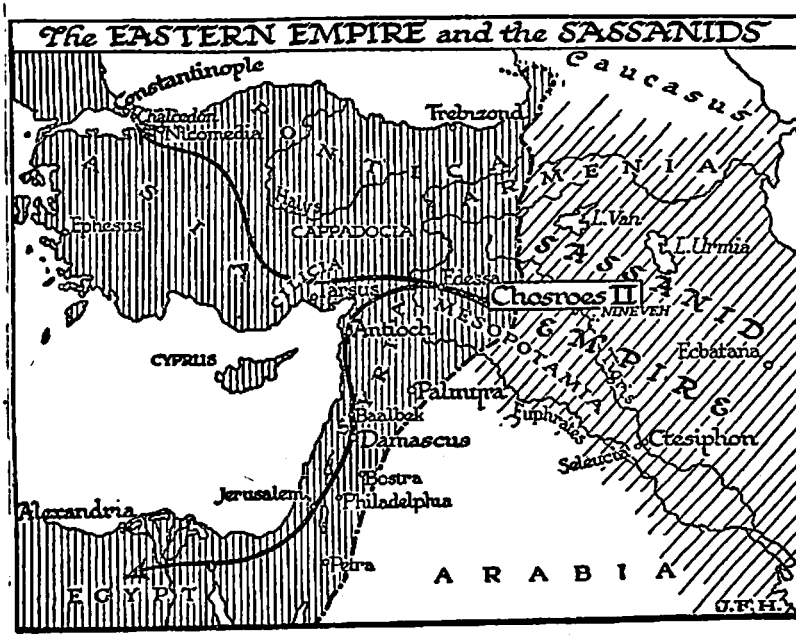
"The direction of military administration and imperial finance became entirely divorced in men's minds from practical government; and notwithstanding the vilest tyranny of sots, drunkards, tyrants, lunatics, savages, and abandoned women, who from time to time held the reins of government, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, and Syria contained enormous populations, huge canals and dykes were kept in repair, and commerce and architecture flourished in spite of a perpetual procession of hostile armies and a continual changing of the nationality of the governor. Each peasant's interest was centred in his ruling town; each citizen's interest was in the progress and prosperity of his city; and the advent of an enemy's army may have sometimes been looked on even with satisfaction, if his victory was assured and the payment of his contracts a matter of certainty.

"A raid from the north,[1] on the other hand, must have been a matter for dread. Then the villagers had need to take refuge behind the walls of the cities, from whence they could descry the smoke which told of the wreck and damage caused by the nomads. So long, however, as the canals were not destroyed (and, indeed, they were built with such solidity and caution that their safety was assured), no irreparable damage could be effected. . . .

"In Armenia and Pontus the condition of life was quite otherwise. These were mountain districts, containing fierce tribes headed by powerful native nobility under recognized ruling kings, while in the valleys and plains the peaceful cultivator provided the necessary economic resources. . . . Cilicia and Cappadocia were now thoroughly subject to Greek influence, and contained numerous wealthy and highly civilized towns, besides possessing a considerable merchant marine. Passing from Cilicia to the Hellespont, the whole Mediterranean coast was crowded with wealthy cities and Greek colonies, entirely cosmopolitan in thought and speech, with those municipal and local ambitions which seem natural to the Grecian character. The Grecian Zone extended from Caria to the Bosphorus, and followed the coast as far as Sinope on the Black Sea, where it gradually faded away.

"Syria was broken up into a curious quilt-like pattern of principalities and municipal kingdoms; beginning with the almost barbarous states of Commagene and Edessa (Urfa) in the north. South of these stood Bambyce, with its huge temples and priestly governors. Towards the coast a dense population in villages and towns clustered around the independent cities of

[1] Turanians from Turkestan or Avars from the Caucasus.



Antioch, Apamea, and Emesa (Homs); while out in the wilderness the great Semitic merchant city of Palmyra was gaining wealth and greatness as the neutral trading-ground between Parthia and Rome. Between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon we find, at the height of its glory, Heliopolis (Baalbek,) the battered fragments of which even now command our admiration. . . . Bending in towards Galilee we find the wondrous cities of Gerasa and Philadelphia (Amman), connected by solid roads of masonry and furnished with gigantic aqueducts. . . . Syria is still so rich in ruins and remains of the period that it is not difficult to picture to oneself the nature of its civilization. The arts of Greece, imported long before, had been developed into magnificence that bordered on vulgarity. The richness of ornamentation, the lavish expense, the flaunting wealth, all tell that the tastes of the voluptuous and artistic Semites were then as now. I have stood in the colonnades of Palmyra and I have dined in the Hotel Cecil, and, save that the latter is built of iron, daubed with sham wood, sham stucco, sham gold, sham velvet, and sham stone, the effect is identical. In Syria there were slaves in sufficient quantity to make real buildings, but the artistic spirit is as debased as anything made by machinery. Over against the cities the village folk must have dwelt pretty

much as they do now, in houses of mud and dry stone wall; while out in the distant pastures the Bedouin tended their flocks in freedom under the rule of the Nabatean kings of their own race, or performed the office of guardians and agents of the great trading caravans.

"Beyond the herdsmen lay the parching deserts, which acted as the impenetrable barrier and defence of the Parthian Empire

behind the Euphrates, where stood the great cities of Ctesiphon, Seleucia, Hatra, Nisibin, Harran, and hundreds more whose very names are forgotten. These great townships subsisted on the enormous cereal wealth of Mesopotamia, watered as it then was by canals, whose makers' names were even then already lost in the mists of antiquity. Babylon and Nineveh had passed away; the successors of Persia and Macedon had given place to Parthia; but the people and the cultivation were the same as when Cyrus the Conqueror had first subdued the land. The language of many of the towns was Greek, and the cultured citizens of Seleucia might criticize the philosophies and tragedies

of Athens; but the millions of the agricultural population knew, possibly, no more of these things than does many an Essex peasant of to-day knows of what passes in the metropolis."

Compare with this the state of affairs at the end of the seventh century.

"Syria was now an impoverished and stricken land, and her great cities, though still populated, must have been encumbered with ruins which the public funds were not sufficient to remove. Damascus and Jerusalem themselves had not recovered from the effects of long and terrible sieges; Amman and Gerasa had declined into wretched villages under the sway and lordship of the Bedouin. The Hauran, perhaps, still showed signs of the prosperity for which it had been noted in the days of Trajan; but the wretched buildings and rude inscriptions of this date all point to a sad and depressing decline. Out in the desert, Palmyra stood empty and desolate save for a garrison in the castle. On the coasts and in the Lebanon a shadow of the former business and wealth was still to be seen; but in the north, ruin, desolation, and abandonment must have been the common state of the country, which had been raided with unfailing regularity for one hundred years and had been held by an enemy for fifteen. Agriculture must have declined, and the population notably decreased through the plagues and distresses from which it had suffered.

"Cappadocia had insensibly sunk into barbarism; and the great basilicas and cities, which the rude countrymen could neither repair nor restore, had been levelled with the ground. The Anatolian peninsula had been ploughed and harrowed by the Persian armies; the great cities had been plundered and sacked."

§ 4

The First Message from Islam.

It was while Heraclius was engaged in restoring order in this already desolated Syria after the death of Chosroes II and before the final peace with Persia that a strange message was brought to him. The bearer had brought it to an imperial outpost in the wilderness south of Damascus. The letter was in Arabic, the obscure Semitic language of the nomadic peoples of the southern desert; and probably only an interpretation reached him—presumably with deprecatory notes by the interpreter.

It was an odd, florid challenge from someone who called

himself "Muhammad the Prophet of God." This Muhammad, it appeared, called upon Heraclius to acknowledge the one true God and to serve Him. Nothing else was definite in the document.

There is no record of the reception of this missive, and presumably it went unanswered. The emperor probably shrugged his shoulders, and was faintly amused at the incident.

But at Ctesiphon they knew more about this Muhammad. He was said to be a tiresome false prophet, who had incited Yemen, the rich province of Southern Arabia, to rebel against the King of Kings. Kavadh was much occupied with affairs. He had deposed and murdered his father Chosroes II, and he was attempting to reorganize the Persian military forces. To him also came a message identical with that sent to Heraclius. The thing angered him. He tore up the letter, flung the fragments at the envoy—and bade him begone.

When this was told to the sender, far away in the squalid little town of Medina, he was very angry. "Even so, O Lord!" he cried; "rend Thou his kingdom from him." (A.D. 628.)

§ 5

Zoroaster and Mani.

But before we go on to tell of the rise of Islam in the world, it will be well to complete our survey of the condition of Asia in the dawn of the seventh century. And a word or so is due to religious developments in the Persian community during the Sassanid period.

From the days of Cyrus onward Zoroastrianism had prevailed over the ancient gods of Nineveh and Babylon. Zoroaster (the Greek spelling of the Iranian "Zarathustra"), like Buddha, was an Aryan. We know nothing of the age in which he lived—some authorities make him as early as 1,000 B.C., others make him contemporary with Buddha or Confucius; and as little do we know of his place of birth or his exact nationality. His teachings are preserved to us in the Zend Avesta; but here, since they no longer play any great part in the world's affairs, we cannot deal with them in any detail The opposition of a good god, Ormuzd, the god of light, truth, frankness, and the sun, and a bad god, Ahriman, god of secrecy, cunning, diplomacy, darkness, and night, formed a very central part of his religion. As we find it in history, it is already surrounded by a ceremonial and sacerdotal system; it has no images, but it has priests, temples, and altars on which burn a sacred fire and at which sacrificial

ceremonies are performed. Among other distinctive features is its prohibition of either the burning or the burial of the dead. The Parsees of India, the last surviving Zoroastrians, still lay their dead out within certain open towers, the Towers of Silence, to which the vultures come.

Under the Sassanid kings from Ardashir onward (A.D. 227), this religion was the official religion: its head was the second person in the state next to the king, and the king in quite the ancient fashion was supposed to be divine or semi-divine and upon terms of peculiar intimacy with Ormuzd.

But the religious fermentation of the world did not leave the supremacy of Zoroastrianism undisputed in the Persian Empire. Not only was there a great eastward diffusion of Christianity, to which we have already given notice, but new sects arose in Persia, incorporating the novel ideas of the time. One early variant or branch of Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, we have already named. It had spread into Europe by the first century B.C., after the eastern campaigns of Pompey the Great. It became enormously popular with the soldiers and common people, and, until the time of Constantine the Great, continued to be a serious rival to Christianity. Mithras was a god of light, "proceeding" from Ormuzd and miraculously born, in much the same way that the third person in the Christian Trinity proceeds from the first. Of this branch of the Zoroastrian stem we need say no more. In the third century A.D., however, another religion, Manichæism, arose, which deserves some notice now.

Mani, the founder of Manichæism, was born the son of a good family of Ecbatana, the old Median capital (A.D. 216). He was educated at Ctesiphon. His father was some sort of religious sectary, and he was brought up in an atmosphere of religious discussion. There came to him that persuasion that he at last had the complete light, which is the moving power of all religious initiators. He was impelled to proclaim his doctrine. In A.D. 242, at the accession of Sapor I, the second Sassanid monarch, he began his teaching.

It is characteristic of the way in which men's minds were moving in those days, that his teaching included a sort of theocrasia. He was not, he declared, proclaiming anything new. The great religious founders before him had all been right: Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus Christ—all had been true prophets, but to him it was appointed to clarify and crown their imperfect and confused teaching. This he did in Zoroastrian language. He explains the perplexities and contradictions of life as a conflict of light and darkness, Ormuzd was God and

Ahriman Satan. But how man was created, how he fell from light into darkness, how he is being disentangled and redeemed from the darkness, and of the part played by Jesus in this strange mixture of religions, we cannot explain here even if we would. Our interest with the system is historical and not theological.

But of the utmost historical interest is the fact that Mani not only went about Iran preaching these new and, to him, these finally satisfying ideas of his, but into Turkestan, into India, and over the passes into China. This freedom of travel is to be noted. It is interesting, also, because it brings before us the fact that Turkestan was no longer a country of dangerous nomads, but a country in which cities were flourishing and men had the education and leisure for theological argument.

The ideas of Mani spread eastward and westward with great rapidity, and they were a most fruitful rootstock of heresies throughout the entire Christian world for nearly a thousand years.

Somewhen about A.D. 270 Mani came back to Ctesiphon and made many converts. This brought him into conflict with the official religion and the priesthood. In 277 the reigning monarch had him crucified and his body, for some unknown reason, flayed, and there began a fierce persecution of his adherents. Nevertheless, Manichæism held its own in Persia with Nestorian Christianity and orthodox Zoroastrianism (Mazdaism) for some centuries.

§ 6

Hunnish Peoples in Central Asia and India.

It becomes fairly evident that in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. not merely Persia, but the regions that are now Turkestan and Afghanistan were far more advanced in civilization than were the French and English of that time. The obscurity of the history of these regions has been lifted in the last few decades, and a very considerable literature, written not only in languages of the Turkish group, but in Sogdian and another Aryan language, has been discovered. These extant manuscripts date from the seventh century onward. The alphabet is an adaptation of the Aramaic, introduced by Manichæan missionaries, and many of the MSS. discovered—parchments have been found in windows in the place of glass—are as beautifully written as any Benedictine production. Mixed up with a very extensive Manichæan literature are translations of the Christian scriptures

and Buddhistic writings. Much of this material still awaits examination.

This central Asiatic country, Sir Denison Ross declares, was still largely Aryan in speech and culture, its art was still largely Indian and Persian in its affinities. Everything points to the conclusion that those centuries which were centuries of disaster and retrogression in Europe, were comparatively an age of progress in Middle Asia eastward into China. Some day we shall have a connected history written of the things that happened in this region during the dark centuries of European disorder. Through some favourable climate change, its civilization had a phase of exceptional elaboration. In Berlin one may see a collection of wall paintings from Turkestan of this period which anticipate the costumes and equipment of thirteenth-century France and Germany (six centuries later), in a quite extraordinary way. All the familiar figures and symbols of the Kings, Queens and Knaves of a pack of cards, for example, are to be seen depicted in these brilliant pictures. There was a life there as rich and fine as that of European medievalism at its brightest, and wonderfully like it. Dark and fair people mingle in these scenes and red-haired men, usually a result of racial admixture, abound.

A steady westward drift to the north of the Caspian of Hunnish peoples, who were now called Tartars and Turks, was still going on in the sixth century, but it must be thought of as an overflow rather than as a migration of whole peoples. The world from the Danube to the Chinese frontiers was still largely a nomadic world, with towns and cities growing up upon the chief trade routes. We need not tell in any detail here of the constant clash of the Turkish peoples of Western Turkestan with the Persians to the south of them, the age-long bickering of Turanian and Iranian. We hear nothing of any great northward marches of the Persians, but there were great and memorable raids to the south, both by the Turanians to the east and the Alans to the west of the Caspian, before the big series of movements of the third and fourth century westward that carried the Alans and Huns into the heart of Europe. There was a nomadic drift to the east of Persia and southward through Afghanistan towards India, as well as this drift to the north-west. These streams of nomads flowed by Persia on either side. We have already mentioned the Yueh-Chi, who finally descended into India as the Indo-Scythians in the second century. A backward, still nomadic section of these Yueh-Chi remained in Central Asia, and became numerous upon the steppes of Turkestan, as the Ephthalites or White Huns. After being a nuisance and

a danger to the Persians for three centuries, they finally began raiding into India in the footsteps of their kinsmen about the year 470, less than a quarter of a century after the death of Attila. They did not migrate into India; they went to and fro, looting in India and returning with their loot to their own country, just as later the Huns established themselves in the great Danube plain and raided all Europe.

The history of India during these seven centuries we are now reviewing is punctuated by these two invasions of the Yuch-Chi, the Indo-Scythians, who, as we have said, wiped out the last traces of Hellenic rule, and the Ephthalites. Before the former of these, the Indo-Scythians, a wave of uprooted populations, the Sakas, had been pushed; so that altogether India experienced three waves of barbaric invasion, about A.D. 100, about A.D. 120, and about A.D. 470. But only the second of these invasions was a permanent conquest and settlement. The Indo-Scythians made their headquarters on the North-west Frontier and set up a dynasty, the Kushan dynasty, which ruled most of North India as far east as Benares.

The chief among these Kushan monarchs was Kanishka (date unknown), who added to North India Kashgar, Yarkand, and Khotan. Like Asoka, he was a great and vigorous promoter of Buddhism, and these conquests, this great empire of the North-west Frontier, must have brought India into close and frequent relations with China and Tibet.

The subsequent divisions and coalescences of power in India are difficult to deal with in the limited space at our command. Sometimes all India was a patchwork-quilt of states; sometimes such empires as that of the Guptas prevailed over great areas. The Gupta Empire flourished throughout the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, and under its patronage modern Hinduism arose and there was a period of great literary activity. These things made little difference in the ordinary way of life of the Indian peoples. Brahminism held its own against Buddhism, and the two religions prospered side by side. The mass of the population was living then very much as it lives to-day; dressing, cultivating, and building its houses in much the same fashion.

The irruption of the Ephthalites is memorable not so much because of its permanent effects as because of the atrocities perpetrated by the invaders. These Ephthalites very closely resembled the Huns of Attila in their barbarism; they merely raided, they produced no such dynasty as the Kushan monarchy; and their chiefs retained their headquarters in Western Turkestan. Mihiragula, their most capable leader, has been called the Attila

of India. One of his favourite amusements, we are told, was the expensive one of rolling elephants down precipitous places in order to watch their sufferings. His abominations roused his Indian tributary princes to revolt, and he was overthrown (528). But the final ending of the Ephthalite raids into India was effected not by Indians, but by the destruction of the central establishment of the Ephthalites on the Oxus (565) by the growing power of the Turks, working in alliance with the Persians. After this break-up, the Ephthalites dissolved very rapidly and completely into the surrounding populations, much as the European Huns did after the death of Attila a hundred years earlier. Nomads without central grazing-lands must disperse; nothing else is possible. Some of the chief Rajput clans of to-day in Rajputana in North India are descended, it is said, from these White Huns.

An Ephthalite Coin.....

Very regretfully we must refrain here from any account of the development of chivalry among these little Rajput states, curiously analogous to the contemporary knightly developments in Europe.

Nor can we trace here, because no student has yet prepared the way for us, even in broad outline, the development of Indian art between the days of Alexander and the coming of Islam. The Hellenic influence upon Indian sculpture and architecture was profound, and there was probably a constant coming and going of artists, and particularly of painters, between Persia and Central Asia and India. Buddhistic art is strongly Hellenic, and when in the second and subsequent centuries A.D. Buddhism, as we have already told, spread into China, it carried a certain Hellenic grace and quality into the Chinese representations of Buddha, and into Chinese religious art generally. But India had a deadly climate for abandoned works of art; dynasties that are almost completely forgotten lived beautiful and luxurious lives, and left little that has survived of all their beauty.

One fascinating monument of this time is to be seen in the painted Caves of Ajanta which are just rotting into invisibility. Happily, copies have been made of them and are accessible

through the India Society. Ajanta is in Hyderabad, at an important pass in the Vindhya Mountains. Between the second and seventh centuries A.D. there was a Buddhist monastery there, with great halls and galleries hollowed out of the rock, and during this period and mainly in the fifth and sixth centuries these caves were adorned with paintings, at the cost of various monarchs and rich men, by a number of accomplished artists. To-day we see these vestiges with amazement, so eloquent are they of an opulent, brilliant and sensuous Court life, that has otherwise passed altogether out of the memory of man. The subjects of the paintings are still in many cases a matter for speculation; some are scenes from the life of Buddha and legends about him; some seem to concern the god Indra, some are just everyday Court life; one scene is supposed to represent the reception of an embassy from Chosroes II. These caves and paintings were visited in the days of Muhammad by Yuan Chwang, a Chinese traveller, about whom we shall have much to tell a little later.

§ 7

The Dynasties of Han and Tang in China.

These seven centuries which saw the beginning and the end of the emperors in Rome, and the complete breakdown and recasting of the social, economic, political and religious life of Western Europe, saw also very profound changes in the Chinese world. It is too commonly assumed by both Chinese, Japanese, and European historians, that the Han dynasty, under which we find China at the beginning of this period, and the Tang dynasty, with which it closed, were analogous ascendancies controlling a practically similar empire, and that the four centuries of division that elapsed between the end of the Han dynasty (220) and the beginning of the Tang period (618) were centuries of disturbance rather than essential change. The divisions of China are supposed to be merely political and territorial, and, deceived by the fact that, at the close as at the commencement of these four centuries, China occupied much the same position in Asia, and was still recognizably China, still with a common culture, a common script, and a common body of ideas, they ignore the very fundamental breaking down and reconstruction that went on, and the many parallelisms to the European experience that China displayed.

It is true that the social collapse was never so complete in the Chinese as in the European world. There remained through-

out the whole period considerable areas in which the elaboration of the arts of life could go on. There was no such complete deterioration in cleanliness, decoration, artistic and literary production as we have to record in the West, and no such abandonment of any search for grace and pleasure. We note, for instance, that "tea" appeared in the world and its use spread throughout China. China began to drink tea in the sixth century A.D. And there were Chinese poets to write delightfully about the effects of the first cup and the second cup and the third cup, and so on, China continued to produce beautiful paintings long after the fall of the Han rule. In the second, third and fourth centuries some of the most lovely landscapes were painted that have ever been done by men. A considerable production of beautiful vases and carvings also continued. Fine building and decoration went on. Printing from wood blocks began about the same time as tea-drinking, and with the seventh century came a remarkable revival of poetry.

Certain differences between the great empires of the East and West were all in favour of the stability of the former. China had no general coinage. The cash and credit system of the Western world, at once efficient and dangerous, had not strained her economic life. Not that the monetary idea was unknown. For small transactions the various provinces were using perforated zinc and brass "cash," but for larger there was nothing but stamped ingots of silver. This great empire was still carrying on most of its business on a basis of barter like that which prevailed in Babylon in the days of the Aramean merchants. And so it continued to do to the dawn of the twentieth century.

We have seen how under the Roman Republic economic and social order was destroyed by the too great fluidity of property that money brought about. Money became abstract, and lost touch with the real values it was supposed to represent. Individuals and communities got preposterously into debt, and the world was saddled by a class of rich men who were creditors, men who did not handle and administer any real wealth, but who had the power to call up money. No such development of "finance" occurred in China. Wealth in China remained real and visible. And China had no need for any Licinian law, nor for a Tiberius Gracchus. The idea of property in China did not extend far beyond tangible things. There was no "labour" slavery, no gang servitude. There were girl slaves who did domestic work and women who were bought and sold, but that was only a slight extension of the ordinary domestic subjection of women. The occupier and user of the land was in most instances practically

the owner of it, paying only a land tax. There was a certain amount of small-scale landlordism, but no great estates. Landless men worked for wages paid mostly in kind—as they were in ancient Babylon.

These things made for stability, and the geographical form of China for unity; nevertheless, the vigour of the Han dynasty declined, enervated perhaps by luxury, and when at last at the close of the second century A.D. the world catastrophe of the great pestilence struck the system, the same pestilence that inaugurated a century of confusion in the Roman Empire, the dynasty fell like a rotten tree before a gale. And the same tendency to break up into a number of warring states and the same eruption of barbaric rulers were displayed in East and West alike.

Mr. Fu ascribes much of the political nervelessness of China in this period to Epicureanism, arising, he thinks, out of the sceptical individualism of Lao-Tse. This phase of division is known as the "Three Kingdom Period." The fourth century saw a dynasty of more or less civilized Huns established as rulers in the province of Shen-si. This Hunnish kingdom included not merely the north of China, but great areas of Siberia; its dynasty absorbed the Chinese civilization, and its influence carried Chinese trade and knowledge to the Arctic circle. Mr. Fu compares this Siberian monarchy to the empire of Charlemagne in Europe, which we shall presently describe; it was the barbarian becoming "Chinized," as Charlemagne was a barbarian becoming Romanized.

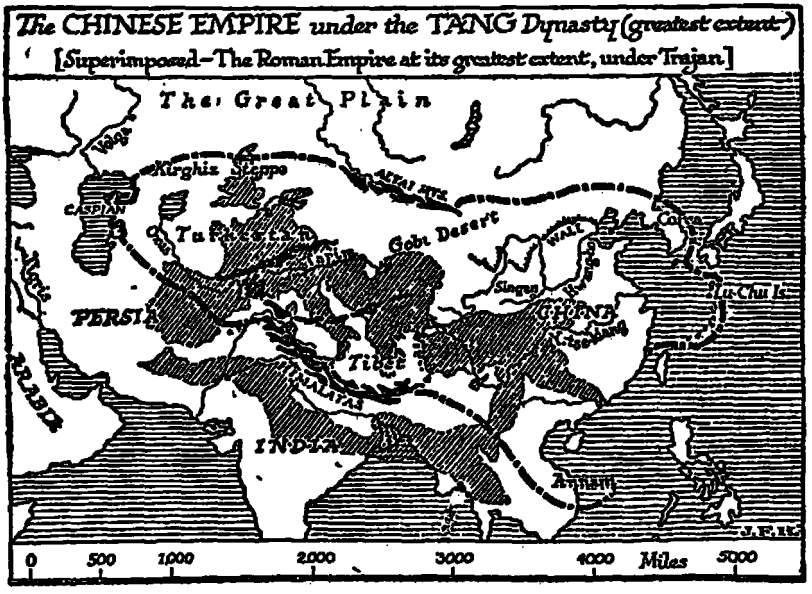
Out of a fusion of these Siberian with native North Chinese elements arose the Suy dynasty, which conquered the south. This Suy dynasty marks the beginning of a renascence of China. Under a Suy monarch the Lu-chu isles were annexed to China, and there was a phase of great literary activity. The number of volumes at this time in the imperial library was increased, we are told, to 54,000. The dawn of the seventh century saw the beginning of the great Tang dynasty, which was to endure for three centuries.

The renascence of China that began with Suy and culminated in Tang was, Mr. Fu insists, a real new birth. "The spirit," he writes, "was a new one; it marked the Tang civilization with entirely distinctive features. Four main factors had been brought together and fused: (1) Chinese liberal culture; (2) Chinese classicism; (3) Indian Buddhism; and (4) Northern bravery.

"A new China had come into being. The provincial system, the central administration and the military organization of the

Tang dynasty were quite different from those of their predecessors. The arts had been much influenced and revivified by Indian and Central Asiatic influences. The literature was no mere continuation of the old; it was a new production. The religious and philosophical schools of Buddhism were fresh features. It was a period of substantial change.

"It may be interesting to compare this making of China with the fate of the Roman Empire in her later days. As the



Roman world was divided into the eastern and western halves, so was the Chinese world into the southern and the northern. The barbarians in the case of Rome and in the case of China made similar invasions. They established dominions of a similar sort. Charlemagne's empire corresponded to that of the Siberian dynasty (Later Wei); the temporary recovery of the Western empire by Justinian corresponded to the temporary recovery of the north by Liu Yu. The Byzantine line corresponded to the southern dynasties. But from this point the two worlds diverged. China recovered her unity; Europe has still to do so."

The dominions of the Emperor Tai-tsung (627), the second Tang monarch, extended southward into Annam and westward to the Caspian Sea. His southern frontier in that direction