

THE TAHTAR TRIBES

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The Tahtar tribes by John Kitto

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JOHN KITTO

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TAHTAR TRIBES**

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CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN AND POSITION OF THE TRIBES.

THERE is a people dispersed throughout western and central Asia, whose manners and habits of life are, on the one hand, materially distinct from those of the pastoral tribes of the desert, (the Bedoweens,) and, on the other, are more than equally removed from those of the people who inhabit towns. Their condition presents much matter that is curious and interesting, considered only in itself; but it is chiefly because it offers circumstances analogous to conditions of life exhibited in the sacred Scriptures, that this volume is appropriated to them.

It has been usual to compare the patriarchal life, as described, or rather indicated, in Scripture, with that of the Bedoween Arabs. In point of fact, however, the differences are as great as the analogies, and perhaps greater. The Bedoweens are properly the inhabitants of the desert, and hate settled countries, towns, houses, and cultivation. But, in these particulars, the life of the Scripture fathers and patriarchal chiefs by no means agreed with theirs. None of them inhabited the desert, but dwelt in, or on, the borders of settled countries. Some of them had their abode in towns ; some lived at times, and some always, in houses ; and some were cultivators of the ground. The difference is further indicated by the nature of the live stock which they possessed. Camels, horses, and sheep, form the wealth of a Bedoween chief. Of horned cattle he knows nothing, and of asses but little : he does not need them, and their wants and habits are unsuited to the life he leads. But these figure conspicuously among the substance of the Scripture pastoral chiefs.

Now, in all the points in which the pastoral tribes of the Scriptures differ from the Bedoweens, they agree with that other people to

whom we purpose to invite the present attention of the reader, or, at least, with those portions of them to which that attention will be chiefly confined.

These are the Tahtar, Turkman, or Eelaut tribes, who inhabit the region indicated, under various circumstances, but who in all circumstances exhibit a marked predilection for the essential forms of pastoral life and of patriarchal government, which they retain even while occupying lands in a settled country, although in some cases exhibiting approximations towards civil life, which give to them an intermediate character between the desert Bedowens and the fixed inhabitants of towns.

Persia is largely occupied by tribes of this character; and, in fact, their chiefs constitute the nobles and princes of that country; and as it is there that their peculiar intermediate position appears in which lies the illustrative resemblance to the forms of life offered in the Bible, we shall consider them chiefly as seen in that land, without precluding ourselves from glancing at them in the other regions which they inhabit.

As inhabiting Persia, their name is written by travellers and historians in the various

forms of Eeels, Eelauts, Eelhauts, Ellyauts, Illeyats, etc. But we find that they are known more popularly and generally, in that and other countries, by the name of Tartars, or rather Tahtars, and this, as the most convenient designation, is the one by which we mean to describe them. In fact, these tribes, now inhabiting Persia and Turkey, are derived from those warlike pastoral races who inhabit the regions beyond the Oxus, and who have been great conquerors in their day, having seated their chiefs on thrones throughout all the countries from the river Ganges to the Adriatic Sea; and the descendants of these chiefs are still sovereigns, really or in name, throughout the same extent of country. The Great Mogul and the principal petty princes of India are of Tahtar descent; so are the king of Persia and the great lords of his empire; and so are the sultan at Constantinople and his Turks. But it would take up too much of our space to explain these matters fully at this time.

They consist of many tribes, who have entered Persia at different times, and under various circumstances. Some came in peace, and others in the train of conquering kings;

but never leaving the country when they once got a footing in it. They seem to a stranger as one people; and, indeed, they are such, as distinguished from the stationary inhabitants. But among themselves they are divided into tribes, each of which has a name of its own, and has little connexion with any other, except when several tribes take the same side in a time of civil war; and such wars are frequent in Persia. They differ greatly in numbers and in power. Each tribe has its own chief, who generally bears the title of "Khan," which has nearly the same meaning as "lord." This title is not confined to the chiefs of tribes. There are, indeed, no precise rules about this title. On the one hand, it is a title which kings have been content to bear—the great Genghiz Khan, for instance; and, on the other, it is frequently bestowed at present on persons of no great consideration. All our knowledge on this particular subject was obtained by us, in the Persian metropolis, from a gentleman well acquainted with that country, and who eventually became the British ambassador at the court of Tehran. He informed us that the title "Khan" was a Mogul word: it is often bestowed by a father upon his son, in families of rank, and among