

**THE ARNOLD PRIZE
ESSAY: FOR
1867. THE MAHOMETAN
POWER IN INDIA**

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The Arnold Prize essay: for 1867. The Mahometan Power in India by Francis Henry Jeune

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THE
MAHOMETAN
POWER IN INDIA.

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This Essay, with the exception of a few verbal alterations, and the addition of some of the notes, is printed as it was sent in for competition.

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The Arnold Prize Essay.

THE MAHOMETAN POWER IN INDIA.

Give me that glass, and therein will I read.—
No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath sorrow struck
So many blows upon this face,
And made no deeper wounds?

Richard II. Act. iv. Sc. 1.

The Three
Periods of
Mahometan
Power in
India.

THE history of India is a history of conquests. During more than three thousand years there has existed in India a social system, and a system of land tenure, of which the effects, combined with those of climate, have ever rendered the natives unable to withstand the first shock of invaders born in hardier lands and under influences less corrupting. But many of the causes which enervated the natives of India have enervated also successive invaders, and, by a sort of compensation, India, which has been so little able to repel conquerors, has more than any other nation resisted the effects of conquest. The customs and institutions, which, when they received a permanent expression in the laws of Menu long before the Christian era, were already past maturity¹, have in their chief features continued to our own times; the masses of foreigners, introduced by invasions and settled in India, melted into the native population; their ordinary language in the South was changed for, in the North became assimilated to an Indian dialect; and peculiarities, where they have survived, distinguish rather than separate the descendants of the conquerors and the conquered. The work of conquests was rapid and intermittent, the process of absorption slow and gradual. To trace the former from the eighth to the eighteenth century is to follow the series of events by which the Mahometan power was again and again established in provinces of India; to trace the latter is to investigate the operations

¹ *Maine's Ancient Law*, p. 18. The various authorities for the date of the Institutes of Menu are collected in *Morley's Administration of Justice in India*, p. 208. Sir William Jones takes the one extreme view, putting their date at 1280 B.C., Professor Wilson the other, making them as late as the second or third century before Christ.

of the varied but simple causes which neutralized Mahometan influence and reduced Mahometan power to a name.

It has been usual to divide the period of Mahometan rule in India according to the dynasties by which ascendancy was successively obtained. This is the form into which chronicles have generally fallen, either when in the obscurity of the past the names of sovereigns have been almost all that could be accurately determined, or when that view of history has been taken in which the fortunes of a royal line seem more important than the condition of its subjects. But those who regard the Mahometan era in India, though they may not be exclusively devoted to the lives and actions of royalty and will not be dealing with an obscure antiquity, are yet likely to associate the history of the people with the annals of its kings. The materials for a history of India during the most striking period of the Mahometan rule are singularly ample. But they are of a peculiar character. They are chiefly memoirs, or in the nature of memoirs of the sovereigns. The most important, as the most interesting, are the writings of the Mahometan Emperors themselves. Baber left a minute and characteristic narrative of his life and times. His descendant Jehangir left an autobiography less spirited than that of Baber, but not less natural and not less full of detail. Aurungzebe's letters almost form an autobiography. Nor does the figure of the sovereign stand out less prominently, where contemporary history has been transmitted by a dependant of the Court, such as Jouher the servant and historian of Humayun, or Abul Fazl the minister of Akbar and author of the Akbarnameh. And even where, as in the case of Ferishta the Persian historian of the 16th century, the history of a long period is presented in a connected form, the same tendency appears, a tendency to be ascribed to many causes, and among them the character of the history of India, in which the vicissitudes of dynasties form a striking contrast to the unchanging nature and institutions of the people. "In Indian Histories," it has been said, "there is little which enables us to penetrate below the glittering surface."¹ It will therefore be necessary in tracing the progress and influence of the Mahometan power in India to group the history round the various sovereigns. But this division may be made subordinate to another and more general division based on a principle which runs through the history of India.

There have been three periods of Mahometan power in India. Each has begun with an invasion, and each has pursued a course which, although greatly affected by the character and powers of individual rulers, has in its general aspect been a course of gradual decay. In the first of these invasions the early vigour of Mahometanism came in contact with India, and the arms of Mahomet Casim were carried up the Indus as far as Multan. This period closes in the year 750 with the expulsion of the Mussulmans by the Rajputs.

¹ *Erskine's Historians of India. Preface, p. xv.*

Two hundred and fifty years passed away, and then came the second period. Mahmud led a series of invasions from his capital of Ghazni. The power, of which he laid the foundations, seemed after various vicissitudes to culminate in the time of Mahomet Toghlak, but the causes of decay had been long at work, and after the death of that prince the Mahometan empire rapidly dissolved. For more than a century India in a state of anarchy invited a conqueror. Then succeeded the third period of Mahometan rule—a period which, foreshadowed in the conquests of Tamerlane, commenced by the invasions of Baber, continued by the four great successors of Baber, and prolonged by the subtle genius of Aurungzebe, closed after the death of Aurungzebe in the degradation of the Mogul dynasty. Amid the confusion which ensued, and which was terminated only by British ascendancy, no Mahometan rulers rose to eminence except Hyder Ali and his son Tippoo, sultans of the state of Mysore.

I. The First Period. The earliest invasion of India by Mussulmans forms the last scene in the first act of the drama of Mahometanism. It came almost at the close of that extraordinary and continuous series of military successes which was achieved by the first burst of Mahometan enthusiasm. The century after the death of the prophet sufficed to extend the Arab Empire to its farthest boundaries towards the west. Egypt and Syria were conquered before 644; Roman Africa and Spain before 713; and in 732 the valour of Charles Martel ended "the victorious line of march, which had been prolonged above a thousand miles from the rock of Gibraltar to the banks of the Loire,"¹ and perhaps saved Europe from the fate of India. Meantime, the arms and faith of the Mahometans had been carried over the countries on the east of Arabia with equal rapidity. The battles of Cadesia, Jellalla, and Neharvend, had completed the subjugation of Persia before the middle of the 7th century; and a few years later the Arab Empire was advanced to the boundary of the Oxus. The Arabs in their invasion of Persia had to pass the chain of hills which, running parallel to the course of the Tigris, forms the western barrier of the country; and thenceforward there was no obstacle to their advance across the plain of Khorasan. But, that plain crossed, there stood in their path a district which is a natural stronghold. Four chains of mountains, known as the chains of Hindoo Cosh, of Ghor, of Solyman, and of Mecran, rise almost from the bank of the Indus, and extend westward intersecting lines of broken heights. Thus is formed a country composed of fertile tablelands and almost inaccessible peaks, which, except for a strip of plain between the southernmost of these mountains and the sea, bars the only path by which an invading army can march upon India¹.

¹ Gibbon. *Decline and Fall*, ch. 52.

² Cf. Alison's *History of Europe*, vol. vi. ch. 40. § 33., for description of the natural characteristics of Afghanistan.

The Afghans who inhabited the greater part of this country were, as they have ever been, an independent and warlike race, and never so formidable as when defending their native fastnesses. It is easy to see that Afghanistan is the key of the Punjab. Many years later it formed the base of the Mahometan operations against India. At this period it opposed an invincible, though not unassailed, obstacle to the advance of the Arabs. For the first time Mussulmans were opposed to Mussulmans¹; and thus the invaders, when they encountered their most stubborn opponents, had lost the motive for the enthusiasm which had triumphed over odds of unbelievers. The details of the contest which ensued are confused and uncertain. It is clear, however, that Afghanistan retained its independence. But, though the result was thus unfavourable to the Mahometans, one of their expeditions against Cabul was the cause of their first contact with India, and gains an interest from the events of a time long subsequent. In 664 a force detached under a lieutenant of the Arab general Abdurehman crossed the Indus, and carried fire and sword to the gates of Multan. This raid seems to have produced no lasting results, but it shewed with what ease a force master of Ghazni or Cabul could make itself master of the Punjab.

The more important invasion which followed was made by a different path. South of the mountains of Mecran there lies a sandy tract, somewhat resembling in its position that part of Cilicia south of the range of Taurus along which Cyrus and Alexander marched on the Euphrates. By way of this plain an invading army can reach the mouths of the Indus, and passing up the banks of the stream penetrate into Scinde and the Punjab. Several bodies of Arab troops appear to have attempted such an expedition; but it was not till 711, in the reign of Walid, sixth Caliph of the house of Ommiyah, that the efforts of any of them were attended with success. The immediate cause of the invasion was a rupture with Dahir, the Hindoo Rajah of Multan and Scinde. The expedition was planned by Hejaj, the Arab governor of Basra, and commanded by his youthful nephew Mahomet Casim. The invaders were animated with something of the zeal of the early Mahometan conquerors, and they achieved a rapid and decisive success. The temple and town

¹ Twelve thousand converts were made on the first attack on Cabul. (*Ferishta's History, translated by Briggs, i. 4.*) But Ferishta also says that the Afghans were converted in the time of Mahomet, and after making wars on the Rajah of Lahor entered into a compact to defend his country against other Mahometans, in return for a cession of territory. It is probable that this is in great part an attempt to explain the immunity which the Rajah of Lahor enjoyed from the house of Samani, (*Cf. Elphinstone's History of India, i. 500.*) and the protection which, as Ferishta says, the Mahometans afterwards received from the Afghans when driven out of the Punjab by the Sumera Rajputs. But there seems no reason to doubt that the Afghans received the faith of Mahometanism before they were reached by its arms.

of Dewal, near the modern Kurrachi¹, were taken after a short siege; Sebwan, a strong place on the Indus, was evacuated at the first summons; and after two desperate battles at Alor and Ashcandra Multan was occupied, and all the dominions of Dahir passed into the hands of the Arabs. The fruits however of these conquests were lost almost as rapidly as they had been gained. Casim was sacrificed to the jealousy of the Caliph Walid², and with him perished the hopes of an Arabian conquest of India. The Mahometans seem to have retained a supremacy in the Punjab for some years, but their hold on the country was feeble, and, at the fall of the house of Ommiyah in 750, the Rajputs of the Samera tribe rose in a successful rebellion, and compelled the remnant of the Mussulmans to take refuge in the country of the Afghans³.

Thus ended the first attempt to establish Mahometan power in India. In itself it was of no great importance, and produced, probably, no more lasting results on the Punjab than the attacks of the Gakkars Afghans to which that country was perpetually subjected. But its progress and the causes of its failure throw light on the far greater invasions, by which, after two centuries and a half, it was succeeded.

Causes of the failure of the Arab attack on India. The country and people of India differed in many important respects from any of which the Mahometan Arabs had in the previous course of their conquests gained experience. To the system of land tenure in particular which existed among the Hindoos, the chief characteristics of Indian history may be ascribed; and its effects become more conspicuous as the course of history advances. Even on this early invasion its effects were, probably, considerable. The invading Mahometans offered the same choice of tribute, conversion or death, as they had offered in Syria, in Egypt, and in Spain. But the degradation which submission to tribute had for a town of Egypt or of Spain, it had not for a town of Scinde or the Punjab. In the former case submission to tribute meant the galling acknowledgment of a conqueror. But the Hindoo was accustomed to pay to his sovereign a tribute, which often formed the only connection between them, and to the Hindoo, therefore, submission to tribute meant merely the substitution of one ruler for another, of the Mahometan general for the Hindoo rajah. Nor did the Mahometans allow their zeal for the faith to carry them beyond the spirit of their original demand. Casim referred to the decision of the Caliph a question of Mahometan casuistry. If, he asked, a town has been stormed, the temples

¹ The details of the geography of Casim's expedition are, as might be expected, very doubtful. Ferishta (*History*, vol. 4. p. 401.) supposed Dewal to be at Tatta; but Elphinstone gives reasons on the authority of Captain McMurdo to shew this is impossible. (*Elphinstone's History*, i. 507. *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, i. p. 29.) Alor lies close to Bakkar where its ruins are still to be seen. (*Burnes's Travels*, iii. 76.)

² *Ferishta's History*, iv. 410.

³ *Ferishta's History*, i. 7. Cf. iv. 411.