THE
HISTORY
OF THE
DECLINE AND FALL
OF THE
ROMAN EMPIRE.

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THE DECLINE AND FALL

C H A P. L.

sky display the visible image of a Deity: their number and distance
convey to a philosophic, or even a vulgar, eye, the idea of boundless
space: the character of eternity is marked on these solid globes, that
seem incapable of corruption or decay: the regularity of their mo-
tions may be ascribed to a principle of reason or instinct; and their
real or imaginary influence encourages the vain belief that the earth
and its inhabitants are the object of their peculiar care. The science
of astronomy was cultivated at Babylon; but the school of the
Arabs was a clear firmament and a naked plain. In their nocturnal
marches, they steered by the guidance of the stars: their names, and
order, and daily filation, were familiar to the curiosity and devotion
of the Bedoween; and he was taught by experience to divide in
twenty-eight parts, the zodiac of the moon, and to bless the constel-
lations who refreshed, with salutary rains, the thirst of the desert.
The reign of the heavenly orbs could not be extended beyond the
visible sphere; and some metaphysical powers were necessary to sus-
tain the transmigration of souls and the resurrection of bodies: a
camel was left to perish on the grave, that he might serve his master
in another life; and the invocation of departed spirits implies that
they were still endowed with consciousness and power. I am igno-
rant, and I am careless, of the blind mythology of the Barbarians;
of the local deities, of the stars, the air, and the earth, of their sex
or titles, their attributes or subordination. Each tribe, each family,
each independent warrior, created and changed the rites and the
object of his fantastic worship; but the nation, in every age, has
bowed to the religion, as well as to the language, of Mecca. The
genuine antiquity of the Cæaba ascends beyond the Christian æra:
in describing the coast of the Red Sea, the Greek historian Diodorus 43
has

43 Περὶ αὐτῶν ἔχει εἰσαγωγὴν τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν ὅπως τοιοῦτον
Αραβικὸν περὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπῶν (Diodor. Sicul. tom. i. l. iii.
p. 211.). The character and position are fo
correctly apposite, that I am surprized how
this curious passage should have been read
without notice or application. Yet this fa-
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has remarked, between the Thamudites and the Sabæans, a famous temple, whose superior sanctity was revered by all the Arabians; the line nor silken veil, which is annually renewed by the Turkish emperor, was first offered by a pious king of the Homerites, who reigned seven hundred years before the time of Mahomet. A tent or a cavern might suffice for the worship of the savages, but an edifice of stone and clay has been erected in its place; and the art and power of the monarchs of the East have been confined to the simplicity of the original model. A spacious portico incloses the quadrangle of the Caaba; a square chapel, twenty-four cubits long, twenty-three broad, and twenty-seven high: a door and a window admit the light; the double roof is supported by three pillars of wood; a spout (now of gold) discharges the rain-water, and the well Zemzem is protected by a dome from accidental pollution. The tribe of Koreish, by fraud or force, had acquired the custody of the Caaba: the fardotal office devolved through four lineal descendants to the grandfather of Mahomet; and the family of the Hashemites, from whence he sprung, was the most respectable and sacred in the eyes of their country. The precincts of Mecca enjoyed the rights of Egyptian linen (Abulfeda, in Vit. Mohammed. c. 6. p. 14.).

47 The original plan of the Caaba (which is fervilely copied in Sale, the Universal History, &c.) was a Turkish draught, which Re- land (de Religione Mohammedica, p. 113—123.) has corrected and explained from the best authorities. For the description and legend of the Caaba, consult Pocock (Specimen, p. 115—122.), the Bibliothéque Orientale of d'Herbelot (Caaba, Hagier, Zemzam, &c.), and Sale (Preliminary Discourse, p. 114—122.).

48 Cofa, the fifth ancestor of Mahomet, must have usurped the Caaba A.D. 440; but the story is differently told by Jannabi (Gagnier,