

THE
H I S T O R Y
OF THE
DECLINE AND FALL
OF THE
R O M A N E M P I R E.

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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 motions 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 station, 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 constellations 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 sustain 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 ignorant, 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 CAABA ascends beyond the Christian æra: in describing the coast of the Red Sea, the Greek historian Diodorus⁴⁵

The Caaba,
or temple of
Mecca.

has

⁴⁵ Ἱερὸν ἀγιάτατον ἰδρύεται τιμωμένοι ὑπο πάντων Ἀραβῶν περίσσοτερον (Diodor. Sicul. tom. i. l. iii. p. 211.). The character and position are so correctly apposite, that I am surprised how this curious passage should have been read without notice or application. Yet this famous

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 ⁴⁶. 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 ⁴⁷. 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 sacerdotal office devolved through four lineal descents 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 ⁴⁸. The precincts of Mecca enjoyed the rights of

mous temple had been overlooked by Agatharcides (de Mari Rubro, p. 58. in Hudson, tom. i.), whom Diodorus copies in the rest of the description. Was the Sicilian more knowing than the Egyptian? Or was the Caaba built between the years of Rome 650 and 746, the dates of their respective histories? (Dodwell, in Dissert. ad tom. i. Hudson, p. 72. Fabricius, Bibliot. Græc. tom. ii. p. 770.)

⁴⁶ Pocock, Specimen, p. 60, 61. From the death of Mahomet we ascend to 68, from his birth to 129, years, before the Christian æra. The veil or curtain, which is now of silk and gold, was no more than a piece of

Egyptian linen (Abulfeda, in Vit. Moham. med. c. 6. p. 14.).

⁴⁷ The original plan of the Caaba (which is servilely copied in Sale, the Universal History, &c.) was a Turkish draught, which Reiland (de Religione Mohammedicâ, 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 Bibliotheque Orientale of d'Herbelot (*Caaba, Hagier, Zemzem, &c.*), and Sale (Preliminary Discourse, p. 114—122.).

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