

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PAPERS

PART III.

THE BOMBARDMENT OF PARIS FROM A DISTANCE OF 60 MILES, SUPPOSED TO BE A MYSTERY. AN INSTANCE OF A SOMEWHAT SIMILAR MYSTERY IN THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF PERSIA.

(Read on 24th April 1918.)

At the commencement of the present offensive against the British and the French armies by the Germans on or about the 23rd March 1918, the enemy began bombarding Paris from a distance of about 60 miles. This is an extraordinary feat, even of the modern artillery which has, as it were, advanced by leaps and jumps in the preparation of long-range cannons. *The Times of India* of 25th March, while summarising the substance of the telegrams from London, said :—"The enemy is shelling Paris suburbs with a long-range 240 millimetre gun, firing every quarter of an hour. Hitherto no explanation has been received of the long-range shelling of Paris which is a mystery as the nearest point on the front is usually regarded as being sixty miles distant." A telegram published in our papers here on the 26th March said : "Twenty-four shells were discharged in the bombardment of Paris. Theories are alternatively advanced that (a) projectiles are mechanically constructed so that they gather fresh force subsequent to discharge from the gun (b) or that an infinitively more powerful explosive is employed than hitherto has been known." A telegram dated "London, March 25," said : "There is much speculation as to the nature of the gun bombarding Paris..... The damage done is insignificant compared with that done by bombs from Gothas. The ex-Premier, M. Painleve, considers that the Germans have invented a process for trebling the

speed of the projectile with a view to causing a moral effect, as shells of such velocity cannot have powerful material effect. It is expected in London that the gun may be tried against the shores in England." Then a telegram dated "Paris, April 8th" said: "An official statement says that the bursting of one of the long-range guns is confirmed from a sure source. It occurred on the 25th March and a lieutenant and nine men were killed." Another telegram informed us that the German Emperor congratulated Krupp for making such a powerful cannon.

We gather the following facts from all the above telegrams:—

1. That the present feat, of the artillery firing a shell to a distance of about 60 miles, is held to be a "mystery."
2. That there are various speculations about the feat. Some attribute it to a new mechanical arrangement and others to a new powerful explosive, the result of some chemicals.
3. That the effect of such a long-range shot is lost at the other end.
4. That the cannon after several powerful shots is likely to burst killing the gunners who used it.

The news of this extraordinary feat of modern artillery has reminded me of an event in the ancient History of Persia, with this difference, that the extraordinary feat of the ancient Persians was in archery. The arrow then took the place of a shell or cannon-ball. The object of this paper is to describe that event. In both cases, we find how real events assume the forms of "mysteries," even shortly after their occurrence, and how historical facts pass into semi-historical or mythological some time after their occurrence. In connection with this matter, I may refer my readers for some further particulars to my paper, entitled "Archery in Ancient Persia. A Few Extraordinary Feats" read before the B. B. R. A. Society on 24th January 1918.¹

The Avesta while invoking Tishtrya, the star-Yazata of the brilliant Sirius, the dispenser of rain in ancient Iran, compares

¹ *Journal, B. B. R. A. Society*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, pp. 175-186.

its swift motion to that of one Erekhsha, "the swiftest Iranian archer, the swiftest archer among all the Iranians (who threw the arrow) from the Khashotha mountain to the Khanvant mountain.¹ As first pointed out by Prof. Nöldeke² and then by Prof. Darmesteter,³ this Erekhsha of the Avesta is the archer Aresh of the Arab historian Tabari. According to this historian, King Minocheher of the Peshdadian dynasty of Persia had a long war of about 10 years with Afrâsiâb, the King of Turân, the cause of the war being a boundary question. The Turanian tribe of Afrâsiâb was genealogically related to the tribe or tribes of the later Huns."⁴ The Iranian king was besieged in the fortress of Amol in Tabaristan.⁵ After a long siege, the two kings came to terms and entered into a treaty, one of the terms of which was, that the Iranian king was to ask one of his best, swiftest, and strongest archers to shoot an arrow from a peak of the Demavand, a mountain of the Alburz range, to which Mount Caucasus also belonged. A line to be drawn from the place where the arrow fell was to be the boundary-line between the countries of the two kings. The Iranian king asked his famous archer Aresh, the Erekhsha of the Avesta, to shoot the arrow. Aresh went over the peak and shot the arrow with all his force and the arrow went on flying and flying till midday and fell at a place more than a hundred miles away. This feat thus added a large portion of the country to the dominions of the Persian king.

As said by Ousley (Travels in Persia, Vol. III, pp. 333-34), this extraordinarily marvellous feat has been attempted to be explained by several Persian writers in various ways. Some said,

¹ Tir Yasht. Yt. VIII. 6 and 37.

² Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft (1881) pp. 445 et seq.

³ Etudes Iraniennes, Tome, II, p. 220.

⁴ Vide my paper on "The Early History of the Huns and their Inroads in India and Persia." *Journal B.B.R.A.S.*, Vol. XXIV No. 3. Vide my Asiatic Papers, Part II, pp. 293-349.

⁵ According to the Pahlavi Bundhesh this fort was in Padash-khvrârgar in Tabaristan.

it was magic; some said, it was due to the assistance of an angel; others said, that the arrow expressed figuratively the skill of the Persians in archery. Arab writers like Tabari (Zotenberg Partie I ch. 68) and Mirkhond (David Shea, p. 175) doubted the incident but still described it, saying that "though so remote from probability, it has been invariably recorded in the text of all historians." Albiruni (Chronology, Sachau's Translation, p. 205) also refers to it.

The points of similarity in the two incidents, the ancient Persian and the modern German, seem to be the following :—

(a) The ancient Persian extraordinary feat is spoken of as divine thing (chiz-i kuhdai) reminding us of the use of the word "mystery" in the present case of the feat of the modern German artillery.

(b) Again, we find, that well-nigh the same thing was said of the arrow of Aresh, as it is said now of the German cannon-ball, viz., that the distance to which the arrow went was due to the fact of there being some chemicals in the arrow, which drove by their force the arrow further and further. According to Ousley,¹ it is the famous Daulat Shâh, who "informs us that the arrow was so contrived as to contain a chymical (chemical) mixture of quicksilver and other substances, which when heated by the sun augmented the original force of projection in such a manner that it reached to Merv."

(c) Again, the cannon or one of the cannons, which bombarded Paris from an extraordinary distance, is said to have burst as the very result of the extraordinary force it put forth. The same was the case with Aresh. We read the following in Albiruni: "There was a genius present called Isfandarmadh; he ordered to be brought a bow

¹ Ousley's Travels in Persia, Vol. III, pp. 333-34.

and an arrow of such a size as he himself had indicated to the arrow-maker, in conformity with that which is manifest in the Avesta. Then he sent for Aresh, a noble, pious and wise man, and ordered him to take the bow and to shoot the arrow. Aresh stepped forward, took off his clothes and said: 'O King and ye others, look at my body. I am free from any wound or disease, I know that when I shoot with this arrow I shall fall to pieces and my life will be gone, but I have determined to sacrifice it for you.' Then, he applied himself to the work, and bent the bow with all the power God had given him; then he shot, and fell asunder into pieces. By order of God the wind bore the arrow away from the mountain of Rayan and brought it to the utmost frontier of Khurasan."

(d) In the version of the story as given by Albiruni, who refers to the Avesta, we find, that, as there is somebody behind the gunner of the big cannon, viz., Krupp, who ordered the gun to be made, so, there was somebody behind the archer who shot the arrow, viz., Isfandarmadh, a genius, who ordered the bow and the arrow to be made. Krupp is, as it were, the German Isfandarmadh or Isfandarmadh was the Persian Krupp.

There is one other explanation of Aresh's extraordinary feat which, on its surface, seems to be probable. It is given by Tabari. I translate from Zotenberg's French Translation: "Some persons maintain that this arrow, by virtue of the good fortune of Minocheher, just struck a vulture in the air and that this bird fell and died on the banks of the Jihoun; that they afterwards found the arrow and carried it to Tabaristan." We learn from this, that the arrow, thrown with an extraordinary force, had spent its force after its long but ordinary flight and that, while falling, it wounded a bird which fled to a distance and

then died of its wound. Thus the probable cause of the arrow falling at an extraordinary distance was, that it was carried to that distance by a bird which it had wounded.

We read in the above version of Albiruni, that Aresh "bent the bow with all the power God had given him." Prof. Bartholomae has adopted as a motto for his translation of the Gathas the words "Wie du kannst so wolle" putting them under the figure of an archer drawing his bow with all his strength, as found on some Iranian monuments. Both the monumental figure and the words may be taken as suggested by the above story.

The modern Parsees of Bombay observe, even now, a holiday, known as the Jashan-i Tirangân. It occurs on the day Tir, the thirteenth day of the month Tir, the fourth month of the Parsee year. This festival day is connected with the above story of the event in the reign of Minocheher.

The Mujmal-al-Tawârikh speaks of an Aresh Shivatir. Here the name Shivatir is the Persian form of Shepâk-tir, which is the Pahlavi rendering of the word *khshviwîshur* in the Avesta. Firdousi often refers to the feat when he speaks of the Tir-i Aresh, *i.e.*, the arrow of Aresh.

Ousley compares the above story of Aresh's arrow to that of "the golden arrow of such classical celebrity which wafted Abaris through the air." This classical story also has been the subject of much learned conjectural explanation. Thus Abaris was a Hyperborean priest of Apollo and he came from the country round the Caucasus. I think this Abaris may be the Iranian Aris, especially because the Iranian Aris also had performed his feat on a mountain belonging to the Caucasus range.

Of course, one may say, that the present German artillery feat is a real historical event and the ancient Iranian archery feat is well-nigh a mythological feat. But, we must remember, that there are many historical events, which time and later

generations have turned into so-called mythological events. The present artillery feat on the very morning after its occurrence has begun to be called a "mystery" and various "speculations" have begun to be made about it. The present is a world-war, involving the whole world into its net and spreading misery all round. Suppose the result is equally large, and, in the end, through victory or long exhaustion we have a peace, which may be called a world-peace. Both sides, seeing the disastrous effects of the long world-war, preserve the world-peace, say, for some generations. The result will be that the devilish art of constructing such distant-range guns falls into oblivion. Then a century or two hence, people, not seeing such guns, or possibly even the pre-war guns before them, will take the present actual real event to be more than a mystery, a piece of mere imagination on the part of the writers of the present day. Speculations have from now begun to be made, and more may follow adding other elements to the actual present-day elements. But at the bottom of all these the historical event must rest. It seems, that round the original historical event of an extraordinary feat of an archery in ancient Persia, several stories have been woven, and what was historical has passed into the sphere of mythological. Before our very eyes, history begins to pass into mythology. Historical personages are being deified, and it is possible, that in a few generations, they may be considered as semi-gods and then as gods. I think, that students of Anthropology will then have as much work as we have now, to unearth the so-called mysteries woven round their names and round the events connected with the names. As Ousley says, a number of ingenious explanations have been given for the extraordinary archery feat, which, as referred to in the Avesta, seems to be simple. By the time we come to the generation of Alberuni who refers to the Avesta in the matter the number of explanations have increased. One ingenious writer has suggested, that the mistake of taking the fort of one Amoul to be that of another Amoul has brought about the result of an enormous distance which cannot be believed.