

CHAPTER XXXI.

Of the Wuhabees.

I HAVE formerly taken notice of the Wuhabee Arabs, and I shall now give as correct an account as I am able of the religion and history of this people. The founder of this religion, Ubdool Wuhab, was a native of Ujunu, a town in the province of Ool Urud; some have been of opinion that Moola Moohummud, the son of Ubdool Wuhab, was the first person who promulgated doctrines subversive of the Moosulman faith; however this may be, it is certain that one or other of these persons was the founder of the religion of the Wuhabees, and the name inclines me to believe Ubdool Wuhab.*

Both these persons were great travellers; they studied under the principal Moohummedan doctors at Bussora and at Bagdad, and afterwards went to Damascus, where Ubdool Wuhab first began to avow his religious principles. The priests were alarmed at the tendency of his doctrines; he was obliged to fly from this city; and on his arrival at Mousul, he publicly supported the purity, excellence, and orthodoxy of his tenets. After a short stay at Mousul, he returned to his own country, and had soon the good fortune to convert the governor of his native town, and many of the principal Sheikhs. It is alledged that Moolla Moohummud received the sister of his protector in marriage, and that soon after he had the ingratitude to murder his benefactor, affirming, that he was an

* I have Niebuhr also to support me.

oppressor and a tyrant, and that his love of justice would not allow him to overlook such detestable crimes, even in a beloved relation. This story does not appear to me to be worthy of credit: I notice it as I have made mention of Moolla Moohummud, but it was probably the invention of some bigoted and rancorous Moosulman, willing to describe the character of this religious innovator in the blackest colours.

Ubdool Wuhab was regarded by his new proselytes in the light of an independent lawgiver; and he prudently exerted his authority to compose the differences existing among his converts, and by this means put himself at the head of the most powerful party in Nujd. His religious furor induced him not only to propagare his opinions by argument and persuasion, but also with all that intolerant zeal and holy cruelty which marked the rise and progress of Mahometanism. Ubdool Wuhab greatly extended his conquests, and in a short time gained possession of nearly the whole of Ool Urud.

On his death, Ubdool Uzeez succeeded him, and continued to follow the same measures for conciliating the Arab Sheikhs as had been pursued by his father.* This new religion, which had sprung up in the midst of Arabia, excited the attention, and roused the indignation of the orthodox Sheikhs, who could not bear the notion of the Wuhabees ridiculing with contempt the legends and tales which they so conscientiously believed.

The Wuhabees are accused of professing the following belief:—
 “ That there is one just and wise God; that all those persons called
 “ prophets are only to be considered as just and virtuous men, and
 “ that there never existed an inspired work nor an inspired writer.”
 Ubdool Wuhab, however, thought it necessary to impose some religious observances on his followers, and has interdicted the use of tobacco, opium, and coffee; indeed I have met with many

* Some accounts make Saoud the father of Ubdool Uzeez.

Moosulmans who have thought it contrary to their religion to smokc.*

Among a number of the civil ordinances of the Wuhabees, are the following:—Illegal to levy duties on goods the property of a “ Moosulman ; on specie, the Zukat, or two and a half per cent. ; “ land watered naturally to pay ten per cent. ; artificially five per “ cent. ; the revenues of conquered countries to belong to the com- “ munity ; the revenues to be divided into five parts, one to be “ given to the general treasury, the rest to be kept where collected, “ to be allotted for the good of the community, for travellers, and “ charitable purposes ; a Moosulman who deviates from the pre- “ cepts of the Koran to be treated as an infidel ; the destruction of “ magnificent tombs a necessary act of devotion.”

The extensive depredations of these reforming Arabs at length excited the resentment of the Pasha of Bagdad, who sent a formidable force against them, under the command of the Sheikh of Moontufij, who had distinguished himself some years before by the capture of Bussora.† This force penetrated as far as Lahsar, which is at no great distance from Dury-yu, the capital of the Wuhabees. The fort of Lahsar was taken, and the Sheikh of Moontufij was resolved on destroying the capital of the infidels. Ubdool Uzeez saw no way of averting the impending blow, but by employing the enthusiasm of his followers against his enemy ; he accordingly selected a favourite slave, and promised him eternal happiness if he succeeded in destroying the object of his fears.

The tent of an Arab is open to every one ; the slave, who was armed, according to the custom of his country, with a sword and a spear, found an easy entrance. He immediately asked for the Sheikh of Moontufij, who happening to be present, called him towards him. The slave had ascertained his object, and he instantly ran the Sheikh through the body with a spear, crying out, “ that

* See Sale's Preliminary Discourse, p. 164.

† See Franklin's Tour, p. 263.

“ the Wuhabee had promised him heaven.” It is needless to add, that he fell a victim to his bigotry. Bin Saoud, the son of Ubdool Uzeez, had been posted with some troops near the enemy, and on perceiving the confusion which prevailed amongst them, on the loss of their chief, attacked them, and made an indiscriminate havock among them.

Thus ended the first expedition against the Wuhabee, which gave rise to another, infinitely more calamitous and disgraceful to the Turks.

The Pasha of Bagdat exerted all his means to wipe off his former disgrace, and sent down to Bussora an army of about twenty thousand men, well supplied with every possible necessary. These troops, like the former, penetrated to Lahsar, and remained encamped there some months. Abdool Uzeez, who continued at Dury-yu, bribed two of the principal commanders to withdraw with their troops. The next morning Bin Saoud attacked the remaining force, gained an easy victory over them, plundered them of their baggage, and took a number of them prisoners.

Since this, I believe, they have not been attacked by the Turks, though the Persians are determining every year to unite themselves with the Pasha of Bagdad, and uproot this dangerous heresy.

The Shureef of Mecca, about nine years ago, undertook an expedition against Ubdool Uzeez, and arrived within a short distance of Dury-yu. Ubdool Uzeez resorted to his usual measures for defeating an enemy. He sent to the Shureef, begging to know his wishes, and expressing a hope that he might be left in quiet possession of his capital. A present for Pooli Quwuh, or expences for coffee, accompanied this message; and he likewise declared his readiness to send out his son as a proof of his good intentions. This was accordingly done, and a communication established between the Shureef's camp and Dury-yu.

As soon as the projects of Ubdool Uzeez were ripe for execution,

he wrote to his son to prepare himself the next day for attacking the Shureef's camp. This service was to be performed at twelve o'clock, a time of the day when all the Arabs are asleep, or lying down to rest. When Ubdool Uzzez approached, with his people, the Shureef would not credit the report, and ordered the persons who brought him the accounts to be beat and confined. Bin Saoud and his attendants, who had never been disarmed, on seeing the approach of Ubdool Uzzez, instantly attacked the unsuspecting Arabs, who were immediately routed and put to flight. The Shureef fled on the first alarm, and effected his escape with great difficulty, leaving his camp and baggage a prize to Ubdool Uzzez.

Ubdool Uzzez has lately gained over the Utoobees to his cause, who are the most powerful of the Arab states on the Arabian coast, and has acquired, in consequence, a command over the navigation of the gulf of Persia.

The Utoobees were lately waging a war with the Persians and people of Bussora: during my stay at Busliire they kept that place in continual alarm. The Imam of Muscat, who had the command of the forces, besieged the Sheikh in his capital, and seized on the island of Bahrein; but in the end the Utoobees were victorious, and the Imam obliged to conclude a peace. A party of the Wuhabees last year (1802) attacked Kurbulu, celebrated among the Persians as being the burial place of the sons of Ali, destroyed the tombs, and plundered the town and pilgrims. I met several of the people who had been there at that period, and they all agreed in complaining most bitterly of the cruelty of the reformers.

It must be recollected, that the destruction of the holy sepulchres would alone be considered as an enormous act of impiety and cruelty; I am led to think this the more probable, as some Armenians, who had fallen in with a party of Wuhabees, gave me a very favourable account of their honesty and humanity. The wars, however, between the Utoobees and Persians were barbarously

savage; it was a constant practice of both parties to murder every person they took prisoner.

The force of the Wuhabees is very considerable, probably eighty or ninety thousand; and as their expeditions are conducted with great celerity and secrecy, they keep all the neighbouring countries in perpetual apprehension. When I was at Bassora, the people were in expectation of being attacked.

The infirmities of Ubdool Uzeez, who is more than eighty years old, have obliged him to relinquish the command of his armies to his son, who is represented to be a bold and enterprising young man.

Whenever an expedition is undertaken, the chiefs are directed to be at a certain place by such a time; and it is so contrived, that a large body shall meet at a particular spot without knowing the designs of their leader. This force is generally mounted on camels, and their arms are chiefly a sword and a spear. They have few guns or matchlocks; those which they have are very bad.

Since finishing this, intelligence has been received of their having attacked and plundered Tycef, Mecca, and Medina. They have, in consequence, violated the sacred law which forbids armed men approaching within a certain distance of the temple.

They have thus destroyed the foundation stone of Mahometanism; and this mighty fabric, which at one period bade defiance to all Europe, falls, on the first attack, at the feet of an Arab reformer. The event may make a great change in the Muhammedan world; for it appears to me almost certain, that the pilgrimages to Mecca have had nearly as great an effect in supporting this religion, as the first victories and conquests of Muhammed.

Our speculations, on the probable effects of this event, might be carried to a great length; I shall content myself, however, by observing, that the temper of the times is greatly altered since the æra of Muhammed, and that however much Arabia or Persia may be

convulsed by religious wars, it is almost impossible for the contagion to extend any further. Numberless are the superstitious observances which have been grafted on the religion of Muhammed in India; and the reliance which the Mooslims place on their conforming to a number of Hindoo eustoms, totally disqualify them for adopting or understanding a reasonable belief.

At my last visit to Bushire (1804), I heard the intelligenee of Ubdool Uzeez having been assassinated, it was supposed, by an inhabitant of Kurbulu, whose family had been murdered, and house destroyed, when that place was taken by the Wuhabees. The Wuhabees are now a considerable people, sufficiently powerful to resist the divided efforts of the Turks, whose power in Arabia must decrease in proportion to the aggrandizement of this roving rae of reformers. Indeed the Turks have already found it expedient to court, and even purchase the friendship of their Arab subjects. They have extended their depredations over the greatest part of Arabia; the fate of Bassora may be said to depend upon the clemeny of the conqueror, or rather to his being engaged in other pursuits. Many places in the Red Sea have been obliged to purchase the good will of the reformer.