

# **THE BOOK OF THE LAWS OF DIVERS COUNTRIES**

BARDESAN

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SOME days since we were calling[3] to pay a visit to our brother Shemashgram, and Bardesan came and found us there. And when he had made inquiries after his health,[4] and ascertained that he was well, he asked us, "What were you talking about? for I heard your voice outside as I was coming in." For it was his habit, whenever he found us talking about anything before he came,[5] to ask us, "What were you saying?" that he might talk with us about it.

"Avida here," said we to him, "was saying to us, 'If God is one, as ye say, and if He is the creator of men, and if it is His will that you should do that which you are commanded, why did He not so create men that they should not be able to do wrong, but should constantly be doing that which is right? for in this way His will would have been accomplished.'"

"Tell me, my son Avida," said Bardesan to him, "why it has come into thy mind that the God of all is not One; or that He is One, but doth not will that men should behave themselves justly and uprightly?"

"I, sir," said Avida, "have asked these brethren, persons of my own age, in order that 'they' may return me an answer."

"If," said Bardesan to him, "thou wishest to learn, it were for thy advantage to learn from some one who is older than they; but if to teach, it is not requisite for 'thee' to ask 'them,' but rather that thou shouldst induce 'them' to ask 'thee' what they wish. For teachers are 'asked' questions, and do not themselves ask them; or, if they ever do ask a question, it is to direct the mind of the questioner, so that he may ask properly, and they may know what his desire is. For it is a good thing that a man should know how to ask questions."

"For my part," said Avida, "I wish to learn; but I began first of all to question my brethren here, because I was too bashful to ask thee."

"Thou speakest becomingly,"[6] said Bardesan. "But know, nevertheless, that he who asks questions properly, and wishes to be convinced, and approaches the way of truth without contentiousness, has no need to be bashful; because he is sure by means of the things I have mentioned to please him to whom his questions are addressed. If so be, therefore, my son, thou hast any opinion of thy own[7] respecting this matter about which thou hast asked, tell it to us all; and, if we too approve of it, we shall express our agreement with thee; and, if we do not approve of it, we shall be under obligation to show thee why we do not approve of it. But if thou wast simply desirous of becoming acquainted with this subject, and hast no opinion of thy own about it, as a man who has but lately joined the disciples and is a recent inquirer, I will tell thee respecting it; so that thou mayest not go from us empty away. If, moreover, thou art pleased with those things which I shall say to thee, we have other things besides to tell thee concerning this matter; but, if thou art not pleased, we on our part shall have stated our views without any personal feeling."

"I too," said Avida, "shall be much gratified[9] to hear and to be convinced: because it is not from another that I have heard of this subject, but I have spoken of it to my brethren here out of my own mind; and they have not cared to convince me; but they say, 'Only believe, and thou wilt then be able to know everything.'"

But for my part, I cannot believe unless I be convinced."

"Not only," said Bardesan, "is Avida unwilling to believe, but there are many others also who, because there is no faith in them, are not even capable of being convinced; but they are always pulling down and building up, and so are found destitute of all knowledge of the truth. But notwithstanding, since Avida is not willing to believe, lo! I will speak to you who do believe, concerning this matter about which he asks; and thus he too will hear something further about it."

He began accordingly to address us as follows: "Many men are there who have not faith, and have not received knowledge from the True Wisdom.[1] In consequence of this, they are not competent to speak and give instruction to others, nor are they readily inclined themselves to hear. For they have not the foundation of faith to build upon, nor have they any confidence on which to rest their hope. Moreover, because they are accustomed to doubt even concerning God, they likewise have not in them the fear of Him, which would of itself deliver them from all other fears: for he in whom there is no fear of God is the slave of all sorts of fears. For even with regard to those things of various kinds which they disbelieve, they are not certain that they disbelieve them rightly, but they are unsettled in their opinions, and have no fixed belief,[2] and the taste of their thoughts is insipid in their own mouth; and they are always haunted with fear, and flushed with excitement, and reckless.

"But with regard to what Avida has said: 'How is it that God did not so make us that we should not sin and incur condemnation?' if man had been made so, he would not have belonged to himself, but would have been the instrument of him that moved him; and it is evident also, that he who moves an instrument as he pleases, moves it either for good or for evil. And how, in that case, would a man differ from a harp, on which another plays; or from a ship, which another guides: where the praise and the blame reside in the hand of the performer or the steersman,[3] and the harp itself knows not what is played on it, nor the ship itself whether it be well steered and guided or ill, they being only instruments made for the use of him in whom is the requisite skill? But God in His benignity chose not so to make man; but by freedom He exalted him above many of His creatures, and even made him equal with the angels. For look at the sun, and the moon, and the signs of the zodiac,[4] and all the other creatures which are greater than we in some points, and see how individual freedom has been denied them, and how they are all fixed in their course by decree, so that they may do that only which is decreed for them, and nothing else. For the sun never says, I will not rise at my appointed time; nor the moon, I will not change, nor wane, nor wax; nor does any one of the stars say, I will not rise nor set; nor the sea, I will not bear up the ships, nor stay within my boundaries; nor the mountains, We will not continue in the places in which we are set; nor do the winds say, We will not blow; nor the earth, I will not hear up and sustain whatsoever is upon me. But all these things are servants, and are subject to one decree: for they are the instruments of the wisdom of God, which erreth not.

"Not so, however, with man: for, if everything ministered, who would be he that is ministered to? And, if everything were ministered to, who would be he that ministered? In that case, too, there would not be one thing diverse from another: yet that which is one, and in which there is no diversity of parts, is a beings which up to this time has not been fashioned. But those things which are destined[6] for ministering have been fixed in the power of man: because in the image of Elohim[7] was he made. Therefore have these things, in the benignity of God, been given to him, that they may minister to him for a season. It has also been given to him to be guided by his own will; so that whatever he is able to do, if he will he may do it, and if he do not will he may not do it, and that so he may justify himself or condemn. For, had he been made so as not to be able to do evil and thereby incur condemnation, in like manner also the good which he did would not have been his own, and he could not have been justified by it. For, if any one should not of his own will do that which is good or that which is evil, his justification and his condemnation would rest simply with that Fortune to which he is subjected.[8]

"It will therefore be manifest to you, that the goodness of God is great toward man, and that freedom has been

given to him in greater measure than to any of those elemental bodies[1] of which we have spoken, in order that by this freedom he may justify himself, and order his conduct in a godlike manner, and be copartner with angels, who are likewise possessed of personal freedom. For we are sure that, if the angels likewise had not been possessed of personal freedom, they would not have consorted with the daughters of men, and sinned, and fallen from their places. In like manner, too, those other angels, who did the will of their Lord, were, by reason of their self-control, raised to higher rank, and sanctified, and received noble gifts. For every being in existence is in need of the Lord of all; of His gifts also there is no end.

Know ye, however, notwithstanding what I have said, that even those things of which I have spoken as subsisting by decree are not absolutely destitute of all freedom; and on this account, at the last day, they will all be made subject to judgment."

"But how," said I to him, "should those things which are fixed and regulated by decree be judged?"

"Not inasmuch as they are fixed, O Philip," said he, "will the elements be judged, but inasmuch as they are endowed with power. For beings[2] are not deprived of their natural properties[3] when they come to be fashioned, but only of the full exercise of their strength,[4] suffering a decrease[5] of power through their intermingling one with another, and being kept in subjection by the power of their Maker; and in so far as they are in subjection they will not be judged, but in respect of that only which is under their own control."

"Those things," said Avida to him, "which thou hast said, are very good; but, lo! the commands which have been given to men are severe, and they cannot perform them."

"This," said Bardesan, "is the saying of one who has not the will to do that which is right; nay, more, of him who has already yielded obedience and submission to his foe. For men have not been commanded to do anything but that which they are able to do. For the commandments set before us are only two, and they are such as are compatible with freedom and consistent with equity: one, that we refrain from everything which is wrong, and which we should not like to have done to ourselves; and the other, that we should do that which is right, and which we love and are pleased to have done to us likewise. Who, then, is the man that is too weak to avoid stealing, or to avoid lying, or to avoid acts of profligacy, or to avoid hatred and deception? For, lo! all these things are under the control of the mind of man; and are not dependent on[6] the strength of the body, but on the will of the soul. For even if a man be poor, and sick, and old, and disabled in his limbs, he is able to avoid doing all these things. And, as he is able to avoid doing these things, so is he able to love, and to bless, and to speak the truth, and to pray for what is good for every one with whom he is acquainted; and if he be in health, and capable of working,[7] he is able also to give of that which he has; moreover, to support with strength of body him that is sick and enfeebled this also he can do.

"Who, then, it is that is not capable of doing that which men destitute of faith complain of, I know not. For my part, I think that it is precisely in respect to these commandments that man has more power than in anything else. For they are easy, and there are no circumstances that can hinder their performance. For we are not commanded to carry heavy loads of stones, or of timber, or of anything else, which those only who have great bodily strength can do; nor to build fortresses[8] and found cities, which kings only can do; nor to steer a ship, which mariners only have the skill to steer; nor to measure and divide land, which land-measurers only know how to do; nor to practise any one of those arts which are possessed by some, while the rest are destitute of them. But there have been given to us, in accordance with the benignity of God, commandments having no harshness in them[9] such as any living man whatsoever[10] may rejoice to do.[11] For there is no man that does not rejoice when he does that which is right, nor any one that is not gladdened within himself if he abstains from things that are bad except those who were not created for this good thing, and are called tares.[12] For would not the judge be unjust who should censure a man with regard to any such thing as he has not the ability to do?"

"Sayest thou of these deeds, O Bardesan," said Avida to him, "that they are easy to do?"

"To him that hath the will," said Bardesan, "I have said, and do still say, that they are easy. For this obedience I contend far is the proper behaviour of a free mind,[13] and of the soul which has not revolted against its governors. As for the action of the body, there are many things which hinder it: especially old age, and sickness, and poverty."

"Possibly," said Avida, "a man may be able to abstain from the things that are bad; but as for doing the things that are good, what man is capable of this?"

"It is easier," said Bardesan, "to do good than to abstain from evil. For the good comes from the man himself,[1] and therefore he rejoices whenever he does good; but the evil is the work of the Enemy, and therefore it is that, only when a man is excited by some evil passion, and is not in his sound natural condition,[2] he does the things that are bad. For know, my son, that for a man to praise and bless his friend is an easy thing; but for a man to refrain from taunting and reviling one whom he hates is not easy: nevertheless, it is possible. When, too, a man does that which is right, his mind is gladdened, and his conscience at ease, and he is pleased for every one to see what he does. But, when a man behaves amiss and commits wrong, he is troubled and excited, and full of anger and rage, and distressed in his soul and in his body; and, when he is in this state of mind, he does not like to be seen by any one; and even those things in which he rejoices, and which are accompanied with praise and blessing from others, are spurned from his thoughts, while those things by which he is agitated and disturbed are rendered more distressing to him because accompanied by the curse of conscious guilt.

"Perhaps, however, some one will say that fools also are pleased when they do abominable things. Undoubtedly: but not because they do them as such, nor because they receive any commendation for them, nor because they do them with a good hope;[3] nor does the pleasure itself stay long with them. For the pleasure which is experienced in a healthy state of the soul, with a good hope, is one thing; and the pleasure of a diseased state of the soul, with a bad hope, is another. For lust is one thing, and love is another; and friendship is one thing, and good-fellowship another; and we ought without any difficulty to understand that the false counterfeit of affection which is called lust, even though there be in it the enjoyment of the moment, is nevertheless widely different from true affection, whose enjoyment is for ever, incorruptible and indestructible."

"Avida here," said I to him, "has also been speaking thus: 'It is from his nature that man does wrong; for, were he not naturally formed to do wrong, he would not do it.'"

"If all men," said Bardesan, "acted alike,[4] and followed one bias,[5] it would then be manifest that it was their nature that guided them, and that they had not that freedom of which I have been speaking to you. That you may understand, however, what is nature and what is freedom, I will proceed to inform you.

"The nature of man is, that he should be born, and grow up, and rise to his full stature, and produce children, and grow old, eating and drinking, and sleeping and waking, and that then he should die. These things, because they are of nature, belong to all men; and not to all men only, but also to all animals whatsoever,[6] and some of them also to trees. For this is the work of physical nature,[7] which makes and produces and regulates everything just as it has been commanded. Nature, I say, is found to be maintained among animals also in their actions. For the lion eats flesh, in accordance with his nature; and therefore all lions are eaters of flesh. The sheep eats grass; and therefore all sheep are eaters of grass, The bee makes honey, by which it is sustained; therefore all bees are makers of honey. The ant collects for herself a store in summer, from which to sustain herself in winter; and therefore do all ants act likewise. The scorpion strikes with its sting him who has not hurt it; and thus do all scorpions strike. Thus all animals preserve their nature: the eaters of flesh do not eat herbage; nor do the eaters of herbage eat flesh.

"Men, on the contrary, are not governed thus; but, whilst in the matters pertaining to their bodies they preserve their nature like animals, in the matters pertaining to their minds they do that which they choose, as those who are free,[8] and endowed with power, and as made in the likeness of God. For there are some of them that eat flesh, and do not touch bread; and there are some of them that make a distinction between the several kinds of flesh—food; and there are some of them that do not eat the flesh of any animal whatever.[9] There are some of them that become the husbands of their mothers, and of their sisters, and of their daughters; and there are some who do not consort with women at all. There are those who take it upon themselves to inflict vengeance, like lions and leopards; and there are those who strike him that has not done them any wrong, like scorpions; and there are those that are led like sheep, and do not harm their conductors. There are some that behave themselves with kindness, and some with justice, and some with wickedness.

"If any one should say that each one of them has a nature so to do, let him be assured[1] that it is not so. For there are those who once were profligates and drunkards; and, when the admonition of good counsels reached them, they became pure and sober,[2] and spurned their bodily appetites. And there are those who once behaved with purity and sobriety; and when they turned away from right admonition, and dared to set themselves against the commands of Deity and of their teachers, they fell from the way of truth, and became profligates and revellers. And there are those who after their fall repented again, and fear came and abode upon them, and they turned themselves afresh towards the truth which they had before held.[3]

"What, therefore, is the nature of man? For, lo! all men differ one from another in their conduct and in their aims,[4] and such only as are of[5] one mind and of one purpose resemble one another. But those men who, up to the present moment, have been enticed by their appetites and governed by their anger, are resolved to ascribe any wrong they do to their Maker, that they themselves may be found faultless, and that He who made them may, in the idle talk of men,[6] bear the blame. They do not consider that nature is amenable to no law. For a man is not found fault with for being tall or short in his stature, or white or black, or because his eyes are large or small, or for any bodily defect whatsoever; but he is found fault with if he steal, or lie, or practise deceit, or poison another, or be abusive, or do any other such—like things.

"From hence, lo! it will be evident, that for those things which are not in our own hands, but which we have from nature, we are in no wise condemned, nor are we in any wise justified; but by those things which we do in the exercise of our personal freedom, if they be right we are justified and entitled to praise, and if they be wrong we are condemned and subjected to blame."

Again we questioned him, and said to him: "There are others who say that men are governed by the decree of Fate, so as to act at one time wickedly, and at another time well."

"I too am aware, O Philip and Baryama," said he to us, "that there are such men: those who are called Chaldaeans, and also others who are fond of this subtle knowledge,[7] as I myself also once was. For it has been said by me in another place,[8] that the soul of man longs[9] to know that which the many are ignorant of, and those men make it their aim to do this;[10] and that all the wrong which men commit, and all that they do aright, and all those things which happen to them, as regards riches and poverty, and sickness and health, and blemishes of the body, come to them through the governance of those stars which are called the Seven;[11] and that they are, in fact, governed by them. But there are others who affirm the opposite of these things, how that this art is a lying invention of the astrologers;[12] or that Fate has no existence whatever, but is an empty name; that, on the contrary, all things, great and small, are placed in the hands of man; and that bodily blemishes and faults simply befall and happen to him by chance. But others, again, say that whatsoever a man does he does of his own will, in the exercise of the freedom which has been given to him, and that the faults and blemishes and other untoward things which befall him he receives as punishment from God.

"For myself, however according to my weak judgment,[13] the matter appears to stand thus: that these three

opinions[14] are partly to be accepted as true, and partly to be rejected as false; accepted as true, because men speak after the appearances which they see, and also because these men see how things come upon them as if accidentally; to be set aside as fallacious, because the wisdom of God is too profound[15] for them that wisdom which rounded the world, and created man, and ordained Governors, and gave to all things the degree of pre-eminence which is suited to every one of them. What I mean is, that this power is possessed by God, and the Angels, and the Potentates,[16] and the Governors,[17] and the Elements, and men, and animals; but that this power has not been given to all these orders of beings of which I have spoken in respect to everything (for He that has power over everything is One); but over some things they have power, and over some things they have not power, as I have been saying: in order that in those things over which they have power the goodness of God may be seen, and in those over which they have no power they may know that they have a Superior.

"There is, then, such a thing as Fate, as the astrologers say. That everything, moreover, is not under the control of our will, is apparent from this that the majority of men have had the will to be rich, and to exercise dominion over their fellows, and to be healthy in their bodies, and to have things in subjection to them as they please; but that wealth is not found except with a few, nor dominion except with one here and another there, nor health of body with all men; and that even those who are rich do not have complete possession of their riches, nor do those who are in power have things in subjection to them as they wish, but that sometimes things are disobedient to them as they do not wish; and that at one time the rich are rich as they desire, and at another time they become poor as they do not desire; and that those who are thoroughly poor have dwellings such as they do not wish, and pass their lives in the world as they do not like, and covet many things which only flee from them. Many have children, and do not rear them; others rear them, and do not retain possession of them; others retain possession of them, and they become a disgrace and a sorrow to their parents. Some are rich, as they wish, and are afflicted with ill-health, as they do not wish; others are blessed with good health, as they wish, and afflicted with poverty, as they do not wish. There are those who have in abundance the things they wish for, and but few of those things for which they do not wish; and there are others who have in abundance the things they do not wish for, and but few of those for which they do wish.[1]

"And so the matter is found to stand thus: that wealth, and honours, and health, and sickness, and children, and all the other various objects of desire, are placed under the control of Fate, and are not in our own power; but that, on the contrary, while we are pleased and delighted with such things as are in accordance with our wishes, towards such as we do not wish for we are drawn by force; and, from those things which happen to us when we are not pleased, it is evident that those things also with which we are pleased do not happen to us because we desire them; but that things happen as they do happen, and with some of them we are pleased, and with others not.

"And thus we men are found to be governed by Nature all alike, and by Fate variously, and by our freedom each as he chooses.

"But let us now proceed to show with respect to Fate that it has not power over everything. Clearly not: because that which is called Fate is itself nothing more than a certain order of procession,[2] which has been given to the Potentates and Elements by God; and, in conformity with this said procession and order, intelligences[3] undergo change when they descend[4] to be with the soul, and souls undergo change when they descend[4] to be with bodies; and this order, under the name of Fate and genesisid ,[5] is the agent of the changes[6] that take place in this assemblage of parts of which man consists,[7] which is being sired and purified for the benefit of whatsoever by the grace of God and by goodness has been benefited, and is being and will continue to be benefited until the close of all things.

"The body, then, is governed by Nature, the soul also sharing in its experiences and sensations; and the body is neither hindered nor helped by Fate in the several acts it performs. For a man does not become a father

before the age of fifteen, nor does a woman become a mother before the age of thirteen. In like manner, too, there is a law for old age: for women then become incapable of bearing, and men cease to possess the natural power of begetting children; while other animals, which are likewise governed by their nature, do, even before those ages I have mentioned, not only produce offspring, but also become too old to do so, just as the bodies of men also, when they are grown old, cease to propagate: nor is Fate able to give them offspring at a time when the body has not the natural power to give them. Neither, again, is Fate able to preserve the body of man in life without meat and drink; nor yet, even when it has meat and drink, to grant it exemption from death: for these and many other things belong exclusively to Nature.[8]

"But, when the times and methods of Nature have had their full scope, then does Fate come and make its appearance among them, and produce effects of various kinds: at one time helping Nature and augmenting its power, and at another crippling and baffling it. Thus, from Nature comes the growth and perfecting of the body; but apart from Nature, that is by Fate, come diseases and blemishes in the body. From Nature comes the union of male and female, and the unalloyed happiness of them both; but from Fate comes hatred and the dissolution of the union, and, moreover, all that impurity and lasciviousness which by reason of the natural propensity to intercourse men practise in their lust. From Nature comes birth and children; and from Fate, that sometimes the children are deformed, and sometimes are cast away, and sometimes die before their time. From Nature comes a supply of nourishment sufficient for the bodies of all creatures;[1] and from Fate comes the want of sustenance, and consequent suffering in those bodies; and so, again, from the same Fate comes gluttony and unnecessary luxury. Nature ordains that the aged shall be judges for the young, and the wise for the foolish, mid that the strong shall be set over[2] the weak, and the brave over the timid; but Fate brings it to pass that striplings are set over the aged, and the foolish over the wise, and that in time of war the weak command the strong, and the timid the brave.

"You must distinctly understand[3] that, in all cases in which Nature is disturbed from its direct course, its disturbance comes by reason of Fate; and this happens because the Chiefs[4] and Governors, with whom rests that agency of change[5] which is called Nativity, are opposed to one another. Some of them, which are called Dexter, are those which help Nature, and add to its predominance,[6] whenever the procession is favourable to them, and they stand in those regions of the zodiac which are in the ascendant, in their own portions. [7] Those, on the contrary, which are called Sinister are evil, and whenever they in their turn are in possession of the ascendant they act in opposition to Nature; and not on men only do they inflict harm, but at times on animals also, and trees, and fruits, and the produce of the year, and fountains of water, and, in short, on everything that is comprised within Nature, which is under their government.

"And in consequence of this, namely, the divisions and parties which exist among the Potentates, some men have thought that the world is governed by these contending powers without any superintendence from above. But that is because they do not understand that this very thing I mean the parties and divisions subsisting among them, and the justification and condemnation consequent on their behaviour, belong to that constitution of things rounded in freedom which has been given by God, to the end that these agents likewise, by reason of their self-determining power,[8] may be either justified or condemned. Just as we see that Fate crushes Nature, so can we also see the freedom of man defeating and crushing Fate itself, not, however, in everything, just as also Fate itself does not in everything defeat Nature. For it is proper that the three things, Nature, and Fate, and Freedom, should be continued in existence until the procession of which I before spoke be completed, and the appointed measure and number of its evaluations be accomplished, even as it seemed good to Him who ordains of what kind shall be the mode of life and the end of all creatures, and the condition of all beings and natures. "

"I am convinced," said Avida, "by the arguments thou hast brought forward, that it is not from his nature that a man does wrong, and also that all men are not governed alike. If thou canst further prove also that it is not from Fate and Destiny that those who do wrong so act, then will it be incumbent on us to believe that man possesses personal freedom, and by his nature has the power both to follow that which is right and to avoid

that which is wrong, and will therefore also justly be judged at the last day, "

"Art thou," said Bardesan, "by the fact that all men are not governed alike, convinced that it is not from their nature that they do wrong? Why, then, thou canst not possibly escape the conviction[9] that neither also from Fate exclusively do they do wrong, if we are able to show thee that the sentence of the Fates and Potentates does not influence all men alike, but that we have freedom in our own selves, so that we can avoid serving physical nature and being influenced by the control of the Potentates."

"Prove me this," said Avida, "and I will be convinced by thee, and whatsoever thou shalt enjoin upon me I will do."

"Hast thou," said Bardesan, "read the books of the astrologers, who are in Babylon, in which is described what effects the stars have in their various combinations at the Nativities of men; and the books of the Egyptians, in which are described all the various characters which men happen to have?" "I have read books of astrology,"[1] said Avida, "but I do not know which are those of the Babylonians and which those of the Egyptians."

"The teaching of both countries," said Bardesan, "is the same." "It is well known to be so," said Avida. "Listen, then," said Bardesan, "and observe, that that which the stars decree by their Fate and their portions is not practised by all men alike who are in all parts of the earth. For men have made laws for themselves in various countries, in the exercise of that freedom which was given them by God: forasmuch as this gift is in its very nature opposed to that Fate emanating from the Potentates, who assume to themselves that which was not given them. I will begin my enumeration of these laws, so far as I can remember them, from the East, the beginning of the whole world:

"Laws of the Seres. The Seres have laws forbidding to kill, or to commit impurity, or to worship idols; and in the whole of Serica there are no idols, and no harlots, nor any one that kills a man, nor any that is killed: although they, like other men, are born at all hours and on all days. Thus the fierce Mars, whensoever he is 'posited' in the zenith, does not overpower the freedom of the Seres, and compel a man to shed the blood of his fellow with an iron weapon; nor does Venus, when posited with Mars, compel any man whatever among the Seres to consort with his neighbour's wife, or with any other woman. Rich and poor, however, and sick people and healthy, and rulers and subjects, are there: because such matters are given into the power of the Governors.

"Laws of the Brahmans who are in India. Again, among the Hindoos, the Brahmans, of whom there are many thousands and tens of thousands, have a law forbidding to kill at all, or to pay reverence to idols, or to commit impurity, or to eat flesh, or to drink wine; and among these people not one of these things ever takes place. Thousands of years, too, have elapsed, during which these men, lo! have been governed by this law which they made for themselves.

"Another Law which is in India. There is also another law in India, and in the same zone,[2] prevailing among those who are not of the caste[3] of the Brahmans, and do not embrace their teaching, bidding them serve idols, and commit impurity, and kill, and do other bad things, which by the Brahmans are disapproved. In the same zone of India, too, there are men who are in the habit of eating the flesh of men, just as all other nations eat the flesh of animals. Thus the evil stars have not compelled the Brahmans to do evil and impure things; nor have the good stars prevailed on the rest of the Hindoos to abstain from doing evil things; nor have those stars which are well 'located' in the regions which properly belong to them,[4] and in the signs of the zodiac favourable to a humane disposition,[5] prevailed on those who eat the flesh of men to abstain from using this foul and abominable food.

"Laws of the Persians. The Persians, again, have made themselves laws permitting them to take as wives

their sisters, and their daughters, and their daughters' daughters; and there are some who go yet further, and take even their mothers. Some of these said Persians are scattered abroad, away from their country, and are found in Media, and in the country of the Parthians,[6] and in Egypt, and in Phrygia (they are called Magi); and in all the countries and zones in which they are found, they are governed by this law which was made for their fathers. Yet we cannot say that for all the Magi, and for the rest of the Persians, Venus was posited with the Moon and with Saturn in the house of Saturn in her portions, while the aspect of Mars was toward them.[7] There are many places, too, in the kingdom of the Parthians, where men kill their wives, and their brothers, and their children, and incur no penalty; while among the Romans and the Greeks, he that kills one of these incurs capital punishment, the severest of penalties.

"Laws of the Geli. Among the Geli the women sow and reap, and build, and perform all the tasks of labourers, and wear no raiment of colours, and put on no shoes, and use no pleasant ointments; nor does any one find fault with them when they consort with strangers, or cultivate intimacies with their household slaves. But the husbands of these Gelae are dressed in garments of colours, and ornamented with gold and jewels, and anoint themselves with pleasant ointments. Nor is it on account of any effeminacy on their part that they act in this manner, but on account of the law which has been made for them: in fact, all the men are fond of hunting and addicted to war. But we cannot say that for all the women of the Geli Venus was posited in Capricorn or in Aquarius, in a position of ill luck; nor can we possibly say that for all the Geli Mars and Venus were posited in Aries, where it is written that brave and wanton[1] men are born.

"Laws of the Bactrians. Among the Bactrians, who are called Cashani, the women adorn themselves with the goodly raiment of men, and with much gold, and with costly jewels; and the slaves and handmaids minister to them more than to their husbands; and they ride on horses decked out with trapping of gold and with precious stones.[2] These women, moreover, do not practise continency, but have intimacies with their slaves, and with strangers who go to that country; and their husbands do not find fault with them, nor have the women themselves any fear of punishment, because the Cashani look upon[3] their wives only as mistresses. Yet we cannot say that for all the Bactrian women Venus and Mars and Jupiter are posited in the house of Mars in the middle of the heavens,[4] the place where women are born that are rich and adulterous, and that make their husbands subservient to them in everything.

"Laws of the Racami, and of the Edessaeans, and of the Arabians. Among the Racami, and the Edessaeans, and the Arabians, not only is she that commits adultery put to death, but she also upon whom rests the suspicion[5] of adultery suffers capital punishment.

"Laws in Hatra. There is a law in force[6] in Hatra, that whosoever steals any little thing, even though it were worthless as water, shall be stoned. Among the Cashani, on the contrary, if any one commits such a theft as this, they merely spit in his face. Among the Romans, too, he that commits a small theft is scourged and sent about his business. On the other side of the Euphrates, and as you go eastward, he that is stigmatized as either a thief or a murderer does not much resent it;[7] but, if a man be stigmatized as an arsenocoete, he will avenge himself even to the extent of killing his accuser.

"Laws.... Among[8] ... boys ... to us, and are not ... Again, in all the region of the East, if any persons are thus stigmatized, and are known to be guilty, their than fathers and brothers put them to death; and very often[9] they do not even make known the graves where they are buried.

"Such are the laws of the people of the East. But in the North, and in the country of the Gauls[10] and their neighbours, such youths among them as are handsome the men take as wives, and they even have feasts on the occasion; and it is not considered by them as a disgrace, nor as a reproach, because of the law which prevails among them. But it is a thing impossible that all those in Gaul who are branded with this disgrace should at their Nativities have had Mercury posited with Venus in the house of Saturn, and within the limits of Mars, and in the signs of the zodiac to the west. For, concerning such men as are born under these

conditions, it is written that they are branded with infamy, as being like women.

"Laws of the Britons. " Among the Britons many men take one and the same wife.

"Laws of the Parthians. Among the Parthians, on the other hand, one man takes many wives, and all of them keep to him only, because of the law which has been made there in that country.

"Laws of the Amazons. As regards the Amazons, they, all of them, the entire nation, have no husbands; but like animals, once a year, in the spring-time, they issue forth from their territories and cross the river; and, having crossed it, they hold a great festival on a mountain, and the men from those parts come and stay with them fourteen days, and associate with them, and they become pregnant by them, and pass over again to their own country; and, when they are delivered, such of the children as are males they cast away, and the females they bring up. Now it is evident that, according to the ordinance of Nature, since they all became pregnant in one month, they also in one month are all delivered, a little sooner or a little later; and, as we have heard, all of them are robust and warlike; but not one of the stars is able to help any of those males who are born so as to prevent their being cast away.

"The Book of the Astrologers. It is written in the book of the astrologers, that, when Mercury is posited with Venus in the house of Mercury, he produces painters, sculptors, and bankers; but that, when they are in the house of Venus, they produce perfumers, and dancers, and singers, and poets. And yet, in all the country of the Tayites and of the Saracens, and in Upper Libya and among the Mauritians, and in the country of the Nomades, which is at the mouth of the Ocean, and in outer Germany, and in Upper Sarmatia, and in Spain, and in all the countries to the north of Pontus, and in all the country of the Alanians, and among the Albanians, and among the Zazi, and in Brusa, which is beyond the Douro, one sees neither sculptors, nor painters, nor perfumers, nor bankers, nor poets; but, on the contrary, this decree of Mercury and Venus is prevented from influencing the entire circumference of the world. In the whole of Media, all men when they die, and even while life is still remaining in them, are cast to the dogs, and the dogs eat the dead of the whole of Media. Yet we cannot say that all the Medians are born having the Moon posited with Mars in Cancer in the day-time beneath the earth: for it is written that those whom dogs eat are so born. The Hindoos, when they die, are all of them burnt with fire, and many of their wives are burnt along with them alive. But we cannot say that all those women of the Hindoos who are burnt had at their Nativity Mars and the Sun posited in Leo in the night-time beneath the earth, as those persons are born who are burnt with fire. All the Germans die by strangulation,[1] except those who are killed in battle. But it is a thing impossible, that, at the Nativity of all the Germans the Moon and Hora should have been posited between Mars and Saturn. The truth is, that in all countries, every day, and at all hours, men are born under Nativities diverse from one another, and the laws of men prevail over the decree of the stars, and they are governed by their customs. Fate does not compel the Seres to commit murder against their wish, nor the Brahmans to eat flesh; nor does it hinder the Persians from taking as wives their daughters and their sisters, nor the Hindoos from being burnt, nor the Medes from being devoured by dogs, nor the Parthians from taking many wives, nor among the Britons many men from taking one and the same wife, nor the Edessaeans from cultivating chastity, nor the Greeks from practising gymnastics, ... , nor the Romans from perpetually seizing upon other countries, nor the men of the Gauls from marrying one another; nor does it compel the Amazons to rear the males; nor does his Nativity compel any man within the circumference of the whole world to cultivate the art of the Muses; but, as I have already said, in every country and in every nation all men avail themselves of the freedom of their nature in any way they choose, and, by reason of the body with which they are clothed, do service to Fate and to Nature, sometimes as they wish, and at other times as they do not wish. For in every country and in every nation there are rich and poor, and rulers and subjects, and people in health and those who are sick each one according as Fate and his Nativity have affected him."

"Of these things, Father Bardesan," said I to him, "thou hast convinced us, and we know that they are true. But knowest thou that the astrologers say that the earth is divided into seven portions, which are called

Zones; and that over the said portions those seven stars have authority, each of them over one; and that in each one of the said portions the will of its own Potentate prevails; and that this is called its law?"

"First of all, know thou, my son Philip," said he to me, "that the astrologers have invented this statement as a device for the promotion of error. For, although the earth be divided into seven portions, yet in every one of the seven portions many laws are to be found differing from one another. For there are not seven kinds of laws only found in the world, according to the number of the seven stars; nor yet twelve, according to the number of the signs of the zodiac; nor yet thirty-six, according to the number of the Decani.[2] But there are many kinds of laws to be seen as you go from kingdom to kingdom, from country to country, from district to district, and in every abode of man, differing one from another. For ye remember what I said to you that in one zone, that of the Hindoos, there are many men that do not eat the flesh of animals, and there are others that even eat the flesh of men. And again, I told you, in speaking of the Persians and the Magi, that it is not in the zone of Persia only that they have taken for wives their daughters and their sisters, but that in every country to which they have gone they have followed the law of their fathers, and have preserved the mystic arts contained in that teaching which they delivered to them. And again, remember that I told you of many nations spread abroad over the entire circuit of the world,[3] who have not been confined to any one zone, but have dwelt in every quarter from which the wind blows,[4] and in all the zones, and who have not the arts which Mercury and Venus are said to have given when in conjunction with each other. Yet, if laws were regulated by zones, this could not be; but they clearly are not: because those men I have spoken of are at a wide remove from having anything in common with many other men in their habits of life. "Then, again, how many wise men, think ye, have abolished from their countries laws which appeared to them not well made? How many laws, also, are there which have been set aside through necessity? And how many kings are there who, when they have got possession of countries which did not belong to them, have abolished their established laws, and made such other laws as they chose? And, whenever these things occurred, no one of the stars was able to preserve the law. Here is an instance at hand for you to see for yourselves: it is but as yesterday since the Romans took possession of Arabia, and they abolished all the laws previously existing there, and especially the circumcision which they practised. The truth is,[1] that he who is his own master is sometimes compelled to obey the law imposed on him by another, who himself in turn becomes possessed of the power to do as he pleases.

"But let me mention to you a fact which more than anything else is likely[2] to convince the foolish, and such as are wanting in faith. All the Jews, who received the law through Moses, circumcise their male children on the eighth day, without waiting for the coming of the proper stars, or standing in fear of the law of the country where they are living. Nor does the star which has authority over the zone govern them by force; but, whether they be in Edom, or in Arabia, or in Greece, or in Persia, or in the north, or in the south, they carry out this law which was made for them by their fathers. It is evident that what they do is not from Nativity: for it is impossible that for all the Jews, on the eighth day, on which they are circumcised, Mars should 'be in the ascendant,' so that steel should pass upon them, and their blood be shed. Moreover, all of them, wherever they are, abstain from paying reverence to idols. One day in seven, also, they and their children cease from all work, from all building, and from all travelling, and from all buying and selling; nor do they kill an animal on the Sabbath-day, nor kindle a fire, nor administer justice; and there is not found among them any one whom Fate compels,[3] either to go to law on the Sabbath-day and gain his cause, or to go to law and lose it, or to pull down, or to build up, or to do any one of those things which are done by all those men who have not received this law. They have also other things in respect to which they do not on the Sabbath conduct themselves like the rest of mankind, though on this same day they both bring forth and are born, and fall sick and die: for these things do not pertain to the power of man.

"In Syria and in Edessa men used to part with their manhood in honour of Tharatha; but, when King Abgar[4] became a believer he commanded that every one that did so should have his hand cut off, and from that day until now no one does so in the country of Edessa.

"And what shall we say of the new race of us Christians, whom Christ at His advent planted in every country and in every region? for, lo! wherever we are, we are all called after the one name of Christ Christians. On one day, the first of the week, we assemble ourselves together, and on the days of the readings[5] we abstain from taking sustenance. The brethren who are in Gaul do not take males for wives, nor those who are in Parthia two wives; nor do those who are in Judges circumcise themselves; nor do our sisters who are among the Geli consort with strangers; nor do those brethren who are in Persia take their daughters for wives; nor do those who are in Media abandon their dead, or bury them alive, or give them as food to the dogs; nor do those who are in Edessa kill their wives or their sisters when they commit impurity, but they withdraw from them, and give them over to the judgment of God; nor do those who are in Hatra[6] stone thieves to death; but, wherever they are, and in whatever place they are found, the laws of the several countries do not hinder them from obeying the law of their Sovereign, Christ; nor does the Fate of the celestial Governors compel them to make use of things which they regard as impure.

"On the other hand, sickness and health, and riches and poverty, things which are not within the scope of their freedom, befall them wherever they are. For although the freedom of man is not influenced by the compulsion of the Seven, or, if at any time it is influenced, it is able to withstand the influences exerted upon it, yet, on the other hand, this same man, externally regarded,[7] cannot on the instant liberate himself from the command of his Governors: for he is a slave and in subjection. For, if we were able to do everything, we should ourselves be everything; and, if we had not the power to do anything, we should be the tools of others.

"But, when God wills them, all things are possible, and they may take place without hindrance: for there is nothing that can stay that Great and Holy Will. For even those who think that they successfully withstand it, do not with- stand it by strength, but by wickedness and error. And this may go on for a little while, because He is kind and forbearing towards all beings that exist,[1] so as to let them remain as they are, and be governed by their own will, whilst notwithstanding they are held in check by the works which have been done and by the arrangements which have been made for their help. For this well-ordered constitution of things[2] and this government which have been instituted, and the intermingling of one with another, serve to repress the violence of these beings,[3] so that they should not inflict harm on one another to the full, nor yet to the full suffer harm, as was the case with them before the creation of the world. A time is also coming when this propensity to inflict harm which still remains in them shall be brought to an end, through the teaching which shall be given them amidst intercourse of another kind. And at the establishment of that new world all evil commotions shall cease, and all rebellions terminate, and the foolish shall be convinced, and all deficiencies shall be filled up, and there shall be quietness and peace, through the gift of the Lord of all existing beings."

Here endeth the Book of the Laws of Countries.

Bardesan, therefore, an aged man, and one celebrated for his knowledge of events, wrote, in a certain work which was composed by him, concerning the synchronisms[4] with one another of the luminaries of heaven, speaking as follows :

Two revolutions of Saturn,[5] 60 years;

5 revolutions of Jupiter, 60 years;

40 revolutions of Mars, 60 years;

60 revolutions of the Sun, 60 years;

72 revolutions of Venus, 60 years;

150 revolutions of Mercury, 60 years;

720 revolutions of the Moon, 60 years.

And this," says he, "is one synchronism of them all; that is, the time of one such synchronism of them. So that from hence it appears that to complete too such synchronisms there will be required six thousands of years.

Thus :

200 revolutions of Saturn, six thousands of

years;

500 revolutions of Jupiter, 6 thousands of

years; 4 thousand revolutions of Mars, 6 thousands

of years;

Six thousand revolutions of the Sun, 6 thou-

sands of years; 7 thousand and 200 revolutions of Venus, 6

thousands of years;

12 thousand revolutions of Mercury, 6 thou-

sands of years;

72 thousand revolutions of the Moon, 6 thou-

sands of years."

These things did Bardesan thus compute when desiring to show that this world would stand only six thousands of years. ANCIENT SYRIAC DOCUMENTS