

# THE HISTORY OF THE PRINCESS PADMANI.

AKEBAR, the seventh emperor of the Moguls, inherited the virtues and the courage of the illustrious Tamerlane: all the good qualities of the Mogul princes seemed to be united in his person, almost without a mixture of those vices which make us look upon them as barbarians. There has scarce been known a prince of a more penetrating and extensive judgment, of a more generous and intrepid soul, and at the same time, tender, compassionate, and grateful.

Among the many triumphs that marked his glorious reign, the reduction of Chitor was not the least considerable. An Indian Raja, or prince of the race of the famous Rana, who had formerly submitted to the power of Tamerlane, gave umbrage to Akebar, who could not endure that he should hold a kind of sovereignty in his neighbourhood.

This prince was called Rana, after the name of his ancestors, and boasted of being lineally descended from the antient Porus. The territories of the Raja were not above twelve days journey from Dely; Chitor, the capital of his country, was rather a fortress than a town of trade: it is situated on a high mountain, surrounded with water on every side, in the midst of a vast plain. The top of the mountain on which the town is built is a flat. It is about a league and a half in circumference, and half a league over in some places. At the foot of the mountain, the Nug, a pretty large river, and very deep, glides gently along, a rivulet of the best water in the world takes its source in the town, makes a great many windings within it, and at last having formed several natural cascades on the break of the mountain, throws itself into the river. Within the compass of the fortress are several beautiful fields sowed with rice, and watered by the overflowings of the rivulet. It affords provisions enough to supply a tolerable large garrison. A place inaccessible, which wants neither victuals nor water, passes in the Indies for impregnable. However this was the place which Akebar undertook to conquer.

This young emperor's passion for the princess Padmani, the wife of Rana, represented that enterprise easy to him, which every one else thought impracticable. Before he would attempt so dangerous a siege, Akebar, by his ambassadors, let Rana understand, that ambition alone was not the motive of this undertaking, and that he might preserve his country from the ruin which threatened it, by giving up the most beautiful princess of the East, to the most potent monarch of the world.

A proposal of this kind is not so mocking in the Indies, as it would be in Europe, their laws allow divorce; however, Rana had too much tenderness for Padmani, to part with her to a rival, and would hear nothing more upon that subject but the dictates of his own valour and the tears of his wife.

'Can you find in your heart to abandon me, (says the virtuous princess,) to a tyrant whom I detest? have we not strength enough in Chitor to consume your enemy's forces, and extinguish his flame, by the length of a fruitless siege? at worst, if I must lose my life, I will lose it without regret, provided I am not so unhappy as to survive you.'

Words so moving, determined Rana to prefer an honourable war, to an ignominious peace. He answered the ambassador of Akebar, that he would not advise his master to sit down before Chitor; but if his passion had the ascendant over his reason, Akebar should find in the person of Rana, a true Raguepute, capable of maintaining his rights, and incapable of violating his faith to Padmani.

The emperor was surprised at so haughty a reply; he was not accustomed to meet with any opposition to his will, or be crossed in his designs. 'Can it be possible, cried he, that there is a man upon earth that dares disobey me?' He quickly assembled his victorious troops, which had newly conquered two kingdoms.

Nor was Rana less adive, but made preparations for maintaining a long siege in Chitor: he roused up, by his ambassadors, the slothful Rajas in his neighbourhood: he gave them to understand, that their negligence must soon expose them to the tyranny of a Mahometan; that the Moguls were a race of people but lately arrived in the Indies, and who grew formidable only by the divisions of the Indians; that if the princes, votaries of Brama, would unite against the sectaries of Mahomet, they might easily destroy them.

Jamee and Tala, both Rajas, and princes of two provinces bordering on Chitor, joined their troops to those of Rana, and came in person to make war against Akebar. They appeared in the field at the head of their armies; but the Mogul, who advanced by long marches towards Chitor, quickly dispersed them. The two brothers had no other remedy but that of retiring into the strong places of their provinces, and there expect the enemy, whose forces they were not able to withstand in the field.

Never was there seen in Indostan a finer nor a more numerous army than that of the Mogul: he spared no cost to shew himself before Chitor in the utmost splendor. The richness of his tents is hardly to be conceived by us in Europe; all was gold about them. He thought, by his magnificent equipage, to dazzle the Princess Padmani, and by the number of his troops to frighten Rana into submission.

Akebar found by experience, that virtue and valour are sometimes proof against the greatest hopes or the greatest fears. The gallant Indians beheld without emotion, from the top of their mountain, the magnificence and prodigious extent of the enemy's camp. The Mogul in the beginning of the siege, acted at once the soldier and the lover: he shot arrows into the town which ried letters for Padmani; the princess took no notice of them: he pushed the siege like one in despair. He fired terribly upon the place from several batteries; but his cannon shooting upwards, had little or no effect.

The Indians from their ramparts insulted the Mahometans, and reproached them with their want of bravery, though animated to the fight by more passions than one.

A Portuguese historian tells us, that the siege of Troy was acted over again in that of Chitor: he adds, that it lasted twelve years, and that Padmani had time to grow old, while the Mogul endeavoured to win her by his arms This is an exaggeration which the Mogul Chronicle does not confirm. The siege lasted at most but two years, and then concluded by a very extraordinary adventure.

Akebar, wearied out by so obstinate a resistance, made shew of raising the siege of Chitor, and wrote to Rana a very obliging artful letter. He commended the Raja for his courage, but desired he would grant him two favours, before he quitted an enterprize which he had undertaken to his confusion; first, that the Raja would give him a sight of the princess, whom he had not known but by public fame; next, that he would permit him to go into Chitor, and see the only place in the world capable of resisting his power.

The Raja granted him the second demand very freely, but refused the first. He contented that the Mogul should enter Chitor, attended by only fifty of his officers, but would not promise that he should see Padmani.

Akebar, accepted the Raja's offer; and having received hostages for the security of his person, he entered Chitor with a smaller number of attendants than was allowed him. The emperor received from Rana all the respect and all the distinction due to his rank. He was regaled in the palace after the Indian manner. The entertainment was civil on both sides; but Akebar, who possessed the most persuasive eloquence, had the art to make Rana grant him more than he had promised. When he saw the Indian warmed with wine, he intreated him to send for Padmani for one moment. The Raja was willing, but they had great difficulty to get the princess to consent. At last in compliance to her husband, she shewed herself, but disappeared in an instant. This indiscretion of Rana cost him dear: Akebar's passion was much more inflamed upon sight of the princess, however he had command enough over himself to dissemble it: he made Rana believe that he was resolved to raise the siege from a place which had already given him but too much trouble, and prudently forbore to intermix in his discourse any praises of Padmani, but such as were cold and indifferent.

Rana, thus deceived by appearances, treated his most cruel enemy without the least distrust: he received his presents, and gave him others in return. Akebar bestowed on the prince a scymetar adorned with diamonds, and Rana made the emperor accept of some jewels, and now the hour of their parting drew near. Akebar walked towards the gate of the fortress, followed only by forty of his attendants; Rana, to shew his respect, insisted upon waiting on him to the gate. During their walk, Akebar renewed his kind protestations. At last they came to the gate of the fortress, where the Mogul, as a farther testimony of his friendship, would put about the neck of Rana one of those large pearl necklaces which in India the men wear as well as the women. He took care to string it with some of the strongest twist; and dragged him by this collar out of the gate, while his forty soldiers opposed the guard, who made a motion to rescue their prince. The Mogul forced the Indian to mount a horse; and after having received some discharges from the musquets on the ramparts, they conducted Rana alive to the emperor's camp.

In the mean time the uproar made at the gate put the whole town into a consternation: the people thought the enemy had surprised it; and certainly had the Mogul been but a little better provided with an armed force to second his design, he might easily have carried the place.

Fame, which ever magnifies, brought to Padmani's ears the news of a sudden eruption of the enemy, and that her husband was missing in the tumult. The gallant princess did not suffer herself to be overwhelmed with this unexpected disaster; she immediately got on horseback, and with her lance in her hand, appeared at the head of her troops, resolved to conquer or die. She did not learn the truth of Akebar's treachery, and the forcing away of Rana, till she came upon the very spot: she

perceived plainly enough that she had been the true cause of his misfortune, but she thought sit to conceal that part. 'He is dead, she cried, that, dearest husband is dead, whom my tenderness has undone. Let us think no more of recovering him by a dishonourable composition, but revenge his death by seeing the authors of it fall in heaps about us.'

Padmani, without shedding a tear, though pierced with the sharpest sorrow, walked round the ramparts, gave all the necessary orders, encouraged the soldiers, and animated the principal leaders. In fine, she shewed herself as much superior to the men in prudence and courage, as she surpassed in beauty all those of her own sex.

Akebar had now flattered himself that he should quickly become master of the fortress, and gave the besieged to understand, that if they did not deliver up the place, and the princess, he would first cause Rana's head to be struck off, and conclude his revenge by sacking the town, and putting the inhabitants to the sword. The brave Amazon answered, that her husband having fallen into the hands of a perjured man, she was no longer in doubt of his death; but still there remained Rageputes enough of his nation to revenge their sovereign: that for her part, she would employ all the authority heaven had given her over her people, to raise up to the Mogul enemies yet more formidable than Rana; and that the principal leaders of her army had sworn to lose their lives rather than surrender the place.

Akebar was not ignorant of the firmness of the Rageputes in all their resolutions; he chose therefore to raise the siege, and endeavour to obtain the princess by way of negotiation. An ambassador was sent to Padmani, loaded with rich presents, and the most passionate letters, Akebar represented to the princess, that she had given proofs enough of the fidelity due to her husband; that it was now time to make some condescension in favour of a great emperor, and her own interest; that her tenderness for Rana could not better appear than by procuring the liberty of her captive husband; that by redeeming Rana from his captivity, she might make herself the greatest queen in the world.

They shewed her at the same time letters extorted from the captive prince, in which he conjured her to make herself happy by setting him at liberty. The heroine rightly apprehended, that Rana's was only a forced consent, and that her own glory depended upon an inviolable fidelity to him; yet she thought it not unlawful to play the hypocrite, and deceive a deceiver, who had robbed her of her husband. She let the Mogul understand, that she began to waver in her resolution, and that ambition had shaken her constancy; that if her vows did not bind her indispensibly to Rana, she would think herself happy in being sultanness to so great a prince; but that she had sworn to her first husband, by all their gods, that she would never be the wife of another, without an express consent from his own mouth; that the emperor might chuse either to suffer Rana to come to Chitor, or permit Padmani to go and demand her husband's consent, in the place of his captivity.

Akebar embraced the last proposal, and consented to let the princess come with a good guard to pay her husband a visit. A castle in the neighbourhood of Agra was Rana's prison: it is impossible to express the impatience of Akebar for the arrival of a princess at his capital for whom he had expended such vast treasures, and exposed himself to so many dangers. Couriers upon couriers were dispatched to entreat her not to defer her departure. The emperor sent her presents every hour of jewels, fruits, and a mysterious kind of nosegays, which are made use of in the east to express, by matching of flowers, the sentiments of the heart.

The princess got ready her equipage with all possible speed; the most sumptuous pallanquins were prepared for her journey. These are a kind of Indian chaises, in which people of quality are carried on the shoulders of ten or a dozen slaves; they are long enough to sleep in, as in a litter: those for the men are open at top; but the women's are close, and of a much larger size. Four may sit conveniently in one of them; so that there is need of twenty slaves to bear those in which the princesses are carried.

Padmani shut up eight of the bravest of her subjects in the two pallanquins, and enjoined them a profound silence during the journey; for her own part she remained at Chitor, and sent away the pallanquins with a good guard. The project was executed with so much secrecy that the whole town was deceived. The people were all in tears at the supposed departure of their princess, and followed the pallanquins in crowds out of the town. Mean time Padmani keeping very private in her palace, had the pleasure to see the sorrow of her people for their imaginary loss.

As soon as the emperor was informed that the princess was set out for Agra, he appointed several persons to meet and compliment her. The princess's first eunuch, who managed the intrigue, and was shut up in the pallanquin, in which the princess was supposed to be, made answers for her. Among other things, he let the emperor know, in the name of Padmani, that if she met with the least interruption in her journey, or was hindered from proceeding directly to her husband, without going through the capital; or even, if she was disturbed in her conversation with Rana, that she was determined to stab herself with a dagger which she brought for that purpose, and held ready in her hand for fear of any surprise.

Akebar had not a thought of making the least opposition to the princess's will. He sent her word, that she should be at full liberty to see Rana, to discourse with him, and bid him adieu. The nearer the pallanquins approached Agra, the more couriers were dispatched to wait on them. They were met by them at every village, and still the eunuch gave answers to the letters of Akebar. About half a day's journey from Agra, and three or four leagues from the castle where Rana was prisoner, they met a magnificent equipage, which the emperor had sent to receive the princess. The Rageputes arrived about the evening at the place where Rana was prisoner.

The two pallanquins only, and some officers of Padmani's guard, were permitted to enter the castle; these officers, together with the Rageputes shut up in the pallanquins, dispatched the governor of the castle, who first advanced to receive the princess; afterwards becoming matters of the guard, they delivered Rana from his imprisonment. They mounted him on a very fleet horse; and, as they had posted change enough on the road, the raja soon arrived at Chitor, where he made Padmani all the acknowledgments due to his deliverer.

Mean time Akebar was waiting impatiently in a garden for the arrival of the princess. When word was brought him that Rana had made his escape, and that some armed men had been concealed in the pallanquins instead of Padmani, he commanded the messenger's head to be struck off who brought this news; but coming to himself a moment after, he was contented to forbid him his presence for ever. "Pursue, pursue Rana," cries he; but Rana was got too far on his road to be overtaken. As to the Rageputes, who had served as a convoy to the pallanquins, after having marched all night with great expedition, they found themselves about the morning in the territories of a raja, and a friend to the prince of Chitor, and at last got safe into their own country.

As soon as Rana was returned to his fortress, he wrote an insulting letter to Akebar; he reproached him with his perfidiousness, and rallied him on the ill success of his amours; he haughtily defied him to come a second time to try his fortune against the citadel of Chitor; and added, that after having been baffled and outwitted by a woman, he might very well expect to be vanquished by an army of Ragueputes, who waited his arrival with impatience. Rana did more than insult his enemy with letters; he erected in the market-place of Chitor a pillar, on which were engraven these words, *Never trust the Moguls who have betrayed you.*

The behaviour of Rana, and the indifference of the princess Padmani, provoked Akebar to such a degree, that he was no longer master of himself. Once more he assembled his troops; he augmented his artillery; he prepared machines; in a word, he made such provision for the siege of Chitor, that he believed the taking of it infallible. In this assurance he surrounded the place on every side; he raised platforms, on which he planted his engines: the assaults were furious, and were equally sustained.

The Mogul was now no more that amorous prince, who seemed tender of the lives of his princess's people; but an emperor enraged to the last degree, who came to avenge a personal affront. The two principals were continually attentive; one to push the siege, and the other to defeat it. Rana scarce ever quitted the ramparts, where he encouraged his men, and repaired the breaches. Akebar, on his side, often mounted the platforms, and gave his orders for forming the attacks. One day as Akebar was taking a view of the place from one of those platforms, almost equal in height with the walls of Chitor, he perceived an officer walking carelessly on the ramparts; he took aim with his fusee, and shot the raja dead upon the spot. Two days after the emperor had an account that he had killed his rival; that his body was burned in great pomp; and that the generous Padmani, according to the custom of the Raguepute princesses, had thrown herself into the flames, and mingled her ashes with those of her husband. Chitor still made some resistance; but at last was forced to yield to the valour and fortune of Akebar.