

THE BOOK OF GOVERNMENT
OR RULES FOR KINGS

The Siyāsat-nāma
or Siyar al-Mulūk
of NIẒĀM AL-MULK

Translated from the Persian by
HUBERT DARKE



LONDON
ROUTLEDGE & KEGAN PAUL

First published in 1960
by Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
Broadway House, 68-74 Carter Lane,
London E.C.4

Printed in Great Britain
by Butler and Tanner Ltd.
Frome and London

© Routledge and Kegan Paul 1960

No part of this book may be reproduced
in any form without permission from
the publisher, except for the quotation
of brief passages in criticism

UNESCO COLLECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS
PERSIAN SERIES

This book has been accepted in the Persian
Translation Series of the United Nations
Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization (UNESCO)

RULES FOR KINGS

In the name of Allah, The Merciful, The Clement

PROLOGUE¹

1. Thanks and praise be to God (to Him be power and glory) who is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Provider of daily food for His servants, the Knower of the hidden and the open, the Pardoner of sins; and blessings upon the best of mortals, The Chosen One (the prayers of Allah and His peace be upon him), who is the greatest of prophets, the elect of the God of the world, the vehicle of the Quran, and the advocate of his people on the day of judgment; blessings too upon the people of his house and his Companions (may Allah give these good and pure men His great peace, and He is a sufficient witness).

2. Thus says the copyist of the books of the Royal Library that the reason for the composition of this book was that The Fortunate Sultan Malikshah (may Allah illumine his proof) in the year 479² gave orders to several of the nobles, elders and wise men, instructing each one of them to give thought to the condition of the country, and to consider—'whether there is in our age and time anything out of order either in the divan, the court, the royal palace or the audience-hall—anything whose principles are not being observed by us or are unknown to us; whether there are any functions which kings before us have performed and we are not fulfilling: consider further what have been the laws and customs of past kings, make a digest of them and present them for our judgment; we shall then reflect upon them, so that hereafter affairs religious and worldly may proceed in accordance with their proper rules, every duty may be

¹ The text of the prologue is confused in the MSS.: the translation is a reconstruction and presents a prologue written by 'the copyist', incorporating material from the original of Nizām al Mulk.

² This date (A.D. 1086) is given in the Istanbul MS.

Prologue

correctly discharged, and all wrong practices may be discontinued; for since God (be He exalted) has given us His consummate grace, and bestowed the world upon us and subdued all our enemies, there must not be hereafter anything improperly done or anything concealed from us.' This request was addressed to Nizam al Mulk, Sharaf al Mulk, Majd al Mulk and others. Each one wrote what occurred to him on this subject and presented it to The Sublime Judgment. The sultan liked none of their compositions except that of the wazir Nizam al Mulk (may Allah have mercy upon him); he said, 'These chapters have been written exactly as I desired; there is nothing to add to them; I will make this book my guide and follow its precepts.' Thereafter he always went by this book, and gave his commands and wrote his treatises according to these chapters. And now that I, your humble servant, wish to present my case and renew my obligations to The Lord of the Universe, The Helper of the World and the Faith, Muhammad ibn Malikshah (may Allah exalt him), I have made a copy of this volume for the magnificent Royal Library (may Allah prosper it) and I offer it as a humble gift; if Allah wills, it may be approved and accepted.

3. No king or emperor can afford not to possess and know this book, especially in these days, for the more he reads it, the more he will be enlightened upon spiritual and temporal matters, the better he will appreciate the qualities of friends and foes; the way of right conduct and the path of good government will be open to him; the rules for the management of the court, the audience-hall, the divan, the royal palace and the parade ground, and the methods of administering taxes, transacting business and settling the affairs of the people and the army will be clear to him; and nothing in the whole realm whether great or small, far or near, will remain concealed (if Allah wills—be He exalted).

4. This book is composed of fifty chapters in the following order:

[PART ONE]

- I. On the turn of Fortune's wheel and in praise of The Master of the World. page 9
- II. On recognizing the extent of God's grace towards kings. 12

2

Prologue

- III. On holding court for the redress of wrongs and practising justice and virtue. page 14
- IV. Concerning tax-collectors and constant enquiry into the affairs of wazirs. 23
- V. Concerning assignees of land and enquiry into their treatment of the peasantry. 33
- VI. Concerning judges, preachers and inspectors (of weights and measures) and the importance of their activities. 43
- VII. On obtaining information about the conduct of tax-collectors, judges, prefects of police and mayors, and keeping them in check. 49
- VIII. On enquiry and investigation into matters of religion, religious law and suchlike. 62
- IX. Concerning overlords and their emoluments. 66
- X. Concerning intelligence agents and reporters and [their importance in] administering the affairs of the country. 66
- XI. On honouring the sublime commands and edicts which are issued from the court. 75
- XII. On sending pages from the court upon important business. 77
- XIII. On sending spies and using them for the good of the country and the people. 78
- XIV. Concerning constant employment of messengers and carriers. 91
- XV. On being careful about giving verbal orders in drunkenness and sobriety. 91
- XVI. Concerning the steward of the household and the importance of his post. 92
- XVII. Concerning boon-companions and intimates of the king and the conduct of their affairs. 92

3

Prologue

XVIII.	On having consultation with learned and experienced men.	page 95
XIX.	Concerning special [guards] and their equipment and administration.	96
XX.	On the provision and use of special weapons studded with precious stones.	97
XXI.	Concerning ambassadors and their treatment.	98
XXII.	On keeping fodder ready at posting-houses.	102
XXIII.	On settling the dues of all the army.	102
XXIV.	On having troops of various races.	103
XXV.	On taking hostages and keeping them at the court.	104
XXVI.	On keeping Turkmans in service like pages.	105
XXVII.	On organizing the work of slaves and not letting them crowd together while serving.	105
	On the training of pages of the palace.	106
XXVIII.	Concerning the conduct of private and public audiences.	121
XXIX.	Concerning the rules and arrangements for drinking parties.	122
XXX.	On slaves and servants standing in order when they are on duty.	123
XXXI.	On preparing arms and equipment for wars and expeditions.	124
XXXII.	Concerning the requests and petitions of soldiers, servants and retainers.	124
XXXIII.	On reprimanding those in high positions when they are guilty of mistakes or wrongs.	125
XXXIV.	With regard to night-watchmen, guards and porters.	127
XXXV.	Concerning the arrangements for setting a good table.	127

Prologue

XXXVI.	On acknowledging the merits of worthy servants and slaves.	page 130
XXXVII.	Concerning precautions to be taken with regard to lands held in fief and the condition of the peasants.	132
XXXVIII.	On the inadvisability of hastiness in affairs on the part of kings.	133
XXXIX.	Concerning commanders of the guard, mace-bearers, and the instruments of punishment.	135
	[PART TWO]	
XL.	On shewing mercy to the creatures of God and restoring all the affairs and customs of the state to their proper order.	143
	On the subject of titles.	152
XLI.	On not giving two appointments to one man; on giving posts to the unemployed and not leaving them destitute; on giving appointments to men of orthodox faith and sufficient merit, and not employing men of perverse sects and evil doctrines; keeping the latter at a distance.	163
XLII.	On the subject of those who wear the veil. Concerning underlings.	185
XLIII.	Exposing the facts about heretics who are enemies of the state and of Islam	193
XLIV.	On the revolt of Mazdak, the doctrines of his sect, and the circumstances of his death at the hands of Nushirwan The Just.	195
XLV.	On the revolt of Sinbad the Magian and the rising of the Khurramdins.	212
XLVI.	On the risings of the Qarmatis [Carmathians] and Batinis— in Kuhistan, Iraq and Khurasan	213

	in Khurasan and Transoxiana	page 218
TE	in Syria and the West	224
	in Herat and Ghur	226
Ti	in Khurasan and Transoxiana (contd.)	227
	in Khuzistan and Basra	233
	in Bahrain and al Ahsa.	234
XLVII.	On the rising of the Khurramdins in Isfahan and Adharbaygan.	238
	On the revolt of Babak.	239
XLVIII.	Concerning treasures and the procedures and arrangements for looking after them.	246
XLIX.	On dealing with complainants, giving answers and dispensing justice.	247
L.	On keeping account of the revenue of the provinces and the method of doing it.	250

5. First of all Nizam al Mulk composed this book ex tempore in thirty-nine chapters and delivered it [to Sultan Malikshah]. Then he revised it, and because of the anxiety that was in his mind on account of the enemies of this dynasty he added another eleven chapters, and in each chapter he set forth what was relevant to it. At the time of his departure he gave the book to me. Then after the calamity that happened to him on the road to Baghdad, when the Batinis revolted and people suffered harm, I did not dare to publish the book until the present time, when justice and Islam have gained strength from the everlasting reign of The Master of the World (may God Almighty preserve this dynasty in perpetuity until the resurrection—through His grace and favour).

CHAPTER ONE

On the turn of Fortune's wheel and in praise of The Master of the World—may Allah confirm his sovereignty

1. In every age and time God (be He exalted) chooses one member of the human race and, having adorned and endowed him with kingly virtues, entrusts him with the interests of the world and the well-being of His servants; He charges that person to close the doors of corruption, confusion and discord, and He imparts to him such dignity and majesty in the eyes and hearts of men, that under his just rule they may live their lives in constant security and ever wish for his reign to continue.

2. Whenever—Allah be our refuge!—there occurs any disobedience or disregard of divine laws on the part of His servants, or any failure in devotion and attention to the commands of The Truth (be He exalted), and He wishes to chasten them and make them taste the retribution for their deeds—may God not deal us such a fate, and keep us far from such a calamity!—verily the wrath of The Truth overtakes those people and He forsakes them for the villainess of their disobedience; anarchy rears its head in their midst, opposing swords are drawn, blood is shed, and whoever has the stronger hand does whatever he wishes, until those sinners are all destroyed in tumults and bloodshed, and the world becomes free and clear of them; and through the wickedness of such sinners may innocent persons too perish in the tumults; just as, by analogy, when a reed-bed catches fire every dry particle is consumed and much wet stuff is burnt also, because it is near to that which is dry.

3. Then by divine decree one human being acquires some prosperity and power, and according to his deserts The Truth bestows good fortune upon him and gives him wit and wisdom, wherewith he may employ his subordinates every one according to his merits and confer upon each a dignity and a station proportionate to his

powers. He selects ministers and their functionaries from among the people, and giving a rank and post to each, he relies upon them for the efficient conduct of affairs spiritual and temporal. If his subjects tread the path of obedience and busy themselves with their tasks he will keep them untroubled by hardships, so that they may pass their time at ease in the shadow of his justice. If one of his officers or ministers commits any impropriety or oppression, he will only keep him at his post provided that he responds to correction, advice or punishment, and wakes up from the sleep of negligence; if he fails to mend his ways, he will retain him no longer, but change him for someone who is deserving; and when his subjects are ungrateful for benefits and do not appreciate security and ease, but ponder treachery in their hearts, shewing unruliness and overstepping their bounds, he will admonish them for their misdeeds, and punish them in proportion to their crimes. Having done that he will cover their sins with the skirt of pardon and oblivion. Further he will bring to pass that which concerns the advance of civilization, such as constructing underground channels, digging main canals, building bridges across great waters, rehabilitating villages and farms, raising fortifications, building new towns, and erecting lofty buildings and magnificent dwellings; he will have inns built on the highways and schools for those who seek knowledge; for which things he will be renowned for ever; he will gather the fruit of his good works in the next world and blessings will be showered upon him.

4. Since the decree of God was such that this should be the era by which bygone ages are to be dated and that it should crown the achievements of former kings, whereby He might bestow on His creatures a felicity granted to none before them, He caused The Master of the World, the mightiest king of kings to come forth from two nobles' lines whose houses were cradles of royalty and nobility, and had been so from generation to generation as far back as the great Afrasiyab;¹ He furnished him with powers and merits such as had been lacking in the princes of the world before him, and endowed him with all that is needful for a king—such as a comely appearance, a kindly disposition, integrity, manliness, bravery, horsemanship, knowledge, [skill in] the use of various kinds of arms

¹ Primordial king of the Turkish race.

and accomplishment in several arts, pity and mercy upon the creatures of God, [strictness in] the performance of vows and promises, sound faith and true belief, devotion to the worship of God and the practice of such virtuous deeds as praying in the night,¹ supererogatory fasting, respect for religious authorities, honouring devout and pious men, winning the society of men of learning and wisdom, giving regular alms, doing good to the poor, being kind to subordinates and servants, and relieving the people of oppressors. Following all this God gave him power and dominion as befitted his worthiness and good faith, and made all the world subject to him, causing his dignity and authority to reach all climes; all the dwellers on earth are his tributaries, and as long as they seek his favour they are protected by his sword.

5. Now in the days of some of the caliphs, if ever their empire became extended it was never free from unrest and the insurrections of rebels; but in this blessed age (praise and thanks be to Allah) there is nobody in all the world who in his heart mediates opposition to our lord and master, or ventures his head outside the collar of obedience to him—may God perpetuate this empire until the resurrection and keep the evil eye far from the perfectness of this kingdom, so that His creatures may pass their days under the equity and authority of The Master of the World and be ever intent on blessing him.

6. Such is the happy state of this great empire; and in proportion to its greatness it is blessed with an abundance of wise and good institutions. The wisdom of The Master of the World is like a taper from which many lamps have been lighted; by its light men find their way and emerge from the darkness. He has no need of any counsellor or guide; nevertheless he is not without cares, and perhaps he wishes to test his servants, and assess their intelligence and wisdom. So when he commanded his humble servant to write down some of those good qualities that are indispensable to a king, indicating every principle which kings have followed in the past but now do not observe, whether praiseworthy or unpraiseworthy, whatever came to the mind of his humble servant that he had seen, learnt, read or heard, was written down, and The Sublime Command was

¹ i.e. in addition to the five prescribed times of prayer.

On the extent of God's grace towards kings

fulfilled; these few chapters were composed in the manner of an epilogue, and what was proper to each chapter was mentioned in that chapter in a simple style, by the grace of Allah.

CHAPTER TWO

On recognizing the extent of God's grace towards kings

1. It is for kings to observe His pleasure (His name be glorified) and the pleasure of The Truth is in the charity which is done to His creatures and in the justice which is spread among them. A kingdom which is blessed by its people will endure and increase from day to day, while its king will enjoy power and prosperity; in this world he will acquire good fame, in the next world salvation, and his reckoning will be the easier. Great men have said [in Arabic], 'A kingdom may last while there is irreligion, but it will not endure when there is oppression.' (The meaning is . . .¹)

2. Tradition tells that when Joseph the prophet (the prayers of Allah and His peace be upon him) went out from this world, they were carrying him to Abraham's tomb (upon him be peace) to bury him near his forefathers, when Gabriel (upon him be peace) came and said, 'Stop where you are; this is not his place; for at the resurrection he will have to answer for the sovereignty which he has exercised.' Now if the case of Joseph the prophet was such, consider what the position of others will be.

3. It has come down in a tradition from The Prophet (may Allah bless him and save him) that on the day of the resurrection, when anyone is brought forward who [in his life] wielded power and command over God's creatures, his hands will be bound; if he has been just, his justice will loose his hands and send him to paradise; but if he has been unjust, his injustice will cast him into hell as he is, with his hands bound in chains.

¹ The translation into Persian corresponds exactly to the Arabic.

On the extent of God's grace towards kings

4. There is also a tradition that on resurrection day whoever had any command in this world over God's creatures, even over the inhabitants of his own house or over his own underlings, will be questioned about it; likewise the shepherd who tended his sheep will be required to answer for that too.

5. They say that at the time of his father's leaving this world 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar ibn al Khattab (may Allah be pleased with them both) asked, 'O father, where and when shall I see you again?' 'Umar said, 'In the next world.' 'Abd Allah said, 'I would it were sooner.' He said, 'You will see me in a dream tonight, tomorrow night, or the next night.' Twelve years passed by without his appearing in a dream. Then one night he saw him in a dream and said, 'O father, did you not say that within three nights I should see you?' He said, 'O son, I was occupied, because in the country around Baghdad¹ a bridge had become dilapidated and officials had not attended to repairing it. One day a sheep's forefoot fell into a hole on that bridge and was broken. Till now I have been answering for that.'

6. Of a certainty The Master of the World (may Allah perpetuate his reign) should know that on that great day he will be asked to answer for all those of God's creatures who are under his command, and if he tries to transfer [his responsibility] to someone else he will not be listened to. Since this is so it behoves the king not to leave this important matter to anyone else, and not to disregard the state of God's creatures. To the best of his ability let him ever acquaint himself, secretly and openly, with their conditions; let him protect them from extortionate hands, and preserve them from cruel tyrants, so that the blessings resulting from those actions may come about in the time of his rule, if Allah wills.

¹ Baghdad was not yet founded in the time of 'Umar ibn al Khattab.

CHAPTER THREE

On holding court for the redress of wrongs and practising justice and virtue

1. It is absolutely necessary that on two days in the week the king should sit for the redress of wrongs, to extract recompense from the oppressor, to give justice and to listen to the words of his subjects with his own ears, without any intermediary. It is fitting that some written petitions should also be submitted if they are comparatively important, and he should give a ruling on each one. For when the report spreads throughout the kingdom that on two days in the week The Master of the World summons complainants and petitioners before him and listens to their words, all oppressors will be afraid and curb their activities, and no one will dare to practise injustice or extortion for fear of punishment.

2. I have read in the books of the ancients that most of the non-Arab [Persian] kings used to put up a high platform and sit up there on horseback so that they could see all the complainants gathered round about, and they would redress the grievances of every one. The reason for this was that when the king sits in a place protected by gates, locks, vestibules and screens, self-interested and oppressive persons can keep people back and not let them go before the king.

3. I have heard that a certain king was rather hard of hearing. He was anxious lest those who acted as interpreters might not report the words of the complainants correctly, and that he, not knowing the true facts, might give an order quite unsuitable to the case. So he commanded that all complainants were to wear red clothes, so that he could recognize them; no one else at all was to wear red. This king used to appear on the plain seated upon an elephant, and wherever he saw people in red clothes, he ordered them to be collected in a group. Then he would sit in a place apart and they were brought before him; they stated their cases in a loud voice and he gave them justice.

Men have taken all this care so that they may not be found ignorant when they have to give their answer in the next world.

On holding court for the redress of wrongs

The story of The Just Amir and the Saffarids

4. One of the kings of the Samanid line was called Isma'il ibn Ahmad. He was extremely just, and his good qualities were many. He had a pure faith in God (to Him be power and glory) and he was generous to the poor—to name only one of his notable virtues. His seat was at Bukhara. Khurasan, 'Iraq¹ and Transoxiana all belonged to his ancestors.

5. Ya'qub ibn Laith emerged in revolt from the City of Sistan [Zaranj] and took the whole of Sistan; then he went to Khurasan, and captured that province; from Khurasan he went to 'Iraq, and seized the whole of 'Iraq. Propagandists deceived him and he secretly swore allegiance to the Isma'ilis; he hardened his heart against the caliph of Baghdad. Then he mustered the armies of Khurasan and 'Iraq and prepared to march to Baghdad to kill the caliph and overthrow the house of the 'Abbasids.

6. The caliph received information that Ya'qub was marching upon Baghdad. He sent a messenger to say, 'You have no business at Baghdad; it were better that you should attend to Kuhistan, Khurasan and 'Iraq, and administer them so that no disorder or anxiety may arise. Turn back.' He did not obey the command, but said, 'It is my desire that without fail I should come to the court, and carry out the rites of homage and renew my obligations; until I have done this, I will not turn back.' However many messengers the caliph sent, he gave this same answer. Then he moved his army towards Baghdad. The caliph became suspicious of him; he summoned the nobles of the state and said, 'I see that Ya'qub ibn Laith has withdrawn his head from the collar of obedience to us, and is coming here with treacherous intent, for we have not commanded him to come and yet he is coming; we command him to turn back; he turns not. At all events he has some evil design in his heart and I think he has sworn allegiance to the Batinis;² he will not reveal it until he arrives here. We must not neglect to take precautions against him; what is the best way to deal with this matter?'

¹ i.e. Persian 'Iraq: see Le Strange, *Lands*, 185.

² 'Esoterics': a term of reproach applied by the Sunnis to the Shi'ites, Isma'ilis and Qarmatis.

They settled on the following plan: that the caliph would not stay in the city, but go into the open country and pitch camp, and the nobles of Baghdad and all of his retinue would be with him; so that when Ya'qub arrived and saw the caliph in the open country with his troops, his plan would misfire and his rebellion against The Commander of the Faithful would become manifest; thereupon men would go to and fro from one camp to the other; for if he were starting a rebellion, not all the nobles and chiefs of Iraq and Khurasan would agree with him and assent to his plans: if he openly shewed his rebelliousness they would contend with his troops as best they could, but if they failed and were unable to cope with him in battle, very well—the road would be open before them and they would not be caught like prisoners within four walls; they would betake themselves wherever they could. This plan was acceptable to The Commander of the Faithful. Thus they did. And this caliph was al-Mu'tamid 'ala 'llah.

7. When Ya'qub arrived he dismounted opposite the caliph's camp and pitched his tents; and the men of the two armies mingled together. On that very day he bid defiance to the caliph and sent a messenger to him to say, 'Give up Baghdad and go where you like.' The caliph asked for two months grace; Ya'qub refused him. When night came on, the caliph secretly sent someone to the officers of Ya'qub's army to say, 'He has openly revolted, and made common cause with the Shi'ites; he has come on purpose to overthrow our house, and set our adversary in our place. Are you too in sympathy with him in this, or not?' One party said, 'From him we have received our subsistence and by virtue of service to him we enjoy the position and prosperity which we have. Whatever he has done we have done.' The majority said, 'We are not aware of these circumstances of which The Commander of the Faithful speaks; we do not think that he will oppose The Commander of the Faithful; hereafter if he openly rebels, we shall entirely disapprove; and in the hour of battle we shall come to your aid.' This party consisted of the army-commanders of Khurasan.

8. When the caliph heard the words of the chiefs of Ya'qub's army on this wise, he was glad. The next day in a bold spirit he sent a message to Ya'qub, saying, 'Now that you have openly displayed

your ingratitude and have made an agreement with my adversary, the sword is betwixt me and you; I am not afraid because my forces are few and yours are many. God (to Him be power and glory) is the helper of the right, and right is on my side. Those troops which you have really belong to me.' He gave the command, and his troops armed themselves, beat the drums of war and blew the trumpets; they went forth from the camp and drew ranks upon the plain.

9. When Ya'qub heard the caliph's message in those terms, he said, 'I am now attaining my desire.' And he too gave orders for the drums to be beaten; all his troops mounted and went in formation on to the plain and drew ranks opposite the caliph's forces. On the one side the caliph came and took up his position in the centre, and on the other side Ya'qub ibn Laith. Then the caliph ordered a certain man who had a powerful voice to go between the two arrays, and proclaim aloud, 'O assembly of Muslims, know that Ya'qub is a rebel and has come on purpose to overthrow the house of 'Abbas, and to bring the caliph's adversary from Mahdiyya¹ to replace him; he wishes to remove the *sunna* [orthodox tradition] and make heresy rife. Whoever opposes the caliph [successor] of The Prophet of God, has opposed The Prophet himself; and if any man plucks his head out of the collar of obedience to The Prophet (upon him be peace), it is as if he has renounced obedience to God and quitted the circle of Islam; as God (be He exalted) says in His incontrovertible book [Quran 4. 62], "Obey Allah, and obey The Messenger and those of you who are in authority." Who is there now amongst you who will choose heaven instead of hell, and will assist the truth and turn his face from vanity? Then let him be with me, not with my enemy.'

10. When the army of Ya'qub ibn Laith heard these words the commanders of Khurasan turned with one accord and approached the caliph and said, 'We thought that he was coming to your presence in obedience to your command; now that he has declared his opposition and rebellion, we are with you, and as long as we have life, we shall wield the sword on your behalf.'

11. When the caliph had thus acquired strength he ordered his total forces to make an assault. Ya'qub ibn Laith was defeated in

¹ The North African capital of the Fatimid (Ismā'īlī) caliphs, which was founded in A.D. 915 whereas Ya'qub's revolt took place about A.D. 875.

the first charge, and took to flight in the direction of Khuzistan. His treasury, stores and camp were all plundered, and the caliph's troops became rich with the spoil. When he reached Khuzistan he sent persons in all directions to call up troops; he began to summon his officers and gave orders that they should bring stores and money from the treasures of Iraq and Khurasan.

12. When the caliph received news that Ya'qub had settled in Khuzistan, he immediately sent a messenger with a letter to him saying, 'It is known to us that you are a simple-hearted fellow; you succumbed to the deceits of our adversaries, and you had no regard for the outcome of your venture. You saw how God (be He exalted) displayed his working to you; He caused you to be defeated even by your own troops, and he preserved our family. It was merely a misunderstanding on your part. I know that now you have woken up and are sorry for your deeds. Nobody is more suitable than you to be amir of Iraq and Khurasan; we shall not impose a higher authority over you, for by your services you are entitled to many rewards from us. We regard those admirable services as outweighing this your single error.' [The caliph considered that] since he was prepared to forgive his unwilliness and regard his action as undone, Ya'qub ought to forget the affair and go with all speed to Iraq and Khurasan, and devote himself to administering those provinces.

13. When Ya'qub read the caliph's letter his heart was in no way softened, nor did he repent of his actions. He ordered some leeks, onions and fish to be brought on a wooden tray and put before him. Then he ordered them to bring in the caliph's envoy and make him sit. He turned towards the courier and said, 'Go and tell the caliph that I was born a coppersmith; I learnt that trade from my father, and my vidual used to be barley-bread, fish, onions and leeks. The sovereignty, treasure and wealth which I enjoy, I have acquired by my own bold enterprise¹ and daring; I neither have it as an inheritance from my father, nor did I get it from you. I shall not rest until I have sent your head to Mahdiyya and destroyed your family. Either I shall do as I say or I shall go back even to my barley-bread, fish and leeks. Behold I have opened the doors of my treasures and

¹ Pers. 'gyānī 'knight-errantry' or 'chivalrous brigandage': see Levy, *Mirror for Princes*, 242, note 1.

summoned my troops; and I am coming in the tracks of the bearer of this message.' He despatched the courier. The caliph then sent many couriers and letters but he refused to abandon his project. He collected his army and set his course towards Baghdad. When he had gone three stages the colic gripped him, and his condition reached the point where he knew that he would not be delivered from the pain. He nominated his brother 'Amr ibn Laith as his heir, gave him the treasure-books, and died.

14. 'Amr ibn Laith returned to Khuzistan and stayed there a while. Then he went to Khurasan and reigned as king, keeping allegiance to the caliph. The army and the people liked 'Amr better than Ya'qub, for 'Amr was magnanimous, generous, enlightened and statesmanlike to a degree. His humanity and magnanimity went so far, that four hundred camels were required to transport his kitchen; other things can be inferred by analogy.

15. However the caliph continued to be apprehensive, lest 'Amr too should follow the ways of his brother, and later engage in the same activities. Although 'Amr had no such intentions, still the caliph was anxious on this score. Frequently and secretly he sent messengers to Bukhara to Isma'il ibn Ahmad to say, 'Go out against 'Amr ibn Laith; lead your army and wrest the kingdom from his grasp, for you have more right to govern Khurasan and Iraq, seeing that this was the kingdom of your fathers, and they [the Saffarids] have usurped it. Firstly you have the right, secondly your conduct is more acceptable, and thirdly my prayers are behind you. Considering these three points I have no doubt but that God will assist you against him. Regard not the fact that your supplies and troops are few; look at what God says [in the Quran 2. 250]: How many a little company has overcome a great company by Allah's leave! Allah is with the steadfast.'

16. The caliph's words had their effect on Isma'il. He firmly resolved to oppose 'Amr ibn Laith. He gathered all the forces he had, and having crossed to the near [south] side of the Oxus, he counted them with the tip of his whip. They amounted to 2,000 horsemen; one in two had a shield, out of twenty men one had a coat of mail, and of every fifty men one had a lance; and there were men who, for lack of a mount, were carrying their coats of mail

themselves, tied on to saddle-straps. Then he moved off from Amur [Amul] and came to the city of Marv.

17. 'Amr ibn Laith was informed that Isma'il ibn Ahmad had crossed the Oxus and come to Marv, whose city prefect had fled; Isma'il was aiming at capturing the province. 'Amr ibn Laith, who was at Nishapur, laughed. He paraded 70,000 cavalry, all clad in horse-armor with weapons and full equipment. He set out for Balkh. When the two armies met they joined battle. It so happened that 'Amr ibn Laith was defeated at the gates of Balkh and his 70,000 horsemen fled without one man being wounded or taken prisoner; of them all 'Amr alone was captured. When they brought him in front of Isma'il, he ordered them to hand him over to his guards. And this is one of the wonders of the world.

18. At the time of afternoon prayers a certain groom belonging to 'Amr ibn Laith was wandering in the camp. He happened to see 'Amr; his heart was stricken and he went up to him. 'Amr said, 'Stay with me tonight for I am left all alone'; then he said, 'As long as a man is alive, there is no escaping the need for food; contrive to find something to eat.' The groom procured one maund of meat and borrowed an iron frying-pan from the soldiers. Then he ran around and collected a little dry dung; and he put together two or three clods of earth, intending to make a dry fry. When he had put the meat in the frying-pan, he just went to look for some salt. The day had then come to its close. A dog came and put its head into the frying-pan and took out a bone, so burning its mouth; it raised its head and the ring of the frying-pan fell round its neck. On feeling the heat of the fire it leapt up and carried off the frying-pan. When 'Amr ibn Laith saw that, he turned towards the soldiers and guards and said, 'Take warning: I am that man whose kitchen in the morning was transported by four hundred camels; at evening a dog took it away. [In Arabic:] I was an *amir* in the morning: I became an *asir* [prisoner] in the evening.' (That means: In the morning I was an amir: at evening I am a prisoner.) And this event too is one of the wonders of the world.

19. In connection with the amir Isma'il and 'Amr ibn Laith, even more remarkable than these two events is the fact that when 'Amr was captured, the amir Isma'il turned to the nobles and chiefs

of his army and said, 'God granted me this success, and to no one am I indebted for this favour except to God (His name be magnified).' Then he said, 'Know that this 'Amr ibn Laith was a man of lofty purposes and great generosity; he was well provided with equipment and supplies, and possessed wisdom and prudence besides. In the conduct of affairs he was vigilant, and he was abundantly hospitable and liberal in his expression of gratitude. It is my idea to see to it that he suffers no harm and is freed from his bonds.' The nobles said, 'The amir's opinion is best; let him command whatever is advisable.' He then sent someone to 'Amr ibn Laith to say, 'Do not fear, because I am planning to ask the caliph for your life to be spared. Even if it costs the whole of my treasury, I shall not mind so long as you suffer no mortal harm and can pass the rest of your life in safety.'

20. When 'Amr ibn Laith heard this, he said, 'I know that there will never be any escape for me from these bonds, nevertheless, thou who art Isma'il, send me a confidant, for I have some words to say; let him report them to you just as he hears them from me.' The man came and told Isma'il. Isma'il at once sent him a confidant, and 'Amr said to him, 'Tell Isma'il: It was not you that defeated me, but it was your piety, faith and character, together with the displeasure of The Commander of the Faithful. God (to Him be power and glory) has taken away this realm from me and given it to you, and you by your goodness are more worthy and deserving of this favour. I have surrendered to God (to Him be power and glory), and I do not wish you anything but good. Meanwhile you have acquired a new kingdom, but you have no wealth or backing. Now I and my brother have many treasures and buried hoards, and the list of them is in my possession; I offer them all to you, so that you may gain backing and power; you should procure supplies and stores, and replenish your treasury.' Thereupon he revealed the treasure-list and sent it to Isma'il by the hand of that confidant.

21. When the confidant came and repeated what he had heard and placed the treasure-list in front of Isma'il, he turned towards the nobles and said, 'This 'Amr ibn Laith is so cunning that he thinks he can escape from our cunning hands and catch us in the traps and snares of eternal ruin.' He picked up the treasure-list and threw it in

front of the confidant, saying, 'Take this treasure-list back to him and say: You with your wiles think you can escape from everything. Whence fell treasure to you and your brother, for your father was a coppersmith and taught you that trade? Through some celestial chance you seized dominion, and by reckless ventures your affairs prospered. This treasure with its dirams and dinars is all that which you have taken from the people by extortion; it comes from the price of thread spun by decrepit old men and widowed women, from the provisions of strangers and travellers, and from the property of weaklings and orphans. Tomorrow you will have to answer for all this before God (to Him be power and glory); so now you promptly want to cast these wrongs about our neck, so that on the morrow at the resurrection when creditors seize you and ask you to give back all the property which you wrongfully took, you will say, "All that we took from you, we gave to Isma'il; seek it from him." You will transfer it all to me and I shall be powerless to answer the creditors and to withstand the wrath and interrogation of God.' Such was his piety and fear of God that he did not accept the treasure-list but sent it back to 'Amr. So he was not deluded by worldly goods.

22. Is that like the amirs of these times who think nothing of condoning ten crimes for the sake of one ill-gotten dinar? They pervert the truth and have no regard for the consequences.

23. Now it was the custom of this Isma'il ibn Ahmad that on days when the cold was severe and snow was falling heavily, he would mount his horse and go alone to the square [of Bukhara], remaining there on horseback until the midday prayers. He used to say, 'It may be that a complainant will come to the court with a petition, and he may not have any money for expenses or anywhere to stay. If we excused ourselves from appearing because of the snow and cold, it would be difficult for such a person to stay and gain access to us. If he knows that we are standing here, he will come and discharge his business and go away in peace.'

There are many stories of this kind; only a few have been repeated here. And all this care has been taken for the sake of the answer in the next world.

CHAPTER FOUR

Concerning tax-collectors and constant enquiry into the affairs of wazirs

1. Tax-collectors,¹ when they are given a fiscal district, must be instructed to deal honourably with their fellow creatures, and to take only the due amount of revenue, and to claim that too with civility and courtesy, and not to demand any taxes from them until the time comes for them to pay; because when they demand payment before the time, trouble comes upon the peasants, and to pay the tax they are obliged to sell their crops for half [of what they would be worth when they ripen], whereby they are driven to extremities and have to emigrate. If any peasant is in distress and in need of oxen or seed, let him be given a loan to ease his burden and keep him viable, lest he be cast out from his home into exile.

2. I heard that in the time of King Qubad there was famine in the world for seven years, and blessings [rain] ceased to come down from heaven. He ordered the tax-collectors to sell all the grain which they had, and even to give some of it away as charity. All over the kingdom the poor were assisted by gifts from the central treasury and [local] treasures, with the result that not one person died of hunger in those seven years—all because the king chid his officers.

3. One must enquire constantly into the affairs of the tax-collector. If he comports himself in the manner just described, the fiscal district can be kept in his hands, but if not, he must be changed for someone suitable. If he has taken more than is due from the peasants, it must be recovered from him and given back to them; after that if he has any property left, it must be seized and brought into the treasury. The officer should be dismissed, and never employed again. Others will then take warning and give up practising extortion.

4. It is also necessary to enquire secretly into the affairs of ministers and confidants, especially the wazir, to see if he is fulfilling his function properly or not, for the good or ill of king and kingdom depends on him. When the wazir is of good character and sound

¹ Muhammad Nazim, *Sultan Mahmud*, 126-50, describes the functions of most of the officials mentioned in this book.