

without orders. How like the story of David and the Amalekite in Ziklag! (2 Samuel, ch. i.).

The chronology of these events is doubtful. Rashiduddin seems to put the defeat of Toktai near the Don in 1298-1299, and a passage in Wassáf extracted by Hammer seems to put the defeat and death of Noghai about 1303. On the other hand, there is evidence that war between the two was in full flame in the beginning of 1296; Makrizi seems to report the news of a great defeat of Toktai by Noghai as reaching Cairo in *Jumadah* I. A.H. 697 or February-March, 1298. And Novairi, from whom D'Ohsson gives extracts, appears to put the defeat and death of Noghai in 1299. If the battle on the Don is that recounted by Marco it cannot be put later than 1297, and he must have had news of it at Venice, perhaps from relations at Soldaia. I am indeed reluctant to believe that he is not speaking of events of which he had cognizance *before* quitting the East; but there is no evidence in favour of that view. (*Golden Horde*, especially 269 *seqq.*; *Ilchan*. II. 347, and also p. 35; *D'Ohsson*, IV. Appendix; *Q. Mákrizi*, IV. 60.)

The symbolical message mentioned above as sent by Toktai to Noghai, consisted of a hoe, an arrow, and a handful of earth. Noghai interpreted this as meaning, "If you hide in the earth, I will dig you out! If you rise to the heavens I will shoot you down! Choose a battle-field!" What a singular similarity we have here to the message that reached Darius 1800 years before, on this very ground, from Toktai's predecessors, alien from him in blood it may be, but identical in customs and mental characteristics:—

"At last Darius was in a great strait, and the Kings of the Scythians having ascertained this, sent a herald bearing, as gifts to Darius, a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. . . . Darius's opinion was that the Scythians meant to give themselves up to him. . . . But the opinion of Gobryas, one of the seven who had deposed the Magus, did not coincide with this; he conjectured that the presents intimated: 'Unless, O Persians, ye become birds, and fly into the air, or become mice and hide yourselves beneath the earth, or become frogs and leap into the lakes, ye shall never return home again, but be stricken by these arrows.' And thus the other Persians interpreted the gifts." (*Herodotus*, by Carey, IV. 131, 132.) Again, more than 500 years after Noghai and Toktai were laid in the steppe, when Muraviev reached the court of Khiva in 1820, it happened that among the Russian presents offered to the Khan were two loaves of sugar on the same tray with a quantity of powder and shot. The Uzbeks interpreted this as a symbolical demand: Peace or War? (*V. en Turcomanie*, p. 165.)

CHAPTER XXX.

OF THE SECOND MESSAGE THAT TOCTAI SENT TO NOGAI, AND HIS REPLY.

♣ (THEY carry a threat of attack if he should refuse to present himself before Toctai. Nogai refuses with defiance. Both sides prepare for war, but Toctai's force is the greater in numbers.)