

CORRESPONDENCE.

1. LE THÉÂTRE PERSAN.

June 10, 1890.

SIR,—M. Montet's letter in the April Journal is one of considerable interest—involving no less important a question than the regeneration of Persia. There is much that could be said or written in support of the views enunciated, but I will confine my remarks to a brief comment on his theory of the Religious Drama in contradistinction to the very secular "Comédies" of Mirza Fath 'Ali.

I fully agree with him in his assertion that "la religion est le souverain bien de l'homme : " also that the *ʿazbya* " peut, sous l'influence de circonstances que nous ne saurions prévoir, circonstances religieuses avant tout, devenir le point de départ d'un mouvement patriotique, d'un relèvement national, d'une rénovation sociale." Moreover, that the particular plays recently translated from the Turkish, "n'appartiennent qu'indirectement au théâtre persan, d'autant plus qu'elles ne paraissent point avoir été jouées en Orient, où elles n'ont eu qu'un médiocre succès de lecture ;" and "ne sont qu'une imitation, un pastiche, des comédies européennes."

But what is the probable reason why these plays have not been acted, nor the teaching of them encouraged in Persia? May it not be that they touch too keenly the sore points of the Persian character, and interpret too plainly the national vanity which kills every germ of enlightenment obtained from outside influences? They lay bare for the first time in Oriental literature a painful Truth, acquaintance with which is the first step to reformation. My humble opinion is that a drastic treatment such as this would open the minds of the

more simple-minded native to the wretched shams which he has been taught to acknowledge as Justice and equitable government, and to the real character of those whose decisions he has been trained to respect and obey—consequently, to the consciousness of power to rise from his self-imposed abasement and become a free and thinking creature.

The religious drama, unlike the teaching of Western Christianity, has nothing to impart to its student *regarding himself*; nor does the sympathy evoked in his breast for the first martyrs of his Faith find vent in practical relief of the distress of his fellow-men, or cause him to give attention to his surroundings, and see whether he can suggest a remedy for their bodily wants and moral shortcomings. If Mirza Fath 'Ali's plays do not attempt high teaching, they are at least suggestive of a healthy innovation, which many Persians now living are capable of turning to good account, both for themselves and their countrymen. As to their value for English students of the language of S'adi and Ḥāfīz, I can only express my belief that nothing can approach them in usefulness for colloquial purposes among all the books hitherto recognized by the Government of India.

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2. DERIVATION OF THE WORD "GANGA."

SIR,—I suggested in p. 542 of the present Number of the Royal Asiatic Society's Journal the possibility of there being some connection between the ancient name of Bengal, Vanga, the river Veh of the Zendavesta encircling the sacred land of the Aryans, and the goddess Ashi Vanguhi; and further pointed out that it might be possible that the Kusikas of Irān, when they settled in India, should have extended their sacred Veh or boundary river from the Indus to the Ganges.

It has since occurred to me that a further argument in support of this contention might be derived from the name of the sacred river Guṅgā.

The name Gaṅgā appears among a list of goddesses in Rig-veda ii. 32. 7, in the form Guṅgū (Grassmann, Rigveda, vol. i.