Book of the Laws of the Countries / The Dialogue on Fate

Bardesanes of Edessa (AD 154–222)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

Book of the Laws of the Countries / The Dialogue on Fate

BARDESAN. — THE BOOK OF THE — LAWS OF COUNTRIES.

A FEW days ago we went up to visit Shemashgram, our brother. And Bardesan came and found us there; and when he had felt him, and seen that he was well, he asked us, "What were you talking about, for I heard your voice from without as I was coming in?" For he was accustomed, whenever he found us talking about any thing before him, to ask us, "What were you saying?" that he might converse with us about it. We therefore said to him," This Avida was saying to us: 'That if God he one, as you say, and He created mankind, and willeth that you should do that which you are commanded, why did He not create men so that they should not be able to go wrong, but always should do what is good; for by this His will would be accomplished.'" Bardesan saith to him, "Tell me, my son Avida, why dost thou think that the God of all is not one, or that He is one, and doth not will that men should conduct themselves holily and uprightly?"

Avida saith, "I, my Lord, asked these of my own age in order that they might give me a reply." Bardesan saith to him, "If thou desirest to learn, it would be advantageous for thee, that thou shouldest learn from one who is older |2 than they: but if to teach, it is not requisite that thou shouldest question them, but that thou shouldest persuade them to ask thee what they desire. For teachers are usually asked, and do not themselves ask. And whenever they do put a question, it should be 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 put questions." Avida saith, "I am desirous of learning, but I began first to question these my brethren, because I was ashamed of asking thee."

Bardesan saith, "Thou speakest cleverly. Nevertheless know that he who putteth his inquiries properly, and is willing to be convinced, and draweth near to the way of truth without obstinacy, needeth not be ashamed, because he will certainly give pleasure to him to whom the inquiry is directed, by those things which I have mentioned. If therefore, my son, thou hast any thing in thy mind respecting this about which thou wast inquiring, tell it to us all; and if it please us also, we shall participate with thee; and if it please us not, necessity will compel us to shew thee why it does not please us. And if thou wert only desiring to

know this word, without having any thing in thy mind respecting it, as a man who has lately attached himself to the Disciples and is a recent inquirer, I will inform thee, in order that thou mayest not depart from us without profit; and if those things which I tell thee please thee, we have also for thee other things respecting this matter, but if they please thee not, we for our part shall have spoken without any ill feeling."

Avida saith, "I even greatly desire to hear and to be convinced, because it is not from any other I have heard this word; but I have spoken it of my own mind to these my brethren, and they were not willing to convince me, but say, 'Believe really, and thou wilt be able to know every thing;' but I am not able to believe unless I be convinced." Bardesan saith, "Not Avida alone is unwilling to believe, but also many, because they have in them no faith, are not even able to be convinced, but always are pulling down and building up, and are |3 found destitute of all knowledge of the truth. Nevertheless, because Avida is not willing to believe, lo! I will speak to you who do believe concerning this which he inquireth, and he will hear something more."

And he began to say to us, "There are many men who have not faith, and have not received knowledge from the wisdom of the truth. And on this account they are not competent to speak and to instruct, and do not easily incline themselves to hear. For they have not the foundation of faith to build upon, and they have no confidence upon which they may hope And because they also doubt respecting God, they likewise have not within them that fear of Him which would liberate them from all fears: for whoso hath not the fear of God within him, he is subject to every fear. For even with respect to that, whatever it may be, which they do not believe, they are not sure that they properly disbelieve; but they are unstable in their minds, and are not able to stand, and the taste of their thoughts is insipid in their mouth, and they are always timid and hasty and rash. But as to what Avida was saying, 'Why did not God create us so that we should not sin and be guilty?' ----if man had been created so, he would not have been for himself, but would have been the instrument of him who moved him; and it is known that, whoso moveth as he chuseth he moveth him either to good or to evil. And how then would a man differ from a harp, upon which, another playeth, or from a ship, which another steereth:

but the praise and the blame stand in the hand of the artist, and the harp itself knoweth not what is played upon it, nor the ship whether it be well steered and guided; but they are instruments which are made for the use of him who possesseth in himself the science. But God in his kindness did not will that he should create man so. But he exalted him by Free-will above many things, and made him equal with the angels. For observe the sun and the moon and the sphere, and the rest of those creatures which are greater than we in some things, that there is not given to them Free-will of themselves, but they are all fixed by ordinance that they should do that only which is ordained for them, and nothing else. For the sun |4 never saith, that I will not rise at my time; nor the moon, that I will not change, and not wane, and not increase; nor does any one of the stars say, that I will not rise, and I will not set; nor the sea, that I will not bear the ships, and I will not stand within my

hounds; nor the hills, that we will not continue in the places in which we are set; nor do the winds say that we will not blow; nor the earth, that I will not bear and sustain whatsoever is upon me:

but all these things serve and are subject to one ordinance, for they are the instruments of the wisdom of God which erreth not. For if every thing ministered, who would be he that is ministered unto; and if every thing were ministered unto, who would be he that ministered? And there would not be one thing differing from another. For that which is single and hath no difference in it, is a Being which up to this hour has not been established. But those things, which are requisite for ministration, have been fixed in the power of man, because in the image of Elohim he was created. On this account there has been given to him these things in kindness, that they might minister to him for a season; and it has been given to him to govern himself by his own will, and that whatever he is able to do, if he will he should do it, and if he will not, he should not do it; and he should justify or condemn himself. For if he had been made so that he would not be able to do evil by which he may be condemned, in the same manner also the good which he should do would not be his, and he would not be able to be justified by it. For whoso should not of his own will do that which is good or evil, his justification and his condemnation would stand in that Fortune for which he is created.

On this account, let it be manifest to you, that the goodness of God has been great towards man, and that there has been given to him Free-will more than to all those Elements of which we have been speaking; that by this same Free-will he may justify himself, and govern himself in a godlike manner, and associate with the angels, who also are possessed of Free-will for themselves; for we know, that even the angels, if they had not been possessed of Free-will for themselves, would not have had intercourse with the daughters of men, and would not have sinned nor fallen from |5 their places. And in the same manner therefore those others which did the will of their Lord, by their power over themselves were exalted and sanctified, and received mighty gifts. For every one that exists stands in need of the Lord of all; and there is no end to his gifts. But nevertheless know ye, that even those things of which I have said that they stand by ordinance, are not entirely devoid of all freedom, and on this account at the last day they all shall be subject to judgment."

I say to him, "And how can those things which are fixed be judged?" He saith to me, "Not in so far as they are fixed, oh, Philip, will the Elements be judged, but in so far as they have power; for Beings when they are set in order arc not deprived of their natural property, but of their force of energy, being diminished by the mingling of one with another, and they are subdued by the power of their Creator; and in so far as they are subject, they will not be judged, but in that which is their own." Avida saith to him, "Those things which thou hast said are very good. But lo! the commandments which have been given to men are severe, and they are not able to perform them."

Bardesan saith, "This is the answer of such an one as doth not desire to do that which is good; and more especially of him who has obeyed and submitted to his enemy. For men are not commanded to do any thing but what they are able to do. For there are two commandments

set before us such as are suitable and just for Free-will: one that we separate ourselves from every thing which is evil and which we should dislike to be done to ourselves; and the other that we should do that which is good and which we love, and desire that it should also be done to us likewise. What man, therefore, is there who is unable to avoid stealing, or to avoid lying or committing adultery and fornication, or that he should be guilty of hatred and falsehood? For lo! all these things are subject to the mind of man, and it is not in the power of the body they are, but in the will of the soul. For even if a man be poor and sick and old, or impotent, in his limbs, he is able to avoid doing all these things; and as he is able to |6 avoid doing these things, so is he able to love, and to bless, and to speak the truth, and to pray for that which is good for every one whom he knoweth:

and if he be in health and have the use of his hands, he is able too to give something of that which he hath; also to support by the strength of body him who is sick arid broken down, this too he is able to do. Who, therefore, it is that is not able to do what those devoid of faith murmur about, I know not. For I think, that it is in these commandments more than in any thing man has power. For they are easy, and there is nothing that is able to hinder them. For we are not commanded to carry heavy burthens of stones, or of timber, or of any thing else, which those only who are powerful in body are able to do; nor that we should build fortresses and found cities, which kings only are able to do; nor that we should steer ships, which mariners only are skilled in steering; nor that we should measure and divide the earth, which geometricians only know how to do; nor any one of those arts which some men possess, and the rest are devoid of them; but there has been given to us according to the goodness of God commandments without grudging, such as every man who possesses a soul within him can do rejoicing; for there is no man who rejoiceth not when he doeth that which is good;

nor is there any one who doth not delight within himself when he refraineth from wicked things, with the exception of those who were not made for this grace, and are called Tares: for would not that judge be unjust who should blame a man for such a thing as he is not able to do?"

Avida saith to him, "Respecting these deeds, oh Bardesan, sayest thou that they are easy to perform?" Bardesan saith, "To him who desireth, I have said, and do say, that they are easy; for this is the good conduct of a free mind, and of that soul which hath not rebelled against its Governors. For there are many things which impede the action of the body, and more especially old age, and sickness, and poverty." Avida saith, "Perchance a man may be able to avoid wicked things, but to do good things who among men is able?"

Bardesan saith, "It is more easy to do good than to abstain from |7 evil. For the good is the man's own, and on this account he rejoiceth whenever he doeth good; but the evil is the operation of the enemy, and on this account, when a man is troubled and not sound in his nature, he doeth wicked things. For know, my son, that it is an easy thing for a man to praise and bless his friend; but that a man should not blame and revile him that he hates is not easy. But nevertheless, this is possible to be; and whenever a man doeth that which

is good, his mind is cheerful and his conscience tranquil, and he is pleased that every one should see what he does; but whenever a man acts wrongly, and committeth an injury, he is agitated and troubled, and full of rage and anger, and is tormented in his soul and in his body: and when he standeth in this mind, he is not pleased to be seen by every one; and those things in which he rejoiceth, which even praise and blessing follow, are rejected by him; but upon those things by which he is agitated and troubled followeth the curse of blame. But perhaps a man may say, that even fools are pleased when they do vile things:---but not in the doing of them, and not in being commended, and not for good hope; and this pleasure doth not continue with them.

For the enjoyment which is in a sound state for good hope is one; and the enjoyment in an unhealthy state for bad hope is another. For lust is one thing and love is another; and friendship is one thing and sodality another; and we ought plainly to understand that the unrestrained ardour of love is called lust, which although there may be in it enjoyment for a moment, nevertheless is far removed from that true love, whose enjoyment is for ever uncorruptible and indissoluble."

I say to him, "After this manner again was this Avida saying, 'That it is from his Nature man acteth wrongly; for if he had not been formed naturally to do wrong, he would not do wrong.'" Bardesan saith, "If all men did one deed and acted with the one mind, it would then be known that it was their Nature governed them, and they would not have the Free-will of which I spake to you. Nevertheless, in order that ye may understand what is Nature and what is Free-will, I will proceed to inform you. |8

The Nature of man is this: that he should be born, and grow up, and rise in stature, and beget children, and grow old, by eating and by drinking, and sleeping, and waking, and that he should die. These because they are of Nature, belong to all men, and not to all men only, but also to all animals which have a soul in them; and some of them also to trees. For this is a physical operation which performeth and produceth and establisheth every thing as it has been ordained. But Nature also is found to be maintained by animals too in their actions. For the lion eateth flesh, by his Nature; and on this account all lions are eaters of flesh. And the sheep eateth grass; and for this reason all sheep are eaters of grass. And the bee maketh honey by which it sustains itself; for this reason all bees are honey-makers. And the ant layeth up for itself a store in summer, that it may sustain itself from it in the winter; and for this reason all ants do likewise. And the scorpion striketh with its sting him who hath not hurt it; and so likewise all scorpions strike. And all animals maintain their Nature; and those which feed upon grass do not eat flesh; nor do those that feed upon flesh eat grass. But men are not governed in this manner;

but in the things belonging to their bodies they maintain their Nature like animals, and in the things |9 which belong to their minds they do that which they wish, as being free and with power, and as 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 in the eating of flesh; and there are some of them that do not eat the flesh of any animal in which there is a soul; and

there are some of them that have connexion with their mothers, and with their sisters, and with their daughters; and there are some that never approach women at all; and there are some that avenge themselves like lions and like leopards; and there are some that injure him who has not done them any harm, like scorpions; and there are some that are led like sheep, and do not hurt those who govern them; and there are some who conduct themselves with virtue, and some |10 with righteousness, and some with vice. And if any one should say, they have each individually a Nature to do so, let him see that it is not so. For there are some who were fornicators and drunkards, and when the admonition of good counsels reached them, they became chaste and temperate, and abandoned the lust of their bodies. And there are some who conducted themselves with chastity and temperance;

and when they became negligent of right admonition, and despised the commands of the Deity, and of their instructors, fell from the way of truth, and became fornicators and prodigals; and there are some who repented again after their fall; and fear came upon them, and they returned to the truth in which they stood. What, then, is man's Nature? for lo! all men differ one from another in their conduct, and in their desires; and those who stood in one will and in one counsel resemble one another: but those men whose lust is enticing them up to the present moment, and whose passion governs them, desire to attribute whatsoever they do wrong to their Creator; so that they themselves may be found without fault, and He who created them may be condemned by a vain plea; and they do not see that Nature has no law, for a man is not blamed because he is tall in his stature or little, or white or black; or because his eyes be large or small; or for any one of the defects of the body: but he is blamed if he steal, or lie, or practise deceit, or poisoneth, or curseth, or doeth such things as are like these; for lo! from hence it is evident, that as to those things which are not done by our hands, but which we have from Nature, we are not indeed condemned by these; neither by these are we justified;

but those things which we do by our own Freewill, if they be good, by them we are justified and praised, and if they be wicked, by them we are condemned and blamed." |11

Again we asked him, and said to him, "There are others who say, that by the decree of Fortune men are governed, at one time wickedly, and at another time well."

He said to us, "I likewise, O Phillip and Baryama, know that there are men who are called Chaldeans, and others who love this knowledge of the art, as I also once loved it; for it has been said by me, in another place, that the soul of man is capable of knowing that which many do not know, and the same men meditate to do; and all that they do wrong, and all that they do good, and all the things which happen to them in riches and in poverty, and in sickness and in health, and in defects of the body, it is from the influence of those Stars, which are called the Seven, they befal them, and they are governed by them. But there are others which say the opposite of these things,----how that this art is a lie of the Chaldeans, or that Fortune does not exist at all, but it is an empty name; and all things are placed in the hands of man, great and small: and bodily defects and faults happen and befal him by chance. But others say that whatsoever a man doeth, he doeth of his own will, by the Free-

will that has been given to him, and the faults and defects and evil things which happen to him, he receiveth as a punishment from God. But as for myself, in my humble opinion, it appeareth to me that these three sects are partly true, and partly false.

They are true, because men speak after the fashion which they see, and because, also, men see how things happen to them, and mistake;----because the wisdom of God is richer than they, which has established the worlds and created man, and has ordained the Governors, and has given to all things the power which is suitable for each one of them. But I say that God and the Angels, and the Powers, and the Governors, and the Elements, and men and animals have this power: but all these orders of which I have spoken have not power given to them in every thing. For he that is powerful in every thing is One; but they have power in some things, and in some tilings they have no power, as I have said: that the goodness of God may be seen in that in which they have power, and in that in which they have no power they may know that they have a Lord. There is, therefore, Fortune, as the |12 Chaldeans say: but that every thing is not in our will is apparent from hence----that the majority of men have wished to be rich and to have powerover their fellows, and to be healthy in their bodies, and that things should be subject to them as they desire: yet wealth is not found but with few; nor power, except with one here and there; nor health of body with all men; neither do those who are rich have entire possession of their riches;

nor those who are in power have all things obedient to them as they wish: and sometimes they are disobedient in a manner which they do not wish: and at one time the rich are wealthy as they desire, and at another time they become poor in a manner which they do not desire; and those who are perfectly poor dwell in a manner that they do not wish, and live in the world in a manner that they do not desire; and they covet things, and they flee from them. And many beget children, and do not bring them up; and others bring them up, and they do not inherit; and others inherit, and become a disgrace and an affliction: and others are rich as they wish, and have ill health as they do not wish; and others are healthy as they desire, and are poor as they do not desire. There are some who have many of the things which they wish, and few of those which they do not wish; and there are some who have many of the things which they do not wish, and few of those which they do wish: and thus it is found, that riches, and honours, and health, and sickness, and children, and various objects of desire, are placed under Fortune, and are not in our own power. But with such as are according as we wish, we are pleased and delighted; and towards such as we do not wish we are drawn by force.

And from those things which befal us when we do not wish, it is evident, also, with respect to those things which we do wish, that it is not because we wish them that they befal us, but that they happen as they do happen; and with some of them we are pleased and with some not. And we men are found to be governed by Nature equally, and by Fortune differently, and by our Free-will each as he wishes.

”But let us speak now, and shew with respect to Fortune, that it has not power over every thing; for this very thing itself |13 which is called Fortune is an order of procession which

is given to the Powers and the Elements by God; and according to this procession and order, intelligences are changed by their coming down to be with the soul, and souls are changed by their coming down to be with the body: and this alternation itself is called the Fortune, and the Nativity of this assemblage, which is being sifted and purified, for the assistance of that which by the favour of God and by grace has been assisted, and is being assisted, till the consummation of all. The body, therefore, is governed by Nature, the soul also suffering with it and perceiving; and the body is not constrained nor assisted by Fortune in all the things which it does individually; for a man does not become a father before fifteen years, nor does a woman become a mother before thirteen years. And in the same manner, also, there is a law for old age; because women become effete from bearing, and men are deprived of the natural power of begetting; while other animals which are also governed by their own Nature, before those ages which I have specified, not only procreate, but also become too old to procreate, in the same manner as also the bodies of men when they are grown old do not procreate;

nor is Fortune able to give them children at that time at which the body has not the Nature to give them. Neither, again, is Fortune able to preserve the body of man in life, without eating and without drinking; nor even when it has meat and drink, to prevent it from dying, for these and many other things pertain to Nature itself; but when the times and manners of Nature are fulfilled, then comes Fortune apparent among these, and effecteth things that are distinct one from another; and at one time assists Nature and increases, and at another hinders it and hurts; and from Nature cometh the growth and perfection of the body; but apart from Nature and by Fortune come sicknesses and defects in the body. From Nature is the connexion of males and females, and the pleasure of the both heads; but from Fortune comes abomination and a different manner of connexion, and all the filthiness and indecency which men do for the cause of connexion through their lust. From Nature is birth, and children; and from Fortune sometimes the children are deformed; |14 and sometimes they are cast away, and sometimes they die untimely. From Nature there is a sufficiency in moderation for all bodies; and from Fortune comes the want of food, and affliction of the bodies; and thus, again, from the same Fortune is gluttony and extravagance which is not requisite. Nature ordains that old men should be judges for the young, and wise for the foolish;

and that the valiant should be chiefs over the weak, and the brave over the timid. But Fortune causeth that boys should be chiefs over the aged, and fools over the wise; and that in time of war the weak should govern the valiant, and the timid the brave. And know ye distinctly that, whenever Nature is disturbed from its right course, its disturbance is from the cause of Fortune, because those Heads and Governors, upon whom that alternation is which is called Nativity, are in opposition one to the other. And those of them which are called Right, they assist Nature, and add to its excellency, whenever the procession helps them, and they stand in the high places, which are in the sphere, in their own portions; and those which are called Left are evil: and whenever they, too, occupy the places of height, they are opposed to Nature, and not only injure men, but, at different times, also animals,

and trees and fruits, and the produce of the year, and the fountains of water, and every thing that is in the Nature which is under their control. And on account of these divisions and sects which exist among the Powers, some men have supposed that the world is governed without any superintendence, because they do not know that these sects and divisions and justification and condemnation proceed from that influence which is given in Free-will by God, that those actors also by the power of themselves may either be justified or condemned:

as we see that Fortune crushes Nature, so we can also see the Freewill of man repelling and crushing Fortune itself: but not in every thing, is also Fortune itself doth not repel Nature in everything; for it is proper that the three things, Nature and Fortune and |15 Free-will, should be maintained in their lives until the procession be accomplished, and the measure and number be fulfilled, as it seemed good before Him who ordained how should be the life and perfection of all creatures, and the state of all Beings and Natures."

Avida saith, "That it is not from his Nature a man doeth wrong . I am persuaded by those things which thou hast shewed, and that all men are not governed equally. But if thou art also able to shew this, that it is not from Fortune and Fate those act wrongly who do act wrongly, then it will be right to believe, that man holds his own Free-will, and by his Nature is brought near to those things which be good, and warned from the things which are wicked, and on this account he will also justly be judged in the last day." Bardesan saith, "From this, that men are not equally governed, art thou persuaded that it is not from their Nature they act wrongly? Therefore the matter constrains thee to believe that neither also from their Fortune do they altogether act wrongly, if we be able to shew thee that the decree of the Fortunes and the Powers does not move all men equally, but we have Free-will in ourselves to avoid serving Physical nature and being moved by the control of the Powers."

Avida saith, "Prove me this, and I will be convinced by thee, and whatever thou shalt charge me I will do." Bardesan saith, " Have you read the books of the Chaldeans which are in Babylon, in which are written what the stars effect by their associations at the Nativities of men? And the books of the Egyptians, in which are written all the modes which happen to men?" Avida saith, "I have read the books of Chaldeism, but I do not know which belong to the Babylonians and which to the Egyptians." Bardesan saith, "The doctrine of both countries is the same." Avida saith, "It is known that it is so." Bardesan saith, "Hear now and understand, that it is not what the stars decree in their Fortune and in their portions, that all men equally do who are in all the earth; |16 for men have established laws in different places, by that Free-will which has been given to them by God. Because the gift itself is opposed to that Fortune of the Powers, which assume for themselves that which has not been given to them. I will begin to speak so far as I remember from the east, the head of the whole world.

"The Laws of the Seres. The Seres have laws that they should not kill, and not commit fornication, and not worship idols; and in the whole country of the Seres there are no idols, nor harlots, who killeth a man, nor who is killed; while they too are born at all hours, and upon all days. And Mars the fierce, when he is placed in the midst of the heavens, doth not

force the Free-will of the Seres that a man should shed the blood of his neighbour with a weapon of iron. Nor does Venus, when she is placed with Mars, force any one of the men of the Seres that he should have connexion with his neighbour's wife, or with another |17 woman; but rich and poor, and sick and healthy, and rulers and subjects, are there: because these things are given to the power of the Governors.

"Laws of the Brahmins which are in India. Again, among the Indians, the Brahmins, among whom there are many thousands and tens of thousands, have a law that they should not kill at all, and not revere idols, and not commit fornication, and not eat flesh, and not drink wine; and among them not one of these things takes place. And there are thousands of years to these men, lo! since they govern themselves by this law which they have made for themselves. Another Law which is in India. And there is another law in India, and in the same Clime, belonging to those, which are not of the family of the Brahmins, nor of their doctrine; that they should serve idols, and commit fornication, and kill, and do other abominable things, which do not please the Brahmins. |18 And in the same Clime of India there are men that by custom eat the flesh of men in the same manner as the rest of the nations eat the flesh of animals. But the evil stars have not forced the Brahmins to do evil and abominable things; nor have the good stars persuaded the rest of the Hindoos to abstain from evil things; nor have those stars which are well arranged in the places which it is proper for them, and in the signs of Zodiac which relate to humanity, persuaded those who eat the flesh of men to abstain from using this abominable and odious food.

"Laws of the Persians. And, again, the Persians have made laws for themselves that they may take for wives their sisters, and their daughters, and their daughters' daughters; and there are some that go further, and take even their mothers. Of these same Persians some have been scattered, and are in Media and the country of Parthia, and in Egypt, and in |19 Phrygia, and they are called Magi; and in all countries and Climes in which they are, they govern themselves by this law which was established for their fathers; but we cannot say that for all the Magi and the rest of the Persians, Venus was placed with the Moon, and with Saturn in the mansion of Saturn in his portions, while Mars witnessed them. And there are many places in the kingdom of the Parthians where men kill their wives, and their brethren, and their children, and incur no vengeance; while among the Romans and the Greeks, whoso killeth one of these incurreth capital punishment, the greatest of vengeance. "

Laws of the Geli. Among the Geli the women sow and reap, and build, and perform all the things of labourers, and do not wear dresses of colours: nor do they put on shoes, nor use sweet ointments; neither does any one blame them when they commit adultery with strangers, or when they have connexion |20 with the slaves of their houses; but their husbands, the Geli, put on garments of colours, and ornament themselves with gold and jewels, and anoint themselves with sweet unguents; nor is it on account of effeminacy they conduct themselves so, but on account of a law which is established among them; and all the men are lovers of hunting, and makers of war: but we cannot say that, for all the women of the

Geli, Yenus was placed in Capricorn, or in Aquarius, in a place of ill-luck; nor for all the Geli is it possible for us to say that Mars and Venus were placed in Aries, where it is written that vigorous and lascivious men are born. |21

"The Laws of the Bactrians. Amongst the Bactrians, which arc called Cashani, the women adorn themselves with the goodly raiment of the men, and with much gold and goodly jewels; and their male and female slaves minister to them more than to their husbands; and they ride horses; and some adorn themselves with vestments of gold and with precious stones. And these women do not observe chastity, but have connexion with their slaves, and with strangers which come to that country, and their husbands do not blame them: and they have no fear, because the Cashani esteem their wives as mistresses; but we cannot say that, for all the Bactrian women, Venus is placed, and Mars, and Jupiter, in the mansion of Mars in the midst of the heavens, where women that are rich, and adulterers, and keep under their husbands in every thing, are born. "The Laws of the Racami, and of the Edesseans, and the Arabians. Amongst the Racami, and the Edesseans, and the Arabians, not only is she that committeth adultery put to death, but she also, that has the name of adultery against her, has capital punishment. |22

"The Laws in Hatra. There is a law established in Hatra that whosoever committeth the small crime of a theft even of little value should be stoned. Amongst the Cashani, whoso committed such a theft as this, they spit in his face. Amongst the Romans, whoso committeth a little theft is scourged and dismissed. On the other side the Euphrates, and towards the East, he who is reviled either as a thief or as a murderer, does not feel very angry; but if a man be reviled as an arsenocoete, he then avenges himself even to the putting to death. "Laws of * * boys * and are not * * Again, in all the country of the East, those who have been insulted, and are known, their fathers and their brothers kill them, and oftentimes they do not even make known their graves. "Laws of the Orientals. But in the north, and in the country of the Germans, and those that are near to them, such boys among them as are handsome become as wives to the men, and they |23 have also marriage-feasts; and tins is not considered by them as a disgrace, nor as a reproach, on account of a law which they have: but it is not possible that all those that are in Gallia, who are disgraced by this disgrace, should have at their nativity Mercury placed for them with Venus, in the mansion of Saturn, and in the limits of Mars, and in the signs of the Zodiac at the west. For respecting those men who have their nativity thus, it is written that they are disgraced as women.

"Laws of the Britons. Amongst the Britons many men take one wife. "Laws of the Parthians. And amongst the Parthians one man takes many wives, and all of these are obedient to his command in chastity, on account of a law which is established there in the country. "Laws of the Amazons. As to the Amazons, all of them, the entire nation, have no husbands, but, like beasts, once in the year, at the season of spring, they go out from their coasts, and pass the river, and when they are over they make a great festival on the mountain, and the men from those quarters come, and abide with them fourteen days, and have intercourse with them, and they become pregnant by them, and then pass again to their own country; and

at the time of birth such as are males, they expose, and bring up the |24 females: and it is a known tiling, that according as Nature ordains, because they all become pregnant in one month, they also are delivered in one month, a little more and a little less; and as we have heard, all of them are vigorous and warlike: but not one of the stars is able to help all those males, which are born, from being exposed."

"Book of the Chaldeans. It is written in the Book of the Chaldeans, that whenever Mercury is placed with Venus in the mansion of Mercury, it produceth painters and sculptors, and money-changers; but when they are in the mansion of Venus, they produce perfumers, and dancers, and singers, and poets. And in all the country of the Tayites and of the Saracens, and in Upper Lybia, and amongst the Mauritanians, and in the country of the Nomades, which is at the mouth of the ocean, and in outer Germania, and in Upper Sarmatia, and in Hispania, and in all |25 the countries which are to the north of Pontus, and in all the country of the Alanians, and amongst the Albanians, and amongst the Zazi, and in Brusa which is beyond the Duro, one seeth not either sculptors, nor painters, nor perfumers, nor moneychangers, nor poets. But this decree of Mercury and Venus is inhibited from the circumference of the whole world. In the whole of Media, all men when they die, even while life is still remaining in them, are cast to the dogs, and the dogs eat the dead of the whole of Media; but we cannot say that all the Medians are born while the Moon is placed for them with Mars in Cancer during the day below the Earth: for thus it is written that those whom the dogs eat are born. The Hindoos, all of them when they die are burnt with fire, and many of their wives are burnt with them alive;

but we cannot say, that all those women of the Hindoos which are burnt had at their nativity Mars and the Sun placed in Leo in the night below the Earth, as those men are born which are burnt with fire. All the Germans |26 die by suffocation, except those which are killed in battle; and it is not possible that at the nativity of all the Germans the Moon and Hora should have been placed between Mars and Saturn. But, in all places, every day and at all hours, men are born in nativities which are distinct one from the other, and the laws of men overcome the Decree, and they govern themselves according to their customs; and Fortune does not compel the Seres to kill at all when they do not wish; nor the Brahmins to eat flesh; nor restrain the Persians from marrying their daughters and their sisters; nor the Hindoos from being burnt; nor the Medians from being devoured by dogs; nor the Parthians from taking many wives; nor the Britons from many men taking one wife; nor the |27 Edesseans from being chaste; nor the Greeks from practising gymnastics * * *; nor the Romans from always seizing upon countries; nor the Gauls from marrying one for another; nor constrain the Amazons to bring up the males; neither does the Nativity compel any at the circumference of the world to use the art of the Muses;

but as I have said, in every country, and in every nation, all men use the Free-will of their Nature as they wish, and do service to Fortune and to Nature, on account of the body with which they are clad, at one time as they wish, at another as they do not wish; for in every

country and in every nation there are rich and poor, and rulers and subjects, and healthy and sick, each of them, according as Fortune and Nativity has reached him.

I say to him, "Thou has convinced us of these things, Father Bardesan, and we know that they are true. But thou art aware that the Chaldeans say, that the Earth is divided into seven portions, which are called Climes; and over these same portions those Seven Stars have authority, each one over one of them; and in |28 each one of those same places the will of its Power prevails; and this is called Law."

He said to me, "Know first, my son Phillip, that for the purpose of deceit the Chaldeans have invented this saying: For although the earth be divided into seven portions, nevertheless, in each one of the same portions there are found many laws which differ one from the other. For there are not found in the world seven laws according to the number of the Seven Stars; nor twelve according to the number of the Signs of the Zodiac; nor also thirty-six according to the number of the Decani: but there are many laws in each kingdom, and in each country, and in each circuit, and in every habitation, which are different from their neighbours. For ye remember what I said to you, that in one Clime of the Hindoos there are men that do not eat the flesh of animals, and there are others that eat the |29 flesh of men. And again, I told you respecting the Persians and the Magi, that it was not in the Clime of Persia only they have taken for wives their daughters and their sisters, but in every country to which they have gone, they have used the law of their fathers, and observed the mysteries of what they delivered to them. And again, remember that there are many people I told you, which surround all the world, that are not in one Clime, but in all the winds, and in all the Climes;

and they have not the art which Mercury and Venus give when they are in configuration one with the other. And if the laws pertained to the Climes this could not be; but it is known, because those men are distant from the intercourse of men they are many in the manners of their living. How many wise men, think ye, have abrogated from their own countries those laws which seemed to them not to be well made? And how many laws are there which have been broken on account of necessity? And how many kings are there, who, having taken those countries which did not belong to them, have abrogated the laws of their establishing, and instituted such laws as they desired? |30 And whenever these things took place, no one of the Stars was able to preserve the law. But this is at hand for you to see; because but as yesterday the Romans took Arabia, and abrogated all their ancient laws; and more especially that circumcision with which they circumcised. For he that has the power in himself obeyeth such law as is ordained for him by another, who also is possessed of the power of himself. But I will tell you what may avail more than any thing to persuade the foolish, and those lacking of faith. All the Jews, who have received the law at the hand of Moses, circumcise their male children on the eighth day, and do not wait for the coming of the Stars;

neither do they respect the law of the country; nor does the Star, which has authority in the Clime, 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 fulfil this law which was established

for them by their fathers; and it is known that this which they do is not from Nativity, for it is not possible that Mars should rise for all the Jews on the eighth day when they are circumcised, so that steel should pass over them, and their blood be shed. And |31 all of them, wherever they are, abstain from worshipping idols; and one day in seven they and their children abstain from all work, and from all building and from all travelling, and from buying and selling; neither do they kill an animal on the sabbath-day, nor kindle fire, nor judge a cause; and there is not found amongst them a man whom Fortune commands that on the Sabbath day he should either go to law and gain his cause, or go to law and lose it, or should pull down or build up, or do any one of those things which all such men as have not received this law do. They have also other things, in which they are not governed like the rest of mankind, while on this same day they both beget, and are born, and fall sick, and die, for these things are not in the power of man.

In Syria and in Edessa men used to cut off their foreskins to Tharatha: but when Abgar the king was converted |32 to Christianity, he commanded that every one that cut off his foreskin should have his hand cut off. And from that day, and up to this hour, no man cutteth off his foreskin in the country of Edessa. What, then, shall we say respecting the new race of ourselves who are Christians, whom in every country and in every region the Messiah established at His coming; for, lo! wherever we be, all of us are called by the one name of the Messiah----Christians; and upon one day, which is the first of the week, we assemble ourselves together, and on the appointed days we abstain from food. Neither do the Brethren which are in Gallia take |33 males for wives; nor those which are in Parthia take two wives; nor those which are in Judea circumcise themselves; nor do our sisters which are amongst the Geli and amongst the Cashani have connexion with strangers; nor do those which are in Persia take their daughters for wives; nor those who are in Media fly from their dead, or bury them alive, or give them for food to the dogs; nor do those who are in Edessa kill their wives that commit fornication, or their sisters, but withdraw themselves from them, and commit them to the judgment of God. Nor do those who are in Hatra stone the thieves.

But whereever they be, and in whatever place that they are, the laws of the countries do not separate them from the laws of their Messiah; neither does the Fortune of the Governers compel them to make use of things which are impure to them; but sickness and health, and riches and poverty----this which does not appertain to their Freewill, befals them wherever they are. For as the Free-will of men is not governed by the necessity of the Seven, and whenever it is governed it is able to stand against its influences, so also is this visible man not able readily to deliver himself from the commands of his Governers, for he is a slave and a subject. For if we were able to do every thing we should be everything; and if nothing came within the reach of our hands to do, we should be the instruments of others. But whenever God pleaseth, all things are possible to be, without hindrance. For there is nothing which can hinder that great and |34 holy will. For even such as think that they stand against Him, it is not in strength they stand, but in evil and in error; and this may subsist a short time, because He is kind, and permitteth all Natures that they should stand in what they

are, and be governed by their own will, but being bound nevertheless by the deeds which are done, and by the plans which have been devised for their help.

For this order and government which have been given, and association of one with another, softens down the force of the Natures, that they should not be altogether injurious, nor be altogether injured, as they were injuring and injured before the creation of the world. And there will be a time, when also this injury which remaineth in them shall be brought to an end by the instruction which will be in another association. And at the establishment of that new world, all evil motions will cease, and all rebellions will be brought to an end, and the foolish will be persuaded, and deficiencies will be filled up, and there will be peace and safety, by the gift of Him who is the Lord of all Natures.

HERE ENDETH THE BOOK OF THE LAWS OF COUNTRIES. [Selected endnotes moved here and assigned numbers. Numbers in are not mentioned by Cureton, although in the text, but are perhaps pages in the manuscript or Syriac text?]. 1. P. 1. Book of the Laws of Countries. The title of this treatise is given by Eusebius, Ec. Hist. b. iv. c. 30, [Greek]; by Epiphanius, ... Panarium adversus Haeres.; 36, p. 477. 2. L. 1. Shemashgram. This is the pronunciation according to the vowels which have been added by a later hand. .... There was a king of Emesa so called, whose daughter was married to Aristobulus: See Josephus, Antiq. Jud. b. 18, c. 6, and b. 19, c. 8. A Priest of Venus at Emesa of this name went out to meet Sapor, king of Persia, when he advanced against that city in the reign of the Emperor Valerian. See Johannes Malela, Chronograph, vol. i. p. 391, edit. Oxon. 1691. In Strabo the name is written .... Geog. b. 16. p. 753, edit. Casaubon, 1620. M. Renan has mistaken this for the name of a place, and supposed the particle and verb ... which follow to be the name of a person. It is hardly possible to commit a greater number of errors in the same space than M. Renan has fallen into in translating the first lines of this treatise. ”Il y a quelques jours, en allant visiter a Schemsgarm notre frere Evetb.es, nous y rencontrames Bardesane, qui, apres s’etre assure de notre sante,” &c. See ”Lettre a M. Reinaud sur quelques manuscrits Syriaques du Musee Britannique,” in Journal Asiatique. 1852.

3. L. 8. Avida. This name is given by Epiphanius ..... M. Renan has again fallen into an error here, and translated this man’s name ”un de nos compagnons,” ...Apparently he was ignorant of the account given by Epiphanius, and has assumed against all authority that Bardesan wrote this treatise in Greek. 4. P. 3. L. 20. Compare what is here said about man’s free agency with Justin Martyr. Apol. i. c. 7, 43; Origen, De Princip. iii. c. 1; Philocalia c. xxvi.

5. P. 4. L. 36. The Angels. Bardesan takes here ... Gen. vi. 2, to be ’angels.’ So Josephus... Antiq. Jud. b. 1. c. 3. Justin Martyr:.... Apol. ii. C. 5. Clemens Alexandrinus: ... Strom, b. 3. And again, ... b. 5. Edit. Potter, pp. 538, 650. Tertullian. ... De Cultu foeminarum, i. c. 2. See also De Idolatria, c. ix. Sulpitius Severus: ... De Sacra Historia, b. i. p. 7. Lactantius: ... Institut. Divin. lib. ii. c. 14. The author of thc Testaments of the XII Patriarchs. ... Test. Reuben, c. 5. Grabe, Spicilegium. Vol. 1. p. 150. This opinion of

the more antient Christian writers Chrysostom refutes, Homil. 22 in Genes. Edit. Paris, 1614, p. 249; Theodoretus, Quaest. in Genesin, 47; and Augustin: although in the copies of Genesis, which he used, the term 'angels' was found, ...De Civitate Dei b. xv. c. 23. The opinion generally held is this of Augustin and others, that the ... "Sons of God" were the descendants of Seth. In this the Book of Adam, lately translated from the Ethiopic by Dillman, concurs: "..." ... I find the same notion in the Cave of Treasures, ... "And they were not willing to give ear to the commandment of Jared and to the words of Enoch, and they dared to transgress the commandment, and went down an hundred men mighty in valour, and when they beheld the daughters of Cain, that they were fair to look upon, and that without modesty they were unveiled, the sons of Seth . were inflamed with the fire of lust; and when the daughters of Cain beheld their beauty they flew upon them like corrupt beasts, and defiled their bodies, and the sons of Seth lost themselves in fornication with the daughters of Cain." fol. 11. ...

6. P. 8, L. 1. The nature of man, &c. It will be seen, upon comparing the passage comprised in this and the following pages with that cited by Eusebius, Praepar. Evan. vi. c. 10, printed below, that the Greek varies considerably from the Syriac: there are many interpolations which are not found in the original; and again several sentences of the Syriac have been omitted in the Greek. 7. P.11. L. 4. O Philip and Baryama. J am not sure respecting this latter word, whether it be a proper name or not: perhaps ... be rendered "even profoundly," literally, "even a son of the sea." ... I do not know whether by my fault or the compositor's, the word is spelled wrongly Phillip in this place. 8. L. 7. In another place. Probably referring to some of his former works. 9. P. 15. L. 30. The doctrine of both countries is the same. The Chaldeans, according to Diodorus Siculus, were a colony from Egypt, Sill. Hist. b. i, p. 73. Edit. Hanoviae, 1604. Clemens Alexandrinus writes ...: Stromat. i. p. 361. Cited also by Euseb. Praep. Evang. x. 6. See also Gallaeus, De Sibyllis, p. 484. Julius Firmicus says that he has embodied in his treatise on Astrology all that the Egyptians and Babylonians had said on this head. ... See Praefat. The reader who is desirous of further information as to many astrological questions alluded to by Bardesan will find them stated fully by Julius Firmicus.

10. P. 16, L. 7. Seres. Respecting these see Pliny, Hist. Nat. vi. c. 17; Solinus c. 53; Pomponius Mela, i. c. 2; Vetus orbis descriptio Graeci Scriptoris sub Constantio. Ed. J. Gothofred. Genevae, 1628, p. 1. 11. P. 17, L. 1. Of the Brahmins. For the account of the Brahmins amongst the ancients, see Palladius, De Gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus; and two other writers edited in the same volume by Ed. Bisse, 4to. Loud. 1(565. Strabo: Geog. x. p. 712. Origen; Contra Celsum, p. 19. Edit. Spencer. Cantab. 1658. Jerome in his Second Book, Adversus Jovinianum, refers to this matter: "Bardesanes, vir Babylonius, in duo dogmata apud Indos gymnosophistas dividit, quorum alterum appellat Brachmanas, alterum Samanaeos, qui tantas continentiae sunt, ut vel pomis arborum juxta Gan-gen fluvium, vel publico orizae, vel farinae alantur cibo, et cum rex ad eos venerit, adorare illos solitus sit, pacemque suae provinciae in illorum precibus arbitrari sitam." Edit. Erasmi, tom. ii. p. 55. There is no mention of the name Samanaei, either in the original Syriac,

or by Eusebius, Caesarius, or Ruffinus in his version of the Recognitions. They are named, however, by Porphyry, referring to Bardesan, De abstinentia, lib. 4. § 17. .... Origen also speaks of the Samansi in conjunction with the Brahmins, ... Contra Celsum, lib. 1, p. 19. Clemens Alexandrinus too mentions them. ... Stromat, lib. 1, p. 359. Edit. Potter.

12. P. 18 L. 10. This abominable law of the antient Persians is frequently referred to by the early Christian writers. Tertullian, ... Ad Nationes 1. c. 18. edit. Fr. Oehler, p. 338. See also Clemens. Hom. xix. c. 19: Origen, Contra Celsum, p. 248. 331. See Vetus orbis descriptio, p. 9. The author of this law is stated by Theodoretus to be Zaradas. Graec. Affec. Curat. De legibus: edit. Gaisford, p. 351. In the ..., f. 22, b., it is stated that Idashir, the Magus received the following instruction: ... "The Daemon said to that priest, that a man cannot become a priest and a Magus until he shall have had connexion with his mother, and with his daughter, and with his sister; and he made Idashir priest in this manner." 13. P. 20. L. 1. Epiphanius makes a blunder, and attributes what is said here of the Geli to the Seres. See Panar. adv. Haeres. p. 1091.

14. P.21. L. 7. With their slaves. These characteristics of the Bactrian women are attributed to the Liburni by Scylax, Periplus, edit. Vossius, Amstel. 1639, p. 7. The same things are also said of the women of the Geli. See above, p. 19. 15. L. 15. The Racami, and of the Edesseans and the Arabians. Eusebius has only [Arabs and Osrhoeans]. The whole is omitted by Caesarius and the Recognitions. In the Peshito, Jud. vi.3, we find ... for the Arabians. There is a town of Syria called Racim near Balea, all the houses of which are hewn out of the rock, as if they were one stone. ... See Abulfeda, loc. cit. p. ... 16. P. 22, L. 1. Hatra. This was the town the seige of which Trajan was compelled to raise shortly before his death. See Tillemont, Histoire des Empereurs, vol. ii. p. 209. 17. L. 10. Laws of * * * The rest has been purposely erased. Euse-bius, however, gives Par' #Ellhsi, which is also omitted by Caesarius and the Recognitions.

18. L. 15. Laws of the Orientals. The context seems to shew that this is an error of the transcriber. ... The Recognitions [has] 'apud Gallos,' which agrees here with the sequel better than the Syriac. 19. P. 24, L. 7. Book of the Chaldaeans. M. Renan has cited a few lines from this place; but he has erred in stating " Le dernier paragraph est donne sous le titre special de ..., Livre de Chaldeans" It will be seen that this is not the last paragraph of the treatise of Bardesan. The heading is only given in distinctive red letters, like ..., and the others above. 20. L.12. Tayites .... The name of a race of Arabs, and often used for Arabs generally. Eusebius, probably not understanding the word, has .... Caesarius, who also does not appear to have understood it, has ... .and the author of the Recognitions, or Ruffinus the translator, has avoided the difficulty by omitting it altogether.

21. P. 25, L. 3. The Zazi, and in Brusa, which is beyond the Duro. Eusebius has ...; the Recognitions 'in Chrysea insula' only; and Caesarius omits the passage altogether. Epiphanius, who evidently had this treatise of Bardesan before him, has ..., p. 1091. It is plain that the text of Bardesan was not clearly understood by the translators, and, as is often the case in obscure passages, it has suffered further corruption in the transcription. This may be

the reason why it is omitted by Caesarius. I find it not an unusual thing for translators to omit what they do not understand, and to take no notice of it whatever. ... As it is difficult to pronounce withany degree of certainty what are the precise places meant by Bardesan, I have not thought it expedient to waste my own and the readers' time by offering uncertain conjectures. 22. P. 28, L. 10. Decani. The twelve signs of the zodiac were each divided into three parts, making thirty-six, which, being again each subdivided into ten portions, were called Decani. "Singula signa in tres partes dividuntur: singulae autem partes singulos habent decanos ut sint in singulis signis terni decani." See Julius Firmicus, Ad Mavort. Loll. Astron. p. 17. Manilius, Astronomicon, B. 4. L. 298, gives the following account of them: ...

23. P. 31, L, 14. Tharatha. This is the same as the goddess Rhea. Justin Martyr mentions this practice..., Apol. 1. c. 27, edit. Otto, p. 72. Itane propterea Galli abscissi huic Magnae Deae serviunt, ut signifiant, qui semine indigeant, terram sequi oportere? See Augustin, De Civit. Dei, b. 7, c. 24. See also Epiphanius, Panar. p. 1092. Abgar was a general title borne by the Kings or Toparchs of Edessa. See Assemani, Bibl. Orient, tom. i. p. 261. Bayer thinks the king especially alluded to here was Abgar, son of Maanes, who began to reign about A.D. 200. Historia Osrhoena et Edessena ex numis illustrata, p. 169; but this does not accord with the accounts given by other writers. It seems much more probable that this was Abgar, the son of Maanes, who began his reign A.D. 152. See Hahn. Bardesan. Gnost. p. 14. 24. P. 32, L. 9. On the appointed days. The Syriac is .... I do not know what the precise meaning of ... here is, and Eusebius gives no aid, for he has omitted this passage, and the Greek also otherwise varies considerably from the original to the end of the treatise. Compare what Bardesan says here relative to the change effected by Christianity, with Eusebius, Praep. Evang. lib. 4, and Theodoret, Graec. Affec. Curat. edit. Gaisford, p. 349.

Source. English translation: an out-of-copyright translation as transcribed, or commissioned and given to the public domain, by Roger Pearse for his collection ***Early Church Fathers – Additional Texts*** (tertullian.org/fathers). SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Footnotes are left out, and Greek or Latin words, square brackets and any transcription error are as the source prints them. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.

Licence. published 1855.