

“be very suitable for this and, thereupon calling to his master of the horse, he instructed him what he was to do.

“While then the Fathers were still there waiting, there appeared the two Turkish Pashas, to whom the Shah at present shows many marks of favour and with whom it is rumoured he confers on all important affairs. They came on horseback and dismounted in the Shah’s presence and kissed his foot, as they are wont; but the king bade them mount and ride with him, and, as in the result there ensued much confusion with so many men and horses, it seemed to Fr. John that it would be well to mount also—it being a customary thing in the country to do so without the king’s command being awaited. Having steeds ready close by, they mounted them and modestly drew near the rest of the men on horseback who formed the king’s suite; but the latter, turning and noticing them at a distance on horseback, at once made a sign to them with his hand to draw near and, when they had done so but still only to some extent, once more the Shah beckoned to Fr. John to take up a position on his right hand. When this had been done, Fr. Benignus being somewhat in the rear, the king commanded him to come alongside Fr. John—all this to the marked surprise of all those grandees and the people who in countless numbers had collected to watch the Shah, and they were astonished at seeing him show such favours to us poor barefoot friars.

“In order to amuse the Shah, some poor people had brought on to the Maidan a number of rams, which had been trained to fight one another, charging with great fury: each of the men” (who had brought them) “had an immense ambition that his own ram should come off the victor: and so the animals had long and furious contests, in which the Shah took much pleasure.

“As has been said, in a row to the right of the king were the two Fathers, on his left the two Pashas already mentioned and other magnates: and so the king, having ordered wine to be brought, and that being at once done, when he had himself drunk he bade them give it also to the others to drink, if they so wished. When the servants had carried some wine in a golden cup to one of the Pashas, the king, making a page give him some small pebbles, of which there were many about there, proceeded to flick some of them into the cup which the Pasha held in his hand, and threw others at him, then turning laughingly to the Fathers, as if he wanted by this to show that, even though those Turks might have the name of being high in his favour, he did not for all that esteem them, but rather for his pleasure he misused them as he liked. The Fathers did not wish to drink in that (public) place, although it was offered them. The Shah went on saying to one of the Pashas who had recently arrived at Isfahan that ‘these Fathers are good men, whom the Pontiff his great friend had dispatched to him’.

“While the Shah was talking about this there arrived on the scene an old man, considered to be a very elegant scribe who is charged with writing an account of all the signal acts and enterprises of the king. In his ear the Shah spoke for a considerable time and, from some words pronounced somewhat more loudly and overheard at the end of the discourse, Fr. John gathered that to him the Shah had given instructions for the dispatch to the Pontiff, not wishing to do so publicly, because of those Pashas (being present).

“So much time had already passed in this way that night had fallen and it was hardly possible to see, when, after taking a turn across the Maidan and dismissing everyone else, the Shah remained alone with the two Pashas, and so the Fathers, who had been following him, drew to one side and still on horseback took their leave and saluted him, to which he made a courteous acknowledgment: they in their turn went off, while the king immediately afterwards entered his saraglio. While they were on their way back to the house anxiously desiring to know for certain what it was that the Shah had ordered him to write, so that they might urge him on to get it done, there overtook them on horseback that aged historiographer, to whom Fr. John thought the king had given the order: and, to make certain, he greeted him and received an answer in the affirmative to his enquiry