

REIGNS OF SHAH SULTAN HUSAIN (1694-1722): AND OF THE AFGHANS SHAH MAHMUD (1722-1725) AND SHAH ASHRAF (1725-1729)

ACCORDING to the edition by Fr. du Cerceau of the *Memoirs* of Father J. T. Krusinski, for some twenty years a member of the Society of Jesus at Isfahan, Shah Sulaiman left, by different mothers, two sons capable of succeeding him, the elder named 'Abbas Mirza, the younger Husain, who had to his detriment a bodily deformity—legs that were monstrously crooked, and withal he was splay-footed: he was born without ambition, and liked solitude, and had been wrapped up in reading the Quran, so that they gave him the nickname 'Darwish'.¹ Contrary to the usual practice the father did not nominate as his successor 'Abbas Mirza, or any successor at all—perhaps with some secret inclination towards the younger son; and he is portrayed as cynically warning the eunuchs, under whose influence he had completely fallen that, if they desired a martial monarch, they should choose 'Abbas Mirza, but Husain Mirza to enjoy a peaceful time. However, the grandmother of Husain Mirza had considerable influence in the Haram and, acting vigorously, found no great difficulty in gaining the adherence of the chief eunuchs: when that of some of the late Shah's wazirs and chief officials had been similarly secured, her grandson was proclaimed as Shah Sultan Husain, 'Abbas Mirza being put under stricter ward inside the Haram.

“Today, 7th August, at the second hour after midnight, his *elder* son Sultan Husain, aged “26 years and 7 months, was proclaimed Shah”,

recorded the Carmelite Fr. Elias of S. Albert in his letter to the Cardinals of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, 7.8.1694.²

The new Shah did at first attempt to assert authority, and it was done out of piety and obedience to the precepts of the Quran and the religion of Islam—an edict prohibiting the use of wine absolutely: and Fr. du Cerceau's work mentioned above represents the young monarch as causing all wine vessels in the palace to be brought out into a public place and there broken to pieces. The Armenians at Julfa, who with the Jews would, as till this twentieth century, alone undertake the crushing of the grapes and making of the forbidden fermented liquor, were prohibited from bringing any wine into the city under penalty of forfeiture of the entire property of the delinquent. Grandees and courtiers had been accustomed to drink wine for a century or two: and, on the reaction of such influential sentiments to the edict, the eunuchs obtained the intervention of Miriam Baigum, the young Shah's maternal grandmother, for whom he always retained much tenderness and who, being herself addicted to wine, was annoyed. She feigned herself sick and had conveyed to the young monarch the impression that, if he valued her life, he should permit her to drink a little wine, that being, according to her physicians, the sole remedy that would relieve her. Alarmed at the pretended dangerous condition of his grandmother, Shah Sultan Husain sent an express messenger to the Armenians of Julfa for some wine. They, apprehending a trap, declared that since his Majesty's prohibition they had not a drop left, but hinted that some might be obtained at the Polish envoy's house (then, as in the present times, such representatives enjoyed 'diplomatic immunity'). When obtained the Shah poured it into a cup and presented it with his own hand to his grandmother who, however, refused to drink, unless he tasted of it first: and, as she backed her refusal by

¹ A recluse living on alms.

² *S.N.R.*, II, p. 108. It is to be remarked that Fr. Elias makes him the *elder* son (in the Latin *major*): this upsets Fr. Krusinski's version of the palace intrigue, explains the father's hesitation in naming the elder, deformed and a recluse, his heir: it was 'Abbas Mirza, who was the younger rival.