

'once more and, having realized the confused and disorganized state of affairs at the capital, seized the opportunity and decided to carry the struggle for Kandahar into the centre of Persia. He had some 3,700 Afghans from Kandahar, who had been with his father, and with two thousand of them he persuaded or constrained 8,000 of the Hazara to join him under their chief, Muhammad Wali. Mir Ashraf, son of the uncle he had murdered, was chosen as his colleague, and some 9,000 Baluchis having also agreed to make common cause, in a few months a force, estimated to have been 40,000 combatants, had gathered in the hope of plunder, for whom during all 1721 provisions and fodder were collected. At the end of December 1721 Mir Mahmud left Kandahar: by the end of January he had again laid siege to Kirman and occupied the town—the citadel had been so well fortified by Lutf 'Ali Khan as to hold out till 1725. Many of the Afghan force deserted there—14,000 are Fr. Krusinski's figures—and returned to Kandahar, so that Mir Mahmud abandoned the siege and set off on his march to Isfahan; parched grain was the food for all. According to Fr. Krusinski's record, Europeans in Isfahan, observing through telescopes the Afghan camp during the siege, made estimates of between 8,000 and 14,000 men in the attacking force: for reasons which he adduces Fr. du Cerceau finds 40,000 with 60,000 baggage camels the more likely figure (Fr. Leander gives 40,000 camels, 22 elephants): to a modern observer in Persia commissariat and transport arrangements of that magnitude are hardly imaginable in the circumstances, and, knowing the inability of local inhabitants to estimate with moderation, he would be inclined to credit much less than half the figures given).

The edition of Fr. Krusinski's memoirs implies that the march, after leaving Kirman, was direct across the desert to Yazd and Isfahan. As to the correctness of that, and the date of departure from Kirman given above there is a remark in a letter of Bishop Barnabas which raises a doubt: writing 14.1.1722,<sup>1</sup> i.e. at least 10 days after the news would have got through from Shiraz, ". . . in this direction . . . enemies are devastating the country. . . . They *have already reached Shiraz*, so that here they" (the Court) "live in very great apprehension. . . ."

'At Isfahan no preparation for defence was made: and the invaders were only two days' march from the capital when the Shah's advisers raised and sent out a force to oppose the Afghans, some 50,000 men' (again, the warning to cut down drastically Persian estimates is needed) 'under the new 'Itimad-ud-Dauleh, and Muhammad Wali, shaikh of Hawaizeh in Khuzistan, 'Ali Mardan Khan of the Bakhtiari, and a Georgian prince, Rustam Khan, brother of the late Khusru Khan. At Gulnabad, four leagues from the city, battle was joined, 8.3.1722: the Afghans remained masters of the field, with the royal treasure chest and camp in their hands: 2,000 of the Shah's force are said to have been killed, 340 on the Afghan side, among them a principal chief of the Hazara with 500 wounded. Notwithstanding, after the battle the Afghans considered themselves lost: they had no knowledge of the extent of the advantage they had gained and for some days remained inactive in their camp: 25 cannon that had been taken were brought off the field without opposition by some Persian soldiers. In a council of war, 11.3.1722, Mir Mahmud voiced his suspicion that the Persians wished to draw them into an ambush: it was deemed prudent to retire the force to Kirman, reduce the fort there, and make that city and province Afghan territory: the date of the retirement was fixed for Thursday, the 15th [*? sic*] March. To cover it, however, it was decided on the 14th to send a body of some 9,000 men towards the city in order to alarm the citizens: these mounted men were to follow the retreat as a rearguard two days later. This was done.

'But on the night of 17.3.1722 a letter from the Persian Court reached Mir Mahmud to the effect that Shah Sultan Husain offered to surrender Kandahar to him and his descendants and in addition pay over a large sum, provided only he would withdraw his force to Kandahar. Thus unexpectedly the prospect of failure turned to victory: rarely in history has a throne and succession to an empire been more easily won. Even then the

<sup>1</sup> *S.N.R.*, III, p. 520.