

'ing Isfahan, in particular five thousand men from Luristan gathered by 'Ali Mardan Khan 'the Bakhtiari and sent to Kashan. An uncle, a younger brother and two cousins of Mir 'Mahmud were taken and put to death by villagers after one encounter, and thence onwards 'he took no more prisoners but massacred all. Shah Sultan Husain had summoned to his 'aid Vaqtan Khan or Vakhtanga, that Georgian prince whom the Shah had offended in '1720 by ordering him to desist just as he was about to crush his Daghistani enemies—and 'unpardonably, for he kept to his oath and refused.

'Tahmasp Mirza, third son of the Persian monarch, who had been declared successor 'to the throne, escaped in disguise and got away to Gilan, where, however, he neglected 'opportunities of gathering men and falling on the Afghans: he was no more the man for 'an emergency than his father. Safi Mirza, the eldest son, afterwards got away to Stambul, 'it was said. The Shahsavan tribe, many thousands strong—they had been 'planted' by 'Shah 'Abbas the First—refused to fight too. The Persian commander inside the besieged 'city proved utterly craven, putting off the people whenever they pressed to be led out in 'force against the enemy, many indeed escaping with the connivance of the Afghans: when 'they finally rose and insisted on being led in a sortie, it was half-heartedly given and failed.

'In July, when there was still beef to be had, famine began, a consequence of the bad 'advice of the Shah's entourage once more, for they, as if there were not enough people 'in Isfahan to consume provisions, had one ordinance published after the arrival of the 'Afghans prohibiting anyone from leaving the capital, and a second even more foolish, 'authorizing the admission of inhabitants of neighbouring villages and towns.¹

'By August only the flesh of camels, mules, horses and asses was to be had, as much as '1,000 scudi being paid for a horse for food. Dogs and cats were being eaten in September 'and October—there was already no corn in the former month: many human bodies were 'to be seen with various members cut off: some taken eating human flesh were bastinadoed 'for it, but the punishment did not stop the evil growing: children were devoured by their 'own mothers. The chronicler alleges the mortality to have been computed at the time 'as one million' (as the total population of the capital could not have been much, if at all, in excess of that figure, it should not be taken seriously; but Persian estimates of distances are always underrated, of all other numbers extravagant). 'Corpses thrown into the 'Zayindehrud fouled its water for a year to come: the air stank. Long previously Mir 'Mahmud could have made himself master of Isfahan; but, such was his indifference to 'human life, so insatiable his greed that he refused even when urged by his chief leaders, 'because he did not want the treasures of Isfahan to fall to his soldiery, were the city sacked 'after an assault. It was 21.10.1722 when, famine having at last taken hold of the palace, 'Shah Sultan Husain brought himself to abdicate and, clothing himself in black, bare-headed, accompanied by a few eunuchs only, left the palace on foot to go through the 'city and prepare the people for the next act. The weeping and wailing in the streets was 'heard as far away as Julfa, it was said.

'On 23.3.1722 the Afghans sent horses into the city for Sultan Husain and his chief 'attendants, there being not one left in Isfahan. The people are said to have been in tears 'to see their king in such grievous case. At Farrahabad, though the Afghan leaders had 'begged Mir Mahmud to go to meet him not as king but as his future father-in-law, the 'son of Mir Wais the Kalantar refused and did not move from his sofa, waiting for Sultan 'Husain to enter the room and bend his knee.

'If Mahmud the Kandahari showed baseness according to a European standard of 'chivalry, the great-grandson of Shah 'Abbas I and erstwhile monarch of a vast kingdom 'is depicted as displaying a despicable abjectness—it could hardly have been real humility 'in such a man: as soon as he saw Mir Mahmud he hastened with open arms to embrace 'him, kissed him with tokens of friendship and then drew from his breast the sign of royalty, 'the aigrette, which he put in the cap of Mahmud, while in the presence of the chief men 'of the two nations he declared him his successor on the throne of Persia, to the exclusion

¹ Quoted from Fr. Krusinski's *Memoirs*, p. 51, vol. II, and p. 88 respectively of Fr. du Cerceau's edition.