

‘of his own sons and their heirs. He begged only that the Afghan would not interfere with the ladies of his andarun, nor let the princes residing therein want, that he would not heap new taxes on the people.

‘Mir Mahmud is said to have relaxed a little of his haughtiness and indicated to Sultan Husain to sit on his left. The latter then made over the sealed paper by which he transferred the sovereignty of Persia on two conditions—his own honour and life, and the lives of his family. After prayers by an Afghan Qazi the notables paid fealty to Mahmud as Shah, and a body of Afghan soldiery was sent into the city to take possession and proclaim a general armistice.

‘Shah Mahmud, as he must henceforth be styled, on 24.10.1722 made a parade march through the capital to display himself to the people:¹ he took his seat, too, on the royal throne. Victuals were allowed to enter the city, so that as much bread might be bought for a crown as the day before would have cost two hundred: and the famine gradually ceased. On the following day he imprisoned his cousin Mir Ashraf, with whom before leaving Kandahar he had sworn to halve all gains and remain equal in all things: all those Persians, who had entered into relations with him and proved traitors to the ex-Shah Sultan Husain, he had arrested and killed, the general Muhammad Wali being alone spared, but his chieftainship of Hawaizeh given to another. Except for an Afghan Diwan-baigi, whose justice was dispensed with more honesty and equity than Isfahan had seen for many decades, Persians were reappointed to the chief offices. All November was spent in putting the city in order. In December, however, in order to capture Tahmasp Mirza, the fugitive son of the ex-sovereign, Shah Mahmud sent six thousand of his own troops to Qazwin. The Safawi prince made off to the province of Gilan; and, when the Afghan leader Amanullah occupied the town and began to let it be looted, the citizens rose and slew four thousand of his men. With barely a thousand, himself wounded, Amanullah reached Isfahan, 9.1.1723: and this so alarmed Shah Mahmud, lest the Isfahanis should act similarly, that he determined to put to death all notables among the Persians, and soldiers of the ex-Shah. He invited on 25.1.1723 some 300 notables to a banquet, where all except some twenty-five were slain barbarously on their arrival at the palace, their dead bodies after being stripped were flung out into the Maidan naked. Two days later he had two hundred youths, sons of leading men, slaughtered in a field outside the city—“like hares”, wrote the chronicler. On 31.1.1723 it was the turn of the soldiers of the guard, some three thousand Persians, who had previously sworn allegiance to the new monarch and were being regaled on pilaf and meat: while they were eating their arms were taken from them and they were put to death in the courtyard of the palace by Afghans. All February soldiers of the ex-Shah were sought out, and killed wherever found. Besides eliminating all likely resistance in the neighbourhood, any local revolt, this bloodthirsty man seemed determined to depopulate the city, turn out the inhabitants and replace them by others. It is not surprising, then, to read that by May 1723 Isfahan was again a prey to famine; the villages round, being sacked by Shah Mahmud’s men, would not bring provisions into the city, whereon the Afghan leader Nasrullah attacked Najafabad and other important villages and deprived them of their beasts of burden.

‘In August 1723, the same leader having arranged with Sunni tribes between Hamadan and Kirmanshah, and as far off as Sanneh and Tiflis (the Kandaharis were of that branch of Islam), thousands of their camels arrived laden with provisions, and more than 10,000 Daghistanis in particular entered to settle in Isfahan, being enrolled as soldiers. In June caravans totalling 30,000 camels had arrived from Kandahar, bringing women and children and numerous recruits: a second convoy of 8,000 came in May 1724: a third of

¹ According to Fr. Krusinski’s *Memoirs* Mahmud

“was middle-siz’d and pretty squat: his face livid, his nose flattish, his eyes blue and squinting a little, his look fierce. . . . His neck was so monstrously short that his head seemed to grow to his shoulders. He had scarce any beard, and what he had was carrotty. His eyes were generally downcast. Every morning he exercis’d himself in wrestling half an hour with some of the most robust of his officers: and spent the rest of the day in other exercises proper to harden and strengthen his body. . . .”