

“ . . . The raids by Baluchis up to 7 leagues from Yazd . . . have obliged the Shah to “send troops against them. As this prince is more than ever given over to wine and card-playing and dice, it is to be hoped that he will trouble less the inhabitants of Julfa, whom “he had worried by his frequent excursions with his womenfolk.”

To a carouse of this Shah in January 1706 was due the destruction of the first Chihil Situn (“Palace of the ‘Forty Columns’”) in the Chahar Bagh at Isfahan, which had been erected by ‘Abbas I and, greater misfortune still, of the paintings sent as gifts from Europe or specially done, including all the collection formed by that dilettante, ‘Abbas II, which today would have doubtless been of immense artistic and pecuniary value: writers on architecture of the Safawi period may take note of this authentic and precise dating of the existing Chihil Situn, the second building over a century posterior to the first. The writer was the Dominican Fr. Peter Martyr (afterwards Archbishop of Nakhchiwan), 12.3.1706:¹

“ . . . About the 12th January at night time there happened here a notable occurrence, “a stupendous event, viz. the king being with his grandees at a sumptuous supper in the “finest and most magnificent of his palaces—called that of the ‘Forty Columns’ ” (i.e. Chihil Situn) “because its ceiling all painted and gilded is supported on forty great pillars of wood “of no small height and thickness, covered and adorned with gold and glass, the walls “similarly enriched with gilt work and paintings, among which were both profane and “sacred, i.e. of Christ our Lord and the Blessed Virgin—he being, I say, in the hall in “question (although some persons will have it that he had already left it and gone out), “fire, I do not know how, attacked the base of one of those pillars and with the greatest “velocity mounted to the top of it, and set alight the ceiling and in turn all the other “columns. So in a short space of time it was completely burnt out—the whole of that “immense hall, which had been built at very great cost and by the labour of many artisans, “had been reduced to ashes, without the many people who had run there with water, of “which there was no lack there, being able in any way to extinguish the conflagration or “save anything from the hall. In this a judgment of God was plainly seen, as according to “some the Shah himself testified with his own mouth: and it might in all piety be said that “this was the judgment of God who would no longer tolerate those holy pictures being in “such a place and especially among profane and droll ones; although for that matter I “doubt whether they will omit to place others similar in the new hall, which is already being “built once more, similar in everything to that burnt and destroyed. Indeed I hear it said “that the king’s officials are going about collecting and getting together the pictures they “find anywhere in order to put them in place of those burnt, and that in particular they “have taken various pictures brought freshly from Europe by Stephen, father of Basil and “John, who about two years ago were in Rome, among which there were some sacred “pictures, especially two large ones of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and of S. “Dominic, which were to have been bought to be presented as gifts to our” (i.e. the Domini- can) “church, but from having been retained too long there in the City have fallen into “the hands of the infidels, and will be put in this place or others similar, or will be for the “use of the king or indeed for some officials of his. . . .”

In his zeal for Islam, too, or yielding to the intolerance of powerful influences at his Court, Shah Sultan Husain would appear to have used, in 1697 or 1698, oppressive measures against the minority creeds in the vogue of those by his grandfather, for a report of Bishop Elias of S. Albert during his stay in Rome, considered in the Session of the Sacra. Congregation, 13.6.1702,² used the following words:

“ . . . After more than 20 years of continued persecution of the Catholic religion . . . “the hostile schismatic Armenians . . . now found themselves—evidently in punishment

¹ *S.N.R.*, II, p. 481.

² *S.R.*, vol. 541, p. 455.