

“ . . . The Carmelite Father, about whom I had written to you, although he entered the city to plaudits, and had brought a very civil letter, with the inscription in gold lettering and inside two medallions in gold, the one of them full of diamonds with the portrait of the Emperor, has remained confined, as it were, to his house for the past two months and has been unable to obtain from 'Itimad-ud-Dauleh a second audience to discuss his business which is said by all to be to the advantage of this capital. In the audience he had of the king, when he presented the letters, he had a place lower down than mine. With 2,000 scudi in presents, which they have distributed among many of the subordinate officials, the English obtained (permission) to go to the place which had been assigned for me: and by spending more money they were enabled to get into their own hands the very letter from the Emperor in order to learn its contents, and they had the time too to make a copy of it. That is the sort of system in which affairs go in this Court. . . .”

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If for no other object than to assign a reason for the complete absence of any communication from Persia in the twenty volumes of the archives of the Sac. Congregation that cover the interval between the years 1721 and 1725, as also of letters from missionaries in the collection preserved in the Carmelite archives, it would have been necessary to relate, at any rate cursorily, the Afghan invasion of Persia, capture of Isfahan and the ensuing change of dynasty. The break with the past, with the settled, ordered and generally dignified government and life of the country which had prevailed for more than a century under the Safawi monarchs was, however, so complete that to it in more proximate or more remote degree may be ascribed most of the ills of the next two hundred years—the internal or tribal dissensions and rivalries, the obvious cracks in the structure of this huge but always loosely built empire of so many component parts and races from Georgians and Armenians in the far north-west and Caucasus to Afghans and Hazara almost on the slopes of the Himalaya, from Arabs beyond Basra and Baghdad to Turcomans and Mongols in the distant north-east: and with the loss of that hereditary stability in the Court at Isfahan, that solidity and continuity of rule to which the various races had become accustomed to look, there largely vanished also the culture, the urbanity and international outlook which through Shah 'Abbas had influenced his descendants and made them to remain in touch and correspondence with the West and admit, incidentally, Catholic missionaries to a privileged position. Materially, the economic life of the country suffered greatly, as the reports of factors and agents of the East India Company bear witness (e.g. in the Gāmbun diary—India Office records—of 8th April 1727:

“the kingdom is still disputed by many parties and factions . . . the cause of so general a decay of trade throughout the kingdom for these five years past but has even threatened the utter ruin of it”),

such evidence of its promotion as seen in Shah 'Abbas the First's search for markets for silk overseas and in the insistence of Shah Sultan Husain's Court on an establishment of direct trade with France ceasing with the disintegration of the centralized government and power which had marked the Safawi system of rule. Lust of autocratic power and of conquest make the brief domination by Nadir Shah one of those typical and arresting incidents of Persian history and an apparent break in the general decline. But for the rest, and in its soul as a nation, it was as if the country had raised round itself a wall of separation from the rest of the world, had elected to develop a fanaticism, an intolerance, contempt and ostracism of the rest of the world which exercised their baneful effect well into the twentieth century.

Despite savage attacks, provoked or not, which had from time to time from Shah 'Abbas I