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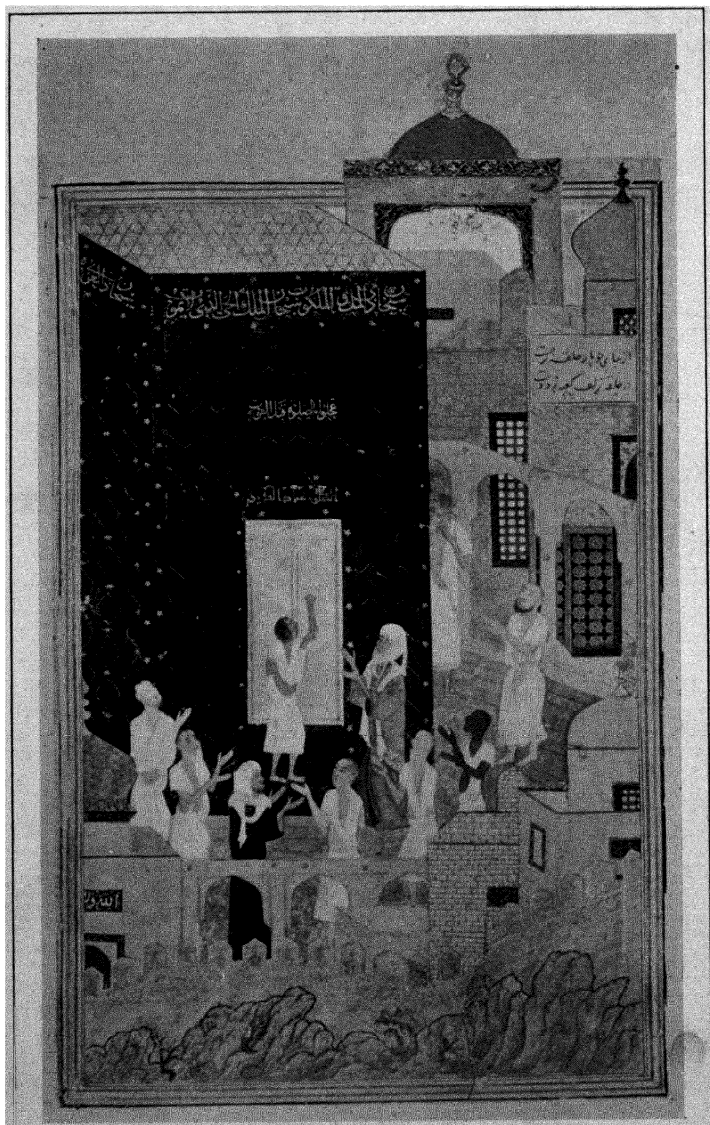
Persian Poetry,

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*CRITERION MISCELLANY—No. 25*

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PERSIAN PAINTING



# PERSIAN PAINTING

BY  
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TO  
HERBERT READ



## PREFACE

IN this little book I have tried to give a summary of the history of Persian painting from the time of the first national kings of Persia, the Sasanians, who came into power about 212 A.D., and under whom the art of painting first flourished, to the present day. It might seem curious that I should have been able to cover so vast a period within the brief space of forty pages. But those initiated into the mysteries of Persian art know that in this glorious world very little is certain and definite. The art of painting in Persia has only recently attracted attention, and as yet only the broad outlines have been described. We know for instance that before the thirteenth century Persia was mainly engaged in gathering the materials on which to build up its art of painting. Our knowledge of this period is therefore inevitably fragmentary. Between the thirteenth century and the sixteenth we come across mature Persian painting, but we have no records of the achievements of these three hundred years because reproducers of the human form were considered to be violaters of the traditions of Islam, and as such too heretical to be mentioned in books. By the end of the sixteenth century the Persian artistic imagination seems to have exhausted its resources, and the process of decay seems to have set in. Consequently the plentiful information about the period after the sixteenth century that is available from the accounts of occidental travellers is rendered useless and uninteresting.

It is hoped that after the forthcoming exhibition of

Persian art at Burlington House we shall know a little more about the work of the three glorious centuries which elapsed between the coming of the Mongols to Persia and the fall of the Safavids.

There are one or two things about my essay which I must note here. I have taken the liberty throughout to dispense with the longs and shorts of oriental names as it is more convenient for the printers to set the type, and perhaps spares the reader the trouble of tackling the difficult task of acquiring the correct phonetic pronunciation of unfamiliar oriental names. The list of principal reigns, poets and artists, and the bibliography, are by no means exhaustive. I have just noted down the names of such kings, poets and artists, as I considered in any remote way connected with the subject of this essay. The bibliography includes only such works as I found useful during the course of my study.

I have to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Laurence Binyon, and to Mr. J. V. S. Wilkinson for looking at the manuscript and for making various suggestions.

I am also grateful to Miss Margaret Thomas for evincing constant interest in my work, and for advice.

*September 1930*

M.R.A.

## PERSIAN PAINTING

PERSIAN painting really begins with the coming of the Mongols to Persia in the thirteenth century. For though there had been a long native tradition of art before that time, and the remarkable work of the thirteenth century and after seems to be a development, which could not have sprung up in all its sudden maturity without a tradition, we have very little authentic knowledge about the artistic activity of the earlier periods of Persia's history. Recent researches have no doubt disclosed certain facts about the major art movements, native and foreign, that flourished in ancient Iran. But most of this knowledge has been acquired from evidence of survival in mature Persian painting of certain of the older art movements, and although it is thus conclusively proved that those movements existed, we are yet too inadequately furnished with any positive facts to see them in a continuous perspective, and to undertake an historical survey of them. Since, however, the tracing of influences is sometimes productive of constructive knowledge, I propose, by way of preface, and in default of a complete outline of the earlier phases of Persian painting, to note what little we do know of the early art movements from evidence of survival, or otherwise.

The term 'Persian' which is generally applied in the West to describe the peoples and things known in the East as Iranian or Ayran, is derived from the classical *Persis*, a modification of *Pars* (or as it is now, *Fars*), the original home of the Achæmenian dynasty which founded

the first Persian Empire. The Achæmenian Kings, Cyrus the Great, Cambyses, Darius and Xerxes, are known to us through Greek history. Settling down in Persia about 2000 B.C., they made their Empire the successful rival of Hellas. And so it remained until that great event in the history of the world, the conquest of Alexander. After this brilliant, youthful general had but half accomplished his ambitious ideal to unite the East and the West in a single world Empire, he died on Persian soil which he had drenched with the blood of his enemies a little while before, and the dynasty of Seleucus, his lieutenant, ruled Iran for a century and a half. The Seleucid régime, however, came to an end when the Parthian nomads, from Khorasan, spread the wave of their conquest over the middle-eastern world. The Parthians remained in possession for nearly four hundred years. But then arose a native Persian dynasty of Sasanian kings which was long to dominate the imagination and the memory of the Iranians by reason of its glory and splendour. There are numerous paintings in mature Persian art, recording the deeds of the kings of this dynasty. Khusrau Naushirwan, and Khusrau Parviz, the hero of the poem 'Khusrau and Shirin', and Bahram Gur, are for instance, the subjects of some of the most remarkable studies by the masters.

During Sasanian rule, which lasted from the middle of the third century to the middle of the seventh, the borders of Persia spread far and wide. It included not only the boundary which is modern Persia, but also the vast area watered by the Tigris and the Euphrates as far as the Arabian desert, and the territory extending to the western end of Mesopotamia, the then border of the Roman Empire. In this expansive Sasanian Empire there prevailed an era of prosperity equalled in few periods of Persia's subsequent history. And a very highly developed art came into being. Had specimens of this art survived we should have been richer by more masterpieces of Persian art than those we already possess,

but the Arabs made a clean sweep of every monument of art, when intoxicated by their zeal to spread the militant religion of Islam they stormed the Persian cities and annexed the country to form part of the Caliphate with its capital at Baghdad. Little besides the arch of the palace of the Sasanian kings, and certain written accounts of the grandeur of their luxurious lives have come down to us to remind us of the glory that was Iran during Sasanian rule. The sculptured reliefs and the figure designs in embossed silver of the time which have been accidentally preserved also suggest that Sasanian art inherited a great deal from the art of Assyria, especially in its decorative character, and that it bequeathed its entire inheritance to later Persian art. Sir Thomas Arnold has suggested, that in the representations of angels, of hunting scenes, and of drinking parties in gardens, the mature Persian paintings retain much of the Sasanian manner. But whatever the nature of the contribution made by Sasanian art to mature Persian art, it is certain that it was considerable.

Another ancient art movement which counted for much in the development of later Persian painting is that called Manichæan art. This found its guiding impulse in Mani, the author of a world religion, known as Manichæanism. Born early in the third century of the Christian era, Mani began preaching in 242 A.D., and incurred the penalty of death for being a heretic from Zoroastrianism about the year 275 A.D. He believed himself to be the promised Messiah, and sought with great reverence for the teachings of Zoroaster and Christ to unite Zoroastrianism and Christianity into a single religion. Light and darkness, good and evil, he taught were the ultimate realities. The earthly universe was the product of the dark or the evil principle. Adam and Eve who embodied the light and the good principle in them were the creation of the devils, who had enshrined their own light and goodness in the being of man and woman, so that it might thus remain

safe from destruction or dissolution. Mani declared that men and women were to separate the particles of light in them which had become mixed with the particles of darkness in the process of creation, by such pious exercises as fasting, prayer, celibacy, etc. For some curious reason he enjoined the practice of painting also as a necessary part of the ritual and the ceremonial of his religion. Mani was himself a painter and memory reveres him more for his skill in the arts than for his religious teachings.

Based on the secure foundations of a religion then, the Manichæan art must have gained the support of the myriads of people whom Mani convinced by his faith, and it must certainly have attained a high degree of perfection. St. Augustine, who was himself a Manichæan before he turned Christian, does indeed refer in one of his writings to the beautifully illustrated leather bound book of the Manichæans, but having been converted to Christianity which was a deadly enemy of Manichæanism he exhorts his readers of true Christian faith to burn these treatises if they ever come across them. It is probable that the Muhammadans adopted the same, at once admiring and contemptuous, attitude towards the Manichæan products of art as did the Christians. So in this case, as in the case of the Sasanian art, with which it was contemporaneous, we have little or no remains left to enable us to exercise our values precisely. Even the evidence of survival was very inconclusive in regard to this art, until Professor Von Le Coq discovered, in 1904, some illustrated manuscripts and frescoes belonging to a Manichæan temple of 1036 A.D. or earlier, on the site of a buried city near Turfan in Central Asia. The striking resemblance between the ornamental details in the colouring and design, and the treatment of drapery, of some of these, and certain later paintings has now put it beyond doubt that the Manichæan tradition is connected with mature Persian art ancestrally. Indeed, even if this evidence had not turned up, it would have been hard to

imagine, in the face of the certain knowledge of the fact that Mani, himself a painter, and the founder of a religious system which made painting a sacred duty, should have been Persian by birth, and that the art which he practised and encouraged should have contributed nothing to the history of the art of his country. Not only then was valuable work executed when Manichæanism was in the ascendancy but it was carried on until long after this religion was completely wiped out of existence by the persecutions of Zoroastrian, Christian, and Muhammadan governments successively. For an illustrated Manichæan religious treatise is reported to have existed until the end of the eleventh century. And a copy of Mani's own illustrated manuscript, *Arzhang*, a book on various religions written in 1092, is still preserved in the treasury of the Afghan city Ghazni, and gives weight to the hypothesis that the Manichæan art was of great significance to later Persian art.

In the seventh century of the Christian era the Arabs made themselves masters of the civilized worlds of Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, North Africa and Spain. They had evinced little talent for art before they accepted Islam, but what little artistic instinct they had displayed was stifled to death by the injunction against painting and sculpture which the Muslim divines inferred from the traditions of the prophet Muhammad, in the absence of any ruling to the effect in the holy Koran. The belief was that the painter and the sculptor would be called upon on the day of judgment to breathe life into the images they had created, and on their failure to do so, they would be condemned to suffer the tortures of hell for having tried to imitate God in the function of creation.

The Ommayid Caliphs of Damascus, the first Islamic rulers in history, were very orthodox, and zealously observed the taboo on art. But their immediate successors, the Abbasid Caliphs, were stimulated into artistic appreciation by their intercourse with the various civilized

nations they subjugated, and they sought within certain limits to cultivate themselves. Thus they engaged the artists of different nations to build their cities and decorate their palaces, and also to illustrate holy books in the painting of which they thought a flagrant breach of the Islamic taboo on art would not be involved. Prominent among foreign artists whom they employed were the Byzantine Christians who brought the Hellenic and the Roman traditions they had inherited, the Persian artists whose genius for drawing and design had already found expression in the Sasanian and the Manichæan arts, the Transoxanians, who had preserved their own tradition of antique art influenced by the Central Asian Buddhistic conceptions, and the Chinese artists who flocked to the capital of the Caliphs at Baghdad, the then centre of world commerce. The art that grew up by the fusion of these respective traditions, is, for want of a better name, styled Musalman art.

It was, in fact, not Musalman art but Christian art derived from the traditions of antique art, because, although artists of different nations contributed to the making of it, the number of Christian artists among these was very large, and the vitality of their artistic impulse manifested itself in the tributary streams of art that flowed into the courts of the Abbasids. The influence which the Christians exerted on the law, government, and other departments of civic life of the Caliphate had also been very extensive. In the realms of art, however, they found much ampler scope for activity, because apart from the secular work for the performance of which they were engaged by their masters they were employed to decorate their own countless churches which were being built by the Nestorian and the Jacobites within the Muslim Empire right under the shadow of angry Islam. And they continued to build on the débris of antique art, without modifying their style in any essential way, except to prevent hurting Muhammadan susceptibilities. Thus

the Muhammadan art remained Christian throughout, only becoming slightly tinged with Muhammadanism towards the luxurious days of the decadence of the Caliphate, when the rulers discovering that they too had ideas of art, beauty, and ugliness, dictated their own will to their court artists.

Few examples of their work in secular art are now extant. The frescoes at Qusayr Amra in which there is a strain of Hellenism, which no other artists except the Christians possessed, were certainly executed by them. The beautiful wall paintings and frescoes in the palace at Samarra, where dwelt Caliph Harun-al-Rashid in all his glory, also seem to be from their hands, for besides the fact that the figures of the Christian priests occur in them, the signatures of the artists are genuinely those of the Byzantine Christians. How wonderful the paintings in the picture hall in the garden of the palace at Samarra, which we read of in the Arabian Nights, must have been, we can imagine if we cast a glance at the manuscript remains of the Arab era which have come down to us.

The earliest relic of Musalman art is some leaves from a manuscript bearing the names of Sultan Nur-al-Din who died in A.H. 581 (A.D. 1185), and of Saladin of crusade fame. There is also an Arabic translation of the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides dated A.H. 619 (A.D. 1222), written and illustrated by Abdallah-ibn-al-Fadl. These two, however, must be passed over, for they are the first very simple attempts of the Arab school, as yet uninfluenced by Christian art. It is the next monument, the *Maqamat-i-Hariri*, once belonging to Mr. Charles Schefer and commonly called after him Schefer's Hariri, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, that must engage our attention. A collection of frivolous stories by a Muhammadan writer, it is the most important work of Musalman art for it delineates the life as it was led under the Caliphate, besides giving us glimpses into the nature of the art of that time. Containing ninety-six miniatures,

it was copied and illustrated by Yahya ibn Mahmud ibn Yahya ibn Ali-al-Hasan ibn Kuwariha al Wasite, about A.H. 634. There exist other copies of this *Hariri* in the same library, and in the British Museum and in the Imperial Library at Vienna in varying states of preservation and of unequal artistic merits.

It is very probable that the *Maqamat* was originally illustrated by Christian artists, or their descendants, who still retained their own religion or accepted Islam, for a great deal of resemblance between the figures that occur in the Nestorian and the Jacobite churches and in Schefer's *Hariri* has been detected. The convention of painting the nose, for instance, that occurs in it also characterizes the Arabic Bible in the British Museum. In a picture of Christ before Pilate in the British Museum, included in a lectionary of the Jacobite church of the thirteenth century, there are groups of figures of an identical facial type, wearing a similar style of costume and presented in the same postures as the figures in the original *Maqamat*. The resemblance, too, between an Arabic manuscript of 1299 of the Apocryphal Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus, belonging now to the Laurentian Library at Florence, and the illustrations in the *Maqamat* of that period, is significant.

Similar resemblances are to be found in the manuscript next in importance after *Hariri*, the *Kalilah-wadimnah*, now in the Bibliothèqu Nationale, Paris, which includes eighty miniatures and was executed somewhere in the thirteenth century.

Miniatures in a treatise of astrology by Nasir-al-Din Muhammad, dated A.H. 662-682 (A.D. 1267-1283), belonging to the Bibliothèqu Nationale may also be mentioned as examples of Byzantine technique. Also the British Museum manuscript of *Manafi-al-Hayawan* of 1250 A.D. by Ibn Bakhtishur is important as it contains very realistic representations of animals.

Alongside of the Abbasid tradition which flourished in

and about Baghdad, must be considered another art movement which developed suddenly in the ninth century under the patronage of the Shiah Fatimid Sultans of Egypt who managed to obtain control of that country from their cousins the Sunni Caliphs of Baghdad, about A.D. 909. When the Fatimids came into power, there was a body of Coptic Christians who had carried on the decayed artistic tradition of Egypt under conditions of great hardship and suffering brought on by the oppression of one conqueror after another. Inspired by healthy rivalry the Fatimids encouraged these Copts to revive their art. The Copts, breathing more freely than they had done for generations, worked steadily and with the help of the Chinese artists who came from the court of Baghdad, and of the Greek artists, raised some monumental structures of which, however, only the memory remains. We accidentally glean some knowledge of them through the chronicler Maqrizi. From this author's account it appears that Fatimid art developed much higher in the brief space of a little over two hundred years than the Abbasid art did during the vigorous practice of about seven centuries.

In A.D. 1171, the Fatimid dynasty was abolished. Almost all the wonderful relics of art were abolished with them. The artists of Egypt emigrated eastward, but finding no service in the already crowded courts of the Abbasids, dispersed and settled down, some in Persia, some in the Mediterranean countries, but most in Mesopotamia, where they founded the vigorous Fatimid Mesopotamian school. This profoundly affected the Abbasid art of Baghdad, the entire body of which later became the heritage of the Persians who accepted Islam.

## II

After the above survey of the major art movements which flourished before the coming of the Mongols, we are fairly well prepared to appreciate the fine efflorescence of Persian art which bloomed at its loveliest between the

fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Art in the East has always been a court art, practised under the patronage of princes and noblemen who could afford to pay the artist the high sums of money his work deserved, and who could defray the heavy costs of production incurred by the artist in buying the gold, the lapiz lazuli and other valuable materials necessary for his work. In 1258, Persia found the patrons it had needed since Sasanian times, in the Mongols, who, though not Persians by birth, became such by adoption, when Hulagu, their general, overthrew the Caliphate and established himself to rule over Iran. He had descended on the Muslim world with indescribable fury, sacking and looting Baghdad and massacring one million of its inhabitants with ruthless barbarism. The loss to civilization through this wholesale slaughter of the learned men and indiscriminate destruction of monumental buildings, libraries and works of art was infinite. But Persia benefitted in creative effort after this avalanche of horror had wrought its havoc, for the power which had come with death and destruction in its train remained there to create. The house of Hulagu displayed an active interest in art. It set to work the Chinese artists who had come with it from Central Asia, and encouraged its Persian subjects to learn the Chinese technique.

It was a lucky day for Persia, indeed, when this happened, for the materials which native Persian art had been moulding under the influence of the arts of different nations with whom it came into contact, directly or indirectly, now received the final gloss and polish which they sorely needed to become a finished product. The subtlety of conception of the Chinese blended with the genius for graceful colouring and design of the Persian artists, and the conventions of true Persian painting were chalked out if not finally established. There was started a renaissance of Persian art, which if destined to live only for two or three brief centuries, produced some of the greatest masterpieces of art. Unfortunately, owing to

the fact that Persia had accepted Islam, Persian artistic activity, though not strictly observing the ban on painting put by Muhammadan iconoclasts, had for a considerable time to limit itself to the illustration of manuscripts and the painting of frescoes, being besides deprived of the advantage of seeking succour from religion which was so strong a factor in the development of the Hindu and the Chinese arts. Still within the limits of the ideal of romantic beauty which it adopted, it achieved things, which as embodiments of earthly heavens, are capable of taking their place not only among the masterpieces of the art of Asia but among the greatest works of art of the entire civilized world.

Among the relics of this first authentic period of Persian art, the Mongol period, which have come down to us, may be mentioned, first the illustrated manuscript of the *History of the Mongols*, by Ala-al-Din Juwayni, dated A.H. 689 (A.D. 1290), at present in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris. The oldest manuscript composed in Persia, and the first representative of the Mongol period, it consists entirely of drawings in pen and ink, a fact which suggests that the artist who executed them was either a Chinese naturalized in Persia, or a Persian greatly under the sway of Chinese influences. As evidenced by the frontispiece showing the author Ala-al-Din Juwayni on his knees presenting a book to Arghun, the grandson of Hulagu, it was probably meant for presentation to that monarch.

Next may be noted the two charming fragments of a manuscript of *Jami-al-Tawarikh* by Rashid-al-Din, dated A.H. 714 (A.D. 1314), belonging to the Royal Asiatic Society and the Edinburgh University respectively. It is impossible to over-emphasise their importance, for embodying as they do a fascinating fusion of the greatest qualities of the Chinese and the Persian traditions they are the first really true products of the Persian art which came to birth in the thirteenth century. In the illustra-

tions of this manuscript the artist betrays a thorough mastery of execution and conception. The lines which define the outline of figures are hardly as broad as the finest hair on a squirrel's tail. The colouring is an harmonious fusion of the bright Caliphate tradition with the sombre Chinese silveriness. The thought is some subtle magic which seems to have sprung up from the illimitable sources of a very deep consciousness, the product is a marvel from which it is difficult to take the admiring eyes away. Two forces have obviously met, the Chinese and the Muhammadan, and their mingling in a common cause has retained what was best in both and eliminated the weaker factors in each; and an art has been created without comparison except in nature's loveliest handiwork among a bed of flowers.

Another *Jami-al-Tawarikh*, later in date but certainly the work of a Persian is in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Besides these manuscripts, there exist the complete works of six Persian poets dated A.H. 714 (A.D. 1314), belonging to the library of the India Office, which Dr. Martin, the well-known collector and critic of Persian art, considers to be of 'no great artistic value'.

There is also a Persian translation of *Manafi-al-Hayawan* containing ninety-four miniatures of men and animals, of A.H. 695 (A.D. 1295) now in the possession of Mr. Pierpont Morgan, similar in colouring and design to the Royal Asiatic Society *Jami-al-Tawarikh*. The figures in this lack realism, and there is visible a disparity of styles, in some features, although on the whole the artist has created with a delicacy and sureness of touch and depth of feeling which was characteristic of the Mongol school.

The Il-Khan dynasty, as the house of Hulagu was called, tumbled to pieces after a century of strong rule. Towards the latter half of the fourteenth century small native chieftains divided Persia between themselves, and under their patronage the Mongol tradition continued to

flourish, though in a somewhat weaker form. The examples of the art of this period which we possess show this in a remarkable manner.

For instance, take the *Jami-al-Tawarikh*, which Dr. Martin considers as important for the Mongol period as Schefer's *Hariri* is for the Caliphate. In a hundred and eleven miniatures it delineates the life of the Mongol princes. The scheming, designing and colouring in this work is of the Chinese kind favoured by the Mongols, but it is reconciled to the spirit of Persia. It seems as though the unconscious elements in the artist's mind which were being moulded into shape through centuries of change and upheaval of the conscious, have attained ascendancy, as it were, and inspired the brush. There is a sheer sense of joy for colour and gaiety moulded into perfect shape through the subtle craftsmanship of the Chinese artist. There is a rhythm in the bold expressive lines, a soft harmony of colouring, more easily found in delicate music than in painting. No doubt, there emerges before the critical eye a certain hardness in the bodily forms, but one has only to realize that the rough uncouth Mongols newly filtering into civilization from the barbarism of their native life were not exactly the images of grace we find in the ballet. The stiff realism which seems to irritate the romantic balance of the artist's mind may therefore be forgiven. Altogether there is a fineness and subtlety in these paintings which might compare with the ripest Chinese or Italian paintings and not be put to shame by the comparison.

My estimate might appear exaggerated, coming as it does from an oriental, but in one of the foremost works on Persian miniature painting, Dr. F. R. Martin declares a portrait of Timur of the period to be 'better than anything European of that time', and after a thorough survey of the work accomplished during the Mongol era asks: 'Which artist ranks the highest? Which was the more skilful, the European or the Eastern?' And the reply

comes trumpet-tongued: 'If we regard the work without prejudice, putting aside all feeling of religion and sentiment as regards costume and subject, I think we must acknowledge that the oriental painting was more highly developed than the European. Could Cimabue, or the great masters Giotto or Duccio who created their much admired work at the same time, bear comparison with their Eastern compeers in respect of unerring drawing and the solution of technical difficulties? Did the Italians of the fourteenth century produce a painting with such splendid decorative effect as Sultan Ozotag's reception of two ambassadors? What a charm, what a decorative sense and character is possessed by oriental landscape drawing in comparison with the childish attempts of the Sienese school! How superior are the orientals in regard to colour! The Italian trecento paintings pale when compared with their prototypes the Byzantine mosaics, whereas the Persian miniatures of the same time survive a similar ordeal with triumph!'

### III

Persia did not long remain split up into minor rival factions after the fall of the Mongols, for there now appeared on the scene of Central Asia one of the greatest conquerors that the world has known—Tamerlane. A Turk by descent, he was born at Kesh, the modern city Shahr-i-Salbz, and early acquired a reputation by his military exploits. He conquered Central Asia, and after years of wandering, not unattended with extreme hardships and privations, he subjugated Eastern Turkestan and Transoxania, by about 1380. During that year he made Persia his objective. But many long years elapsed before this country, still strongly governed by the Mongols, fell to him as a whole. Some of its eastern provinces, i.e., Khorasan, submitted, but Southern Persia was annexed only after Timur had been all round, reducing Sistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia, etc. He took Isfahn,

butchering 70,000 of its inhabitants. The citizens of Shiraz, dreading the same fate, opened their gates to him. Six years later he had won complete control over Southern Persia. Then establishing his capital at Samarkand, he continued his marches till he had touched the borders of India in the East, and of Russia in the West.

Although a stern subduer, Tamerlane was not without culture, and when he plundered and pillaged he did so with discrimination, destroying the useless but preserving the valuable to carry back with him on the golden road to Samarkand. And with that superior love of beauty, which distinguished him from his predecessors Alexander and Chengiz, he made his capital a truly golden city, attracting to his court the leading spirits in the arts of all nations and countries which paid him tribute. His reign was thus an era of refinement which saw the fullest development of Persian painting.

Timur died, and his descendants continued to evince interest in art until the inevitable mischief of time stepped in and robbed them of their sovereignty. But though they are dead and forgotten, the art which flourished under them and bears their name is eternal and immortal.

The spirit of many nations and civilizations that met under the shadow of Timur's canopied throne, meets in Timurid art. The mosaics executed on the inner and the outer walls of the buildings which Timur had erected best betray this spirit. But as these mosaics strongly influenced the miniature painting of the time, the spirit also permeates that branch of artistic activity.

The founder of the Timurid school of painting is supposed to be one *Ustad* (master) Gung. Nothing much is known about him except that he taught *Ustad Jahangir* of Bukhara, who is known as 'Umdat-al-Mussavrin', (the Pillar of the Painters), and who in turn tutored *Pir Sayyid Ahmad* of Tabriz, the master of *Bihzad*. But though the loss to our hero-worshipping instincts is great that no gossipy details of his life are known, the gain of Timurid

art, which certainly came to be whether its founder ever lived or not (for it is sometimes asserted that Ustad Gung was a mythical person), is by no means lessened, because some real masterpieces of this school have come down to us, and we can merge all the individuals who contributed to the making of them in an objective study.

First and foremost among the relics of this period is the *Khwaju Kirmani* manuscript, dated A.H. 799 (A.D. 1396) executed by Junaid and belonging to the British Museum. A remarkably beautiful piece of work, it is a cherished possession because it is the sole representative of the art as it was practised in Timur's own lifetime. The lack of plasticity in the figures shows that the Mongol influence has not yet quite receded. In fact, the manuscript discloses the same perfect fusion of heterogeneous elements as the Royal Asiatic Society *Jami-al-Tawarikh*. The expressions on the faces of the figures are Chinese. The background is of Persian-Chinese architecture, and the landscape purely Iranian. In all its glorious unity of conception and execution, however, it gives sometimes a revolting sense of crudeness, and sometimes an idea of delicacy and fineness that would do nature no harm, but might even augment its charm.

In the famous Bellini Album which derives its name from the fact that a portrait of a Turkish prince by Gentile Bellini was found in it, and which, originally collected in Turkey by Sultan Ahmad, passed through various hands until it was divided among the sons of a Turkish bibliophile, there is a miniature of this period called 'A Prince with his Wife'. A photograph of this, and another much admired page showing the scene of the arrival of Humag at the court of the Emperor of China among other photographs of the Bellini Album, is in the Musée des Arts décoratifs. Keats might have revelled in them, to find a truth as beautiful as he discovered in the Grecian urn. The life behind plants and in flowers dancing in an overgrowth of foliage to the gentle music of a soft breeze has

been interpreted with a masterliness, which suggests that nature seems to have revealed its innermost secret to the artist, and drowned him as it were, in its depths below depths.

The British Museum owns a Timurid manuscript of A.H. 813 (A.D. 1410) in which ink and gold designs of carpets and borders of manuscripts, have been executed with an extraordinary refinement of decorative detail and luxurious beauty of colour.

A collection of manuscripts of A.H. 813 (A.D. 1410) consisting of thirty-nine works bound in a single volume is now the treasure of M. Golbenkian. Prepared for presentation to Sikandar, son of Umar Shaikh, and a grandson of Timur, 'the most powerful Sultan and most just Emperor, King of Kings of Arabs and Persians, Shadow of God in the two countries, Lord of the Water and Land, the greatest King, splendour of the world and of the Faith', it is a marvel of detailed workmanship, and would be most interesting to Europeans, as in it the nude which in their own art is the medium for the expression of the highest feeling, is here, probably under alien influences treated according to the conventions of Persian art.

The veritable galaxy of stars that adorned the court of Shah Rukh Bahadur, the greatest of Timur's sons, who ruled from the changed capital of Herat, assimilated, in a more coherent manner than had been accomplished at Samarkand, the major influences which flowed into Persian art at the beginning of the Timurid era. The style of this time is an admirable mixture of Chinese drawing in line in pen and ink, the Mesopotamian gold and colour finish, and the Italian primitive radiance and gorgeousness which probably made its way into Timur's court with the European ambassadors who came to pay homage to the master of Asia. And, although we have yet to meet the exquisite finality of the art of Bihzad, the Shah Rukh phase of Timurid art presents the most refined, and the most luxurious colour schemes of all Persian painting.

There are some ink drawings of animals, belonging to Dr. Sarre, and obtained by him from the Sultan's library at Yildiz, in which we may clearly see European and Chinese influences beautifully blended together.

The grandeur and the majesty of the wealthy monarchs of Timur's dynasty is reflected in such superb monuments as the *Miraj Namah*, dated A.H. 840 (A.D. 1436) owned by the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and the *Nizami* manuscript of A.H. 868 (A.D. 1463) formerly belonging to M. Goloubeff.

There is a hunting scene painting of this time, which is important as showing the softening of the old colours.

A manuscript of dancing dervishes, composed by Sultan Mirza Ali of Gilan in A.D. 1490, consists of two hundred miniatures contributed by various hands in one symphony of colour and design.

A charming picture of sleeping Rustum may also be mentioned as an expression of the art of this time.

This gloriously rich period of Persian art was only the harbinger of the great things yet to come. Already, however, we see that the masters of Samarkand and Herat had attained that joyous sense of freedom from the tyranny of reality, acquired that secret power of impressing their thought on the symbol, which raises the static to the ecstatic. Of course, in the light of what followed, this was merely the fixing of conventions, the outlining of the task of the future. There was still a stiffness and primitiveness lurking somewhere. Absolute perfection was not yet. Bihzad had not yet appeared.

#### IV

With the appearance of Bihzad, perfection came. Bihzad was born in the first half of the fifteenth century, and he lived to see the decline and final disruption of Timurid power, and the rise of the Safavids, the first national kings of Persia since the Sasanians. As is usual in the case of Persian artists we have very scanty informa-

tion about him. Islamic writers were too weak to flout the anathemas of orthodox Muhammadan divines who condemned the art of painting. Although they wrote countless lives of the prophet, and exulted in recalling the deeds of their kings, they refrained from mentioning even so much as a word about the painters unless one of these also happened to be a poet or calligraphist, and claimed notice in either of those connections. Khwandamir, the author of a history called *Hahib-as-Siyar* and perhaps the only writer who had the courage to be an open admirer of the arts, has, however, left us a note about Bihzad, which is more an eulogy written with abounding enthusiasm than informative about his life. But it may be quoted as it is the only document we possess about the master. It runs as follows: 'Ustad Kamal-ad-Din Bihzad. He sets before us marvellous forms and rarities of art; his draughtsmanship, which is like the brush of Mani, has caused the memorials of all the painters of the world to be obliterated, and his fingers endowed with miraculous qualities have wiped out the pictures of all the artists among the sons of Adam. A hair of his brush, through its mastery, has given life to the lifeless form. My revered master attained to his present eminence through the blessing of the patronage and of the kind favour of the Amir Nizam-ad-Din Ali Shir, and his Majesty the Khaqan (i.e., Sultan Husayn Baygara) showed him much favour and kindness. At the present time too this marvel of the age whose belief is pure, is regarded with benevolence by the kings of the world, and is encompassed with the boundless consideration of the rulers of Islam. Without doubt thus it will be forever!'

The above appreciation, apart from doing honour to Bihzad, establishes one important fact about him that from the very beginning of his career till the end, he enjoyed the patronage of one court or another. Trained in the school of Ustad Gung, he seems first to have been in the service of Sultan Husain Mirza, a descendant of

Timur. After the death of that monarch he was appointed court artist by Shah Ismail Safavi, and he lived long enough to enjoy the friendship of Shah Tahmasp. That he was very highly thought of by the first Safavi king is evident from the anecdote that is current about them. Shah Ismail before setting out to lead an army in battle declared, 'If I suffer defeat, and my capital be taken, I do not wish Shah Mahmud Nishapuri and Master Bihzad to fall into the hands of my foes.' He actually had them concealed, so that the enemy might not lay hands on them, and on returning home from the battle vanquished the first question tradition puts into his mouth is: 'Is Master Bihzad still alive?' Babur the Mughal Emperor of India speaks of Bihzad in his memoirs as 'the most eminent of all painters', and there are hosts of similar references to him scattered about in books of the time.

It is difficult to identify all the work that he executed, because such was his fame and the love which people had for his art, that they signed his name with their own hands on paintings by other artists for no other reason but that they wished the paintings in their possession were his. Among the paintings that are assigned to him are the following: (1) A sketch for the portrait of Sultan Husain Mirza, which belongs to the Boston Museum; (2) An archer on horseback; (3) Portrait of a 'dervish from Baghdad'; (4) A dervish owned by the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris; (5) Another dervish; (6) A little dervish in the Goloubeff collection; (7) Portrait of an amir, signed Bihzad, but probably by one of his school; (8) Portrait of a man with a hand in palahang, the most discussed of Bihzad's work, in respect of authenticity.

Manuscripts assigned to him are: (1) The *Zafar-Namah* or book of victory, a biography of Timur by Sharaf-ad-Din Ali Yazdi of A.H. 828 (A.D. 1424-5), copied by Shir Ali, which was once possessed by the Moghal Emperors of India, now in the Garrett collection; (2) Paintings in Nizami's *Haft Paikar*, formerly belonging to Mr.

Quaritch, in the early Timurid style; (3) One of the six large paintings in the *Bustan-i-Saadi*, now in the Khedival Library at Cairo; (4) Thirteen paintings in the *Khamsah* of Amir Khusrau Dihwi, dated A.H. 890 (A.D. 1485) now belonging to Mr. Chester Beatty; (5) Twenty miniatures in the early Nizami manuscript in the British Museum, dated A.H. 846 (A.D. 1442), which show the last manifestations of his supreme genius.

Some other later work from his hand was once in St. Petersburg Library, and there is an abundance of work scattered about in different collections, which if not actually his, was executed in his style by his followers.

It is needless to add superlatives in making an estimate of his contribution to the art of painting in Persia. Suffice it to say there is in his work a mastery of idea and craft which is the seal of finality in art. Both as portrait painter and as manuscript illustrator, he touched the highest point of any Persian artist before or after him, and the highest in Persian art, it is now agreed, can compare on an equal footing with any art of the world.

I believe he achieved his greatness because he carried the romanticism of Persian art which he had inherited, not only to its logical consequences, but a little further. He introduced into it an element of divine love, for it seems to me that he was profoundly influenced by Sufism, which at the time of his birth and during the years of his upbringing was at the zenith of its popularity in Persia, and was supplying to the arts the fecundation and inspiration of the soul. Jalal-ud-din Rumi, the greatest mystical poet of Persia, had not long been dead. The God intoxicated Hafiz had succeeded in arresting the last fine shade of sensation and thought, and had made Persian verse sing as it had never sung before. Jami burnt like a moth on the veritable spark of divine love. The atmosphere was seething with religious activity. Sufi Mysticism had permeated the very marrow of the life of Persia.

The Sufis believe the soul to exist as pre-natal. The full

perception of beauty is regarded as the realization of the supreme beauty in the spiritual world. In spite of the separation brought about by the veil of the body on the soul, the latter, it is asserted, can be realized. Through its realization and by the exercise of love and ecstasy, the divine mystery can be comprehended. Creation is considered a manifestation of supreme beauty, man an emanation of the Divine and his task in life the realization of God.

Living and moving among a coterie of Sufis in an age marked by deep religious fervour, as Bihzad certainly did at the crucial moment of his life (i.e., in his youth), he could not but have succumbed to the beautiful dreams that those God-worshipping men were weaving day and night. It was under the spell of this ideal of the realization of the divine, under the impulse of the religious instinct that he nurtured and brought to fruition that remarkable phenomena of spiritual power which has now for centuries dazzled the disillusioned gaze of even the severest critics of his art, and which leaves one dumb in a vain effort to find language sufficiently acute and pellucid to describe the intimate experiences of the soul enshrined in it. Perhaps the best way of enjoying such beauty may be, not to define it, but to let it define us, to let it reveal us to our own soul, and to rouse our inner worlds of faculty and experience in the realization of which rests the true joy of art.



## V

Agha Mirak, a pupil of Bihzad is the next greatest painter in the history of Persian art. A sayyid from Isfahan, he early attained fame as an engraver in ivory, and as a painter. His work has come down to us in less abundance than that of his master, but that is perhaps because he accomplished less of it.

There is a miniature in the Bellini Album by him, and four of his paintings are to be found in a manuscript of

A.D. 1250 which once belonged to Nur-al-Din Jahangir the Moghal Emperor of India. There are five miniatures in the Nizami of A.H. 899 (A.D. 1524) by him, besides some illustrations in the British Museum Nizami of A.H. 946-947 (A.D. 1539-1543).

A critical survey of his work discloses him as less emancipated from the Timurid tradition than his master. His work is simple. But his figures retain the Timurid stiffness of form. His colours are, however, saturated with a brilliance that lends a peculiarly charming ostentatiousness and decorativeness to his pictures. An accomplished technician, his masterly paintings suffer from the inevitable comparison to the work of Bihzad to which they put themselves.

Shaikh Sada Mahmud, a pupil of both Bihzad and Mirak worked at the court of the Shaybanid Sultans of Transoxania. So well did he practise the craft he learnt from his masters, that his work is sometimes difficult to distinguish from theirs. Most of his miniatures are now owned by M. De Motte, who obtained the Shaybanid Library of Abd-al-Ghazi Abd-al-Aziz Bahadar Khan, the Uzbek Sultan of Bukhara who is reported to have been the greatest bibliophile of the East. Among the many works executed by Sada Mahmud for this monarch, one miniature in a collection of three (two of which are by Bihzad), and a Nizami manuscript dated A.H. 944 (A.D. 1537), and a *Bustan-i-Saadi* of A.H. 963 (A.D. 1555) in the possession of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, deserve mention.

There are extant some other paintings of this time executed by members of the Bukhara school. For instance, there is a manuscript of *Gulistan-i-Saadi*, done at Bukhara in A.H. 975 (A.D. 1567) after Bihzad, and a picture of Sikander fighting the dragon, which suggests that the Persian painters were well acquainted with European art of this time, because it is evidently modelled on the picture of St. George fighting the dragon.

Most of the artists of the Bukhara school, painters of masterpieces under Bihzadian influence, have, however, yet to be dragged from the obscurity in which they have long lain. Their distinguishing features were the strength and vividness of their design, and few bold touches of colour. Their school, however, died an abrupt death about the beginning of the sixteenth century and has never since been revived.

## VI

The tradition of Bihzad which had travelled with him from the studios of Herat to those of Tabriz, when he went to the court of Shah Ismail, absorbed most of the good features of the Bukhara school, and flourished till long after the decay of that School. Shah Tahmasp, son of Shah Ismail, was a great lover of art as we learn from Iskandar Munshi who lived in the reign of Tahmasp's grandson, Shah Abbas II, and wrote a few pages of the lives of Persian painters. 'His Majesty was a pupil of the celebrated painter, Master Sultan Muhammad; he attained perfection in designing and the delicate use of the brush; in his early youth he had a great enthusiasm and love for art, and established in his well equipped library the incomparable masters of this art, such as Master Bihzad, and Sultan Muhammad, who had reached the greatest height in this noble art and attained world wide fame for the delicacy of their brush; and Aga Mirak, the artist from Isfahan, was his special friend and intimate boon companion.

'His Majesty was very friendly with this group; whenever he was at leisure from the business of government and the cares of state, he would devote his attention to practising painting, but in the latter part of his reign the multitude of his occupations left him no leisure for such work, and he paid less attention to the work of those masters who bestowed life on the beautiful forms produced by their mixing of colours.'

· Sultan Muhammad, referred to above as the teacher of His Majesty, was the chief artist who carried on the traditions of Bihzad and Mirak at the court of Shah Tahmasp. He is known by such works as the large hunting scene painting which once belonged to the Russian Imperial Library, the drawing of a camel, formerly belonging to Mr. Charles Ricketts and now owned by Philip Hofer, and certain contributions to works illustrated during Shah Tahmasp's reign by various artists in collaboration.

His art may generally be described as limited in conception, though it displays a wide range of technical power. He borrowed extensively from his forerunners. His excellent grouping betrays the strong influence of Bihzad, the elegance and polished grace of his style he owes to Mirak, and the physiognomy of his figures is Chinese. He is the creator of happy scenes, luxury loving people indolently lounging in garden bowers. But his figures do not seem capable of movement. The folds of their dresses seem to be fixed. His deliberate, determined manner, robs Sultan Muhammad's work of much of the charm which he would seem otherwise to possess. There is also a rather distressing sameness about his paintings. Even his enchanting colouring presents a sameness throughout his work. Within the narrow circle of his scanty vision, he certainly produced thoroughly satisfactory results, reinterpreting the best in his inheritance, but apart from the novel method of drawing large and bold lines, he added nothing to the glorious annals of Persian art filled up by the personality and the work of one great man—the master Bihzad.

Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris owns the greatest and the most typical representative of the art of the Shah Tahmasp period. It is a *Shah-Namah* dated A.H. 944 (A.D. 1537) executed at the command of the king, containing two hundred and fifty-six large miniatures, characterized by its amazingly dense groups which move

in a background of grand architecture and natural landscape. It is executed with a meticulous care for detail, and a pleasing richness of colour. Unfortunately, the source of its inspiration was no new vision of the artist, but the love of pomp of the Shah who desired the best artists of his day to make a joint effort to create a monument to perpetuate the glory of his reign. Hence it lacks the spontaneity of a work dictated by the feeling of art for arts' sake. The artists had nothing fresh to offer, and were merely repeating with a desperate hurry the conventions of the old masters. Besides it aimed at fusing all the styles of the studios of Bukhara, Herat, Tabriz that had sprung up since the time of the Mongols. Consequently there is here an assertive virtuosity, a fuss and haste that comes through painting with an inharmonious technique, and in obedience to a vaporous emotion.

The British Museum Nizami dated A.H. 946-949 (A.D. 1539-1542) containing thirteen miniatures, to the making of which the brushes of Mirak, Sultan Muhammad, Mir Sayyid Ali, Muzaffar Ali and Mirzi Ali, all contributed, is the finest representation of sixteenth century art. There is in it an idyllic picture of the ascent of the prophet Muhammad to heaven, which is one of the most beautiful of the few Persian religious paintings in existence. The graceful design has been executed with such rare skill, that each element of the scene stands out separate, and yet perfectly united to the whole. The delicate harmonies of colour take the onlooker by leaps to the heights which the prophet is reaching. The strange atmosphere of heaven has been created with a clearness, reticence, composure and certainty which is indescribable. The entire Nizami in which this occurs is a veritable treasure full of the most priceless gems. I do not think the chronicler, Shah Mahmud Nishapuri, was led away by his instinct for exaggeration when he described it as one 'the like of which the eye of time never beheld'.

There exists a manuscript of A.H. 945 (A.D. 1557) in which there is beautiful calligraphy by the above mentioned Shah Mahmud Nishapuri. And there is a manuscript of Qazvini, with excellent illustrations of plants and trees, of this period, formerly in the Goloubeff collection.

Sadiq and Kamal were two other distinguished painters of Shah Tahmasp's reign. The former was a pupil of Bihzad and adhered to the conventions set by the master very rigidly. His line is, however, much thicker and he can never catch the spirit of the master.

Kamal's work shows greater powers so far as technical skill is concerned, but he has no individuality, being like most other artists of the day a copyist of former conceptions, and his art seemingly inspired by the observation of the superficies of things remains a superficial art.

Shah Tahmasp's reign, rich though it was in artistic activity, shows in the imitativeness of its later phases the first signs of the decay that was soon to set into the realms of Persian art. Nobility of ideas was vanishing. Sensuous motives predominated. The cruder senses and preoccupations had no occasion to be checked in the breathless race to achieve grandeur that the king had started. The increase in the quantity of art was followed by a diminishing quality.

## VII

The history of painting of the reign of Shah Tahmasp's son and successor Shah Abbas is the story of how the art which had lately shown symptoms of decay, developed the fatal disease, lingered on the death bed, and finally succumbed to its tragic end. Shah Abbas reigned successfully for about forty-three years. As administrator, as warrior, and as man of culture, he aimed at greatness. But like most people surcharged with the wine of ambition he forgot that what is big is not necessarily great. It was not altogether his fault that

he failed to see this. Persia had been enjoying peace and orderly government now for a considerable space of time and it had learnt to indulge in the evils that come in the train of prosperity. Western influence was also making itself felt. European travellers were being dazzled by the glamour of Shah Abbas' court, perhaps also dazzling it in turn with European novelties. It was an illusory world that Iran lived in. Outwardly happy and contented, inside it was being moth-eaten. The process of decay in art, I said above, was felt in the closing years of the Shah Tahmasp's reign. There had been visible a lack of originality. Shah Abbas precipitated the disruption, when in blissful ignorance of the true function of art, he engaged artists to advertise his grandeur to the world. Not only that. He tried to impose his will on the artists by making his personal pleasure the only criterion of good work. Lured away from their vision and their method, the artists produced a great deal of imitation stuff with machine-like efficiency. Copying was the ideal adopted as is well evidenced by a passage from Manaqib, a writer of about the beginning of Shah Abbas' time, which has it that an artist, 'after having copied a master for a number of years, became at last so thoroughly imbued with his master's style that he was able to create in exactly the same manner'.

The art of this period embodies all that is negative of the positive qualities of the art of Bihzad and Mirak. If the colouring of the masters was one pure lyric innocent of false accent or over-emphasis, yet passionately powerful, in the pictures of Shah Abbas' reign, it has lost both its harmony and its power. If the line of the masters was one smooth melody, executed now with microscopic delicacy, now with largeness and strength, it is now often uncouth and capricious. Even the materials which the artists used are inferior. The background of the landscape at one time the very essence of poetry, has now almost sunk to the level of sordid realism. The fact is, the artist

did not search for meanings. He did not, like his illustrious predecessors, try to relate beauty to truth.

Owing, however, to the fact that Shah Abbas vigorously advertised his glory to the West by extending the hospitality of his court to occidental travellers, and by dispatching and receiving embassies to and from the most powerful states of Europe, the art of his time has acquired a rather undeserved reputation. No doubt some of it is very charming and delicate, but it is a pity that the work for instance of Riza, the head of Shah Abbas' court artists, should be better known in the West than that of Bihzad and the other great masters.

Riza was a prolific painter, producing several hundred works even the worst of which he took great pride in signing. At times a skilful draughtsman, he is generally as tiresomely lifeless as the tired looking figures he created in badly coloured backgrounds of strong violet mixed with blue.

Muin Musavvir, a pupil of Riza, who produced some drawings in the crude and garish manner of his master, is remembered because he executed a portrait of his master, which is the only portrait of a Persian artist known.

The chief work carried on in collaboration during this age was a *Shah Namah*, projected perhaps in a vein of egoism by Shah Abbas to portray the splendour of his reign, but a monstrous perpetration, devoid of any charm of conception, colour, design, costume or landscape, executed by artists who follow their master Riza like sheep in a flock.

Of these artists the reader may well be spared the knowledge. They were becoming bankrupt both in thought as well as in execution.

## VIII

When the bankruptcy of a nation's culture is threatened, it is well for it to attempt to adjust its balance by exploring its past heritage and by rediscovering its ancient ideals.

The Persian nation did nothing of the kind. Persian art was a romantic art. Mr. Laurence Binyon in his little essay on *Painting in Persia*, in his *Poems of Nizami*, has beautifully summed up its character by saying that: 'We are impressed, first of all by its supremely decorative quality. The figures, the dresses, the birds, the trees, the flowers, the buildings, are all real things, such as the artist saw in his own daily life; there is an exquisite observation in every detail, but all is removed into a strange and radiant world, because there is no attempt to render the light and shade of nature; everything glows distinct like a jewel. For the everyday vision of the ordinary man is substituted a vision in which the world is a glorious whole, washed in a clear magical light and dazzling in its colour. In no other art do we feel a more sensuous appreciation by the artist of the pure and precious pigments. It is indeed the danger of the art that as we see in its decay, it is prone to decline into craftsmanship, uninformed from within by the stress of mental effort.' Romanticism can flourish only when the world of dreams is as yet untainted by the brute reality of ugly facts, only when the child's dream world of fancy is not yet spoiled by the reasonable common-sense of a stern, unimaginative parent, conscious of his own importance, and never doubting whether the child's fancy world is not a much better and a more real world than his own real existence. In this respect, romanticism is in an inferior position to the mystical idealism of religion, for the religious consciousness refuses to be put to shame by the challenge of the intellect. It builds on faith which to the generality of mankind seems as important as, or more important than, reason. Romanticism, then, unless it is of the deeper religious consciousness, always surrenders its dream world of fancy, when it comes face to face with so-called enlightenment.

Persia's romantic child's mind of the seventeenth century, was impressed and overawed by the clear and defined realism of the European traveller. It became

ashamed of its romanticism. Hence, it made no effort to rediscover its ancient ideals. The people became thoroughly denationalized. In the special domain of art, the denationalization took the form of giving European costumes to figures. Europe had brought its intellectual contempt for fantasy. Asia submitted without a murmur. And it is a horrible fact to record that this loss of individuality persevered throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, so that the Persians of these generations have been inclined to prefer contemporary drawings executed under European influence, to the immortal creations of mature Persian painting.

The European influence was, however, productive of one good result. The Western art of flower painting had been dumped in the Persian picture markets for some time. The Persian people fortunately still retained much of their love of flowers. Beginning by imitating Western flower paintings, the artists finally abandoned the alien manner, and got back at least in this kind of art to the ancient traditions. So that a decorative effect was achieved by some of them, hardly equalled by the flower painters of any other nation. An excellent example of this branch of art are the flower paintings in a manuscript dated A.H. 1145 (A.D. 1752) in the Imperial Library at Vienna.

A partial renaissance in art set in with the invasion of Nadir Shah into India. The fabulous wealth which this tyrant brought from Delhi included not only the art treasures of the Imperial Library, but also several artists of the Mughal court. These artists brought new motives. But it was like throwing a pebble into a stagnant pool, not a strong enough influence to revive a vital movement. A portrait of Nadir Shah done under the spell of Indian inspiration is an extraordinary example of work thus conceived, and is significant of the spirit of the times.

In the crowded political history of Persia from the fall of the Safavids, to the rise and fall of the Kajars, native

art has been altogether dead, although now and then collectors and critics have been faced with some unusual ebullitions from the hot springs of artistic creation. The last Kajar Shah of Persia died amid the squalor and the dirt of the disreputable alleys and lanes of Paris. The spirit of decadence which he inherited has died with him. Persia has been reborn with the Riza Shah Pahlvi. May one not entertain the hope that just as the political sagacity of this brilliant monarch has created a Persia capable of taking its place alongside of the greatest nations of the world, his broad culture will also stimulate the coming of a renaissance of Persian art?

LIST OF PERSIAN DYNASTIES, PRINCIPAL REIGNS, AND THE  
MOST FAMOUS POETS AND ARTISTS WHO FLOURISHED UNDER  
THEM

*Achaemenians*, B.C. 650-330

Achaemenes, about B.C. 650.

Cyrus the Great, B.C. 546-529.

Darius, B.C. 521-485.

*Alexander the Great*, died B.C. 323.

*Seleucids*, B.C. 311-159

Seleucus Nicator, B.C. 302-281.

Antiochus the Great, B.C. 223-213.

*Parthians*, B.C. 249-226

Mithradates I, died B.C. 138.

*Sasanians*, A.D. 212-650

Ardeshir, A.D. 229-241.

Shapur the Great, A.D. 309.

Naushirwan the Just, A.D. 531.

Khusru Parviz, A.D. 591-628.

*Omayyid Caliphs*, A.D. 661-750.

Abd-al-Malik, A.D. 685-705.

Walid, A.D. 705-715.

*Abbasid Caliphs*, A.D. 750-1258

Harun al-Rashid, A.D. 820-872.

Ma'mun, A.D. 813-833.

*Abdallah-ibn-al-Fadl*, painter.

*Yahya-ibn-Mahmud-ibn-Yaha-ibn-Ali-al-Hasan-  
ibn-kuwariha-al-Wasite*, painter.

*Tahirids*, A.D. 820-872

Tahir Dhu 'l-Yaminayn, A.D. 820-822.

*Saffarids*

Ya'qub ibn Layth, A.D. 868-878.

*Samanids*, A.D. 874-999

Ismail ibn Ahmad, A.D. 892-907.

*Ghaznavids*, A.D. 962-1186

Yamin al-daula Mahmud, A.D. 998-1030

*Firdausi*, poet, A.D. 1020.

*Seljuks*, A.D. 1037-1157

Tughril Beg, A.D. 1037-1063.

Malik Shah, A.D. 1072-1092.

Sinjar, A.D. 1117-1175.

*Khawarizm Shahs*, A.D. 1150-1231

Ala-al-din Muhammad, A.D. 1199-1220.

*Nizami*, poet, A.D. 1200 (?)

*Chingiz Khan*, A.D. 1175-1227.

*Mongols*, A.D. 1227-1349

Hulagu, A.D. 1256-1265.

Conquest of Baghdad, A.D. 1258.

*Sadi*, poet, A.D. 1291.

*Timurids*, A.D. 1369-1494.

Timur, A.D. 1369-1404.

Shah Rukh, A.D. 1404-1447.

Baisunghar, A.D. 1433.

*Hafiz*, poet, A.D. 1388.

*Ustad Gung*, painter.

*Ustad Jahangir*, painter.

*Pir Sayyid Ahmad of Tabriz*, painter.

*Junaid Naqqash Sultani*, painter.

*Sultan Husain Mirza*, A.D. 1506.

*Safavids*, A.D. 1502-1736  
Ismail I, A.D. 1502-1524.  
*Bihzad*, painter.  
Tahmasp I, A.D. 1524-1576.  
*Agha Mirak*, painter.  
*Sultan Muhammad*, painter.  
*Mir Sayyid Ali*, painter.  
*Muzaffar Ali*, painter.  
*Mirza Ali*, painter.  
*Qasim Ali*, painter.  
*Sadiq*, painter.  
*Kamal*, painter.  
*Shah Mahmud Nishapuri*, calligraphist.  
*Shah Quli Naqqash*, painter.  
Abbas the Great, A.D. 1587-1629.  
*Riza Abbasi*, painter.  
*Muin Mussavir*, painter.  
Abbas II, 1642-1667.  
Hussain I, 1694-1722.

*Afsharids*, A.D. 1736-1749  
Nadir Shah, A.D. 1736-1747.

*Kajars*, A.D. 1794-1909  
Aga Muhammad, A.D. 1794-1796.  
Fath Ali Shah, A.D. 1798-1834.  
Muhammad Shah, A.D. 1834-1846.  
Nasir-ud-din Mirza, A.D. 1846-1896.  
Muzzafar-ud-din, A.D. 1896-1907.  
Muhammad Ali Mirza, A.D. 1907, abdicated  
1909.  
Sultan Ahmad Mirza, crowned A.D. 1909,  
abdicated A.D. 1925.

*RIZA SHAH PAHLVI.*



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