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THE FALL OF THE KAJAR DYNASTY  
IN PERSIA MARKS THE END OF TWO  
CENTURIES OF CRUELTY AND VICE

The last of the Shahs has gone. Another chapter in Persian history is closed. Another great Eastern dynasty is in the dust, and presumably the land of Omar Khayyam joins the swelling list of republics.

Whether the change marks the dawn of more peaceful, more prosperous days for Persia remains to be seen. Democracy as we know it is not an Eastern growth, and the experience of some other Oriental countries is not encouraging.

With the deposition of Sultan Ahmed Shah vanishes the power of the Kajar dynasty, which has held the country in an iron grip for nearly two centuries. It was founded amid the terrors of civil strife, during which brother mutilated brother and son murdered father, and common humanity disappeared before a lust for power.

The Persia of Omar Khayyam, brilliant, lush, exotic, and the Persia of the Kajar dynasty, running in blood and steeped in vice and cruelty, are difficult to reconcile. Nightingales sing beneath a white moon, scented gardens where lovers whisper, a rich, sensuous life amid Oriental luxury, belong to the poet's song, while in the real Persia under the despotism of the Kajars the clash of swords mingled with the cries of the wounded and the oppressed.

The history of the Kajar dynasty is brief and inglorious, crowded with tales of Oriental cruelty, almost unbelievable to Western ears.

The real founder of the house was Aga Mahommed, although his father and grandfather had been fighting neighboring tribes for the supremacy of the Kajars for many years. He was undoubtedly one of the most cruel and vindictive despots that ever disgraced a throne. He waded to victory through the blood of his friends and enemies alike, and was known to be utterly without mercy.

Although Aga Mahommed was a beardless and shriveled eunuch, with a face like that of an aged and wrinkled woman, he was terrible in his craving for power, and appalled even his callous soldiery with his cruelty. On one occasion, after the surrender of Kerman in 1795, he was so furious at the escape of his most hated rival that he ordered a general massacre of the innocent townspeople, and sold 20,000 women and children into slavery. Still not satisfied in his lust for revenge, the savage conqueror had 70,000 eyes of the inhabitants brought before him on platters.

When his rival was finally caught and tortured to death, Aga Mahommed marked the spot with a pyramid built of the skulls of his enemies, slain at the same time.

**A Murdered Tyrant.**

Treacherous as a cat, he gained the confidence of the blind king, Shah Rukh, under the guise of friendship, and then tortured him horribly until he revealed the place of concealment of his jewels and treasures.

Having reduced the country to a state of terror, he caused himself to be crowned Shah, but lived only a year afterward, when he was murdered by his own personal attendants, and his body was exposed to insult.

His contempt of luxury, his dislike of excessive ceremony, his protection of commerce, and his consideration for his soldiers—all this would have been praiseworthy in another man; but through the centuries the memory of his atrocious tyranny alone has survived.

Baba Kan, his nephew, who took the name of Fath Ali Shah, was able to secure the throne after some fighting. The tradition of ruthless tyranny was not as strong in him as in his uncle, but he showed by one action alone, which Western peoples would consider inexcusably devilish, that he could on occasion view insubordination with all the cold malice of the true despot.

Sadik Kahn Shakaki, a general who seized the crown jewels, and whose hand was as ready to fondle the cheek of a harem beauty as to close around his sword hilt, was felled up alive by the Shah's orders, and the imperial jewels glittered once again in the grasp of the king of kings.

**Ghastly Tortures.**

At times, too, this Shah could lose all sense of justice in the sheer joy of inflicting punishment. He had a noble charged falsely with the murder of a holy man, and ordered the offender to be brought before him. He gloated over his tremulous appeals for mercy; he laughed at the sight of his hands that flickered from breast to mouth in his extremity of nervous agitation.

"Those hands of yours shall be cut off," said the Shah, "and your tongue shall be plucked out by the root." This was only part of the ghastly punishment inflicted on the unfortunate man. In comparison with his uncle, however, Fath Ali Shah was a mild-mannered prince.

**The Peacock Throne.**

His son, Mahommed Shah, who first prohibited the importation of black slaves into Persia, was a strong and vigorous ruler who brooked no interference with his will. He was twenty-eight when he ascended the Peacock Throne of his ancestors, the most dazzling emblem of royalty in the world, and a masterpiece of the goldsmith's jeweler's and carver's art, the value of which it is impossible to assess.

The throne resembles a table some five feet by four, with three richly bejeweled legs at each end. The top of the "table," which forms the seat of the throne, is approached by a flight of steps. A glittering and intricately carved panel serves as a background for the occupant of the throne and the front, at each side of the steps is guarded by miniature parapets.

His crown jewels were no less splendid than the Peacock Throne. They originally included the famous Koh-i-nor diamond, which was seized, however, by the Afghans before the time of Aga Mahommed, and now adorns the English Crown. A superstitious feeling of fear and respect appears to have kept them intact in spite of frequent insurrections, and they were handed down through the Kajar family without loss.

Mahommed Shah struck fear into the hearts of his vassals by the cold-blooded way in which he had a Prime Minister strangled, provincial governors beaten and stripped of all their possessions, and blinded rebels against his absolute authority. His obsession appeared to be the seizing of power, inherited from the first of his line, and he waged ruthless warfare against all who dared stand against him.

**Western Innovations.**

He was succeeded by his son, Nasru 'd-Din Shah, who followed in the tradition of cruelty which his forefathers had established. He used treachery against his friends, tortured his enemies, and would have murdered the commander-in-chief of his army and his faithful ally had the luckless man not anticipated his fate by committing suicide.

In spite of his reign of terror, he opened up his country to Western innovations and permitted the overland telegraph line between England and India to pass through his dominions.

Nasru 'd-Din Shah, unlike his predecessors, felt his rule safely enough established in Persia to risk a visit to the Continent of Europe. He came to England in 1873 and stalked through the streets of London, gorgeously arrayed in Eastern costume that astonished the eyes of the conservative English. A contemporary commentator wrote of him as "dripping diamonds and vermin" and marvelled at his unusual method of disposing of his asparagus stalks.

He is said to have been persuaded with the utmost difficulty to forgo the pleasure of seeing one of his suite hanged when the British method of capital punishment was explained to him during a visit to a prison. He was assassinated in 1896 and left the throne to his younger son, Muzaffar-ud-Din, whose sole contribution to the welfare of his country was the granting of a Constitution a few months before his death.

There is a characteristic story of his meeting with the then Duke of Sutherland. The duke was presented to the Shah by the Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII.

**The New Persia.**

"This is one of the richest of our great nobles," said the Prince. "He is much richer than myself."

"Ugh!" was the Shah's confidential but perfectly audible comment, "why don't you cut his head off?" And it is stated that the refusal of his offer of personal assistance in the matter gave some offence and earned the Prince not a little Imperial contempt.

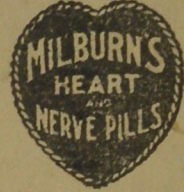
The Persia over which his son, Mahommed Ali Shah, was called upon to rule was no longer the kingdom of old times. It now had a Constitution which recognized the rights of the people and curtailed the extravagance of its ruler. The new Shah was weak and vacillating, without any of the qualities which had made Persia the most powerful nation of Western Asia. He soon came into conflict with his Parliament, and after a period of fighting in and about Teheran, during which the worst excesses of Oriental savagery were perpetrated, he fled for his life and surrendered the throne to his eleven-year-old son, Ahmed Mirza.

The latter has added nothing to the history of his country. Showing a marked distaste for living in his native land, he has spent most of the years of his rule abroad, away from the eternal factional quarrels and petty jealousies that seethed beneath the blue sky of Persia. Paris and the Riviera have been his playgrounds, and now the last vestige of his shadowy sovereignty vanishes. A groom commands where for 200 years his ancestors ruled so terribly.

Think, in this battered Caravanserai whose portals are alternate Night and Day, how Sultan after Sultan with his pomp abode his destined hour, and went his way.

Gone long ago are the glories of the Great Mogul at Delhi; an English Viceroy commands where once the line of Shah Jehan reigned. Vanished from the sight of the teeming millions of China is the Son of Heaven; the Manchu Empire is no more. The pomp and circumstance of Constantine are past, and a soldier rules a republic in the Asiatic city where once the Caliphs, descendants of the Prophet, held sway.

Now another great dynasty follows them into obscurity. The "King of Kings" has vanished from his Peacock Throne, and the East is bereft of a little more of its traditional romance.

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