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The History Of Hindostan; From The Earliest Account Of Time, To The Death Of Akbar; Translated From The Persian Of Mahummud Casim Ferishta Of Delhi

Together With A Dissertation Concerning the Religion and Philosophy of the Brahmins ; With An Appendix, Containing the History of the Mogul Empire, from its Decline in the Reign of Mahummud Shaw, to the present Times ; In Two Volumes

Dow, Alexander

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Chap. II. Disturbances in Bengal - Story of Chaja Aiass - His flight from Tartary - Distress in the desert - Birth of the Sultana Noor-Mahil - Marriage with Shere Afkun - Persecution - and murder of ...

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prudent to send all on different services. Four of the principals he reserved, whom he ordered to be seized. They were tried for treason; sufficient proofs could not be found. They were kept in confinement: Chusero was more narrowly watched; and became daily more and more obnoxious to his father.

A. D. 1606.
Hig. 1015.

J E H A N G I R E.

C H A P. II.

Disturbances in Bengal—Story of Chaja Aiafs—His flight from Tartary—Distress in the desert—Birth of the Sultana Noor-Mábil—Marriage with Shere Afkun—Persecution—and murder of that Omrah—Her marriage with the emperor—Promotion of her family.

J E H A N G I R E, having resettled the affairs of the provinces to the north-west of the Indus, marched toward the capital. When he was crossing the Attoc, letters were received from Illam Chan, governor of Behâr, with intelligence, that Shere Afkun, a native of Turkomania, who commanded in the district of Burdwan, had, with his own hand, killed Kuttub-ul-dien Koka, Suba of Bengal, together with several other officers, who had set upon Shere Afkun, with an intention to assassinate him. Jehangire was much afflicted at the death of his favourite Kuttub; but he derived some comfort from the Suba's success against the life of Shere Afkun. The circumstances of the unhappy fate of this chief are in themselves extraordinary; and the knowledge of them is necessary for elucidating the sequel of the history of Jehangire. To trace things to their source, we must, for some time, lose sight of the unfortunate Shere.

Disturbances
in Bengal.



Story of
Chaja Aiafs.

About twenty years before this period, Chaja Aiafs, a native of the western Tartary, left that country to push his fortune in Hindostan. He was descended of an ancient and noble family, fallen into decay by various revolutions of fortune. He, however, had received a good education, which was all his parents could bestow. Falling in love with a young woman, as poor as himself, he married her; but he found it difficult to provide for her the very necessaries of life. Reduced to the last extremity, he turned his thoughts upon India, the usual resource of the needy Tartars of the north. He left privately friends, who either would not or could not assist him, and turned his face to a foreign country. His all consisted of one sorry horse, and a very small sum of money, which had proceeded from the sale of his other effects. Placing his wife upon the horse, he walked by her side. She happened to be with child, and could ill endure the fatigue of so great a journey. Their scanty pittance of money was soon expended: they had even subsisted, for some days, upon charity, when they arrived on the skirts of the Great Solitudes, which separate Tartary from the dominions of the family of Timur, in India. No house was there to cover them from the inclemency of the weather; no hand to relieve their wants. To return, was certain misery; to proceed, apparent destruction.

His distress

They had fasted three days: to complete their misfortunes, the wife of Aiafs was taken in labour. She began to reproach her husband for leaving his native country at an unfortunate hour; for exchanging a quiet, though poor life, for the ideal prospect of wealth in a distant country. In this distressed situation she brought forth a daughter. They remained in the place for some hours, with a vain hope that travellers might pass that way. They were disappointed. Human feet seldom tread these deserts: the sun declined a-pace. They feared the approach of night: the
place



place was the haunt of wild beasts; and should they escape their hunger, they must fall by their own. Chaja Aiafs, in this extremity, having placed his wife on the horse, found himself so much exhausted that he could scarcely move. To carry the child was impossible: the mother could not even hold herself fast on the horse. A long contest began between Humanity and Necessity: the latter prevailed, and they agreed to expose the child on the high-way. The infant, covered with leaves, was placed under a tree; and the disconsolate parents proceeded in tears.

When they had advanced about a mile from the place, and the eyes of the mother could no longer distinguish the solitary tree under which she had left her daughter, she gave way to grief; and throwing herself from the horse on the ground, exclaimed, "My child! my child!" She endeavoured to raise herself; but she had no strength to return. Aiafs was pierced to the heart. He prevailed upon his wife to sit down. He promised to bring her the infant. He arrived at the place. No sooner had his eyes reached the child, than he was almost struck dead with horror. A black snake, say our authors, was coiled around it; and Aiafs believed he beheld him extending his fatal jaws to devour the infant. The father rushed forward. The serpent, alarmed at his vociferation, retired into the hollow tree. He took up his daughter unhurt, and returned to the mother. He gave her child into her arms; and, as he was informing her of the wonderful escape of the infant, some travellers appeared, and soon relieved them of all their wants. They proceeded gradually and came to Lahore.

The emperor Akbar, at the arrival of Aiafs, kept his court at Lahore. Asiph Chan, one of that monarch's principal Omrahs, attended then the presence. He was a distant relation to Aiafs,

in the desert.
His arrival,
and good
fortune at
Lahore.

and



and he received him with attention and friendship. To employ him, he made him his own secretary. Aiafs soon recommended himself to Afiph in that station; and, by some accident, his diligence and ability attracted the notice of the emperor, who raised him to the command of a thousand horse. He became, in process of time, master of the household; and his genius being still greater than even his good fortune, he raised himself to the office and title of Actimâd-ul-Dowla, or high treasurer of the empire. Thus he, who had almost perished through mere want in the desert, became, in the space of a few years, the first subject in India.

Character of
his daughter
Mher-ul-
Niffa.

The daughter, who had been born to Aiafs in the desert, received, soon after his arrival at Lahore, the name of Mher-ul-Niffa, or the Sun of Women. She had some right to the appellation; for in beauty she excelled all the ladies of the East. She was educated with the utmost care and attention. In music, in dancing, in poetry, in painting, she had no equal among her sex. Her disposition was volatile, her wit lively and satirical, her spirit lofty and uncontrôled. Selim, the prince-royal, visited one day her father. When the public entertainment was over, when all, except the principal guests, were withdrawn, and wine was brought on the table, the ladies, according to custom, were introduced in their veils.

She capti-
vates Sultan
Selim:

The ambition of Mher-ul-Niffa aspired to a conquest of the prince. She sung—he was in raptures: she danced—he could hardly be restrained, by the rules of decency, to his place. Her stature, her shape, her gait, had raised his ideas of her beauty to the highest pitch. When his eyes seemed to devour her, she, as by accident, dropt her veil; and shone upon him, at once, with all her charms. The confusion, which she could well feign, on
the



the occasion, heightened the beauty of her face. Her timid eye by stealth fell upon the prince, and kindled all his soul into love. He was silent for the remaining part of the evening: she endeavoured to confirm, by her wit, the conquest which the charms of her person had made.

Selim, distracted with his passion, knew not what course to take. Mher-ul-Nissa had been betrothed, by her father, to Shere Afkun, a Turkomanian nobleman of great renown. He applied to his father Akbar, who sternly refused to commit a piece of injustice, though in favour of the heir of his throne. The prince retired abashed; and Mher-ul-Nissa became the wife of Shere Afkun. The latter, however, suffered in his prospects in life, for not having made a voluntary resignation of the lady to the enamoured prince. Though Selim durst make no open attack upon his fortunate rival, during the life of Akbar, men in office worshipped the rising sun, and threw accumulated disgrace on Shere Afkun. He became disgusted, and left the court of Agra. He retired into the province of Bengal, and obtained from the Suba of that country, the superintendency of the district of Burdwan.

Marries Shere
Afkun;

The passion for Mher-ul-Nissa, which Selim had repressed from a respect and fear for his father, returned with redoubled violence when he himself mounted the throne of India. He was now absolute; no subject could thwart his will and pleasure. He recalled Shere Afkun from his retreat. He was, however, afraid to go so much against the current of the public opinion, as to deprive that Omrah of his wife. Shere was inflexible: no man of honour in India can part with his spouse, and retain his life. His incredible strength and bravery had rendered Shere extremely

who is per-
secuted by
Selim.



popular. He was naturally high-spirited and proud; and it was not to be expected, that he would yield to indignity and public shame.—His family, his former reputation was high.—Born of noble parents in Turkomania, he had spent his youth in Persia; and had served, with uncommon renown, Shaw Ismaël the third of the Sufvi line. His original name was Asta Jillô, but having killed a lion, he was dignified with the title of Shere Afkun, or the Overthrower of the Lion. Under the latter name he became famous in India. In the wars of Akbar, he had served with great reputation. He had distinguished himself, in a particular manner, under Chan Chanan, at the taking of Sind, by exhibiting prodigies of personal strength and valour. Preferments had been heaped upon him; and he was highly esteemed at court, during the life of Akbar, who loved in others that daring intrepidity for which he himself was renowned.

He is called
to court.

Jehangire kept his court at Delhi, when he called Shere Afkun to the presence. He received him graciously, and conferred new honours upon him. Shere Afkun, naturally open and generous, suspected not the emperor's intentions. Time, he thought, had erased the memory of Mher-ul-Niffa from Jehangire's mind. He was deceived. The monarch was resolved to remove his rival; but the means he used were, at once, foolish and disgraceful. He appointed a day for hunting; and ordered the haunt of an enormous tiger to be explored. News was soon brought, that a tiger of an extraordinary size was discovered in the forest of Nidarbari. This savage, it was said, had carried off many of the largest oxen from the neighbouring villages. The emperor directed thither his march, attended by Shere Afkun, and several thousands of his principal officers, with all their trains. Having, according to the custom of the Mogul Tartars, surrounded the ground for many miles, they began to move toward the center,

on



on all sides. The tiger was roused. His roaring was heard in all quarters: and the emperor hastened to the place.

The nobility being assembled, Jehangire called aloud, "Who He attacks,
 "among you will advance singly and attack this tiger?" They
 looked on one another in silence: then all turned their eyes on
 Shere Afkun. He seemed not to understand their meaning: at
 length three Omrahs started forth from the circle, and sacrificing
 fear to shame, fell at the emperor's feet, and begged permission to
 try singly their strength against the formidable animal. The
 pride of Shere Afkun arose. He had imagined, that none durst
 attempt a deed so dangerous. He hoped, that after the refusal of
 the nobles, the honour of the enterprize would devolve in course
 on his hands. But three had offered themselves for the combat:
 and they were bound in honour to insist on their prior right.
 Afraid of losing his former renown, Shere Afkun began thus in
 the presence: "To attack an animal with weapons is both
 "unmanly and unfair. God has given to man limbs and sinews
 "as well as to tigers: he has added reason to the former to conduct
 "his strength." The other Omrahs objected in vain, "That
 "all men were inferior to the tiger in strength; and that he could
 "be overcome only with steel." "I will convince you of your
 "mistake," Shere Afkun replied: and, throwing down his
 sword and shield, prepared to advance unarmed.

Though the emperor was, in secret, pleased with a proposal full and kills an enormous tiger.
 of danger to Shere, he made a shew of dissuading him from the
 enterprize. Shere was determined. The monarch, with feigned
 reluctance, yielded. Men knew not whether they ought most to
 admire the courage of the man, or to exclaim against the folly of
 the deed. Astonishment was painted in every face. Every
 tongue was silent. Writers give a particular, but incre-
 VOL. III. E dible



dible detail of the battle between Shere Afkun and the tiger. This much is certain, that, after a long and obstinate struggle, the astonishing warrior prevailed; and, though mangled with wounds himself, laid at last the savage dead at his feet. The thousands who were eye-witnesses of the action, were even almost afraid to vouch for the truth of the exploit, with their concurring testimony. The fame of Shere was increased; and the designs of the emperor failed. But the determined cruelty of the latter stopt not here: other means of death were contrived against the unfortunate Shere.

Defeats a
design against
his life.

He had scarce recovered from his wounds, when he came to pay his respects at court. He was caressed by the emperor; and he suspected no guile. A snare, however, was prepared for him. Jehangire had meanly condescended to give private orders to the rider of one of his largest elephants to waylay his rival, in one of the narrow streets, when he next should return to court, and there to tread him to death. As accidents of that kind sometimes happen, from the rage of those animals in the rutting season, the thing might have passed without suspicion. Shere was carried in his palanky. He saw the elephant in his way. He gave orders to the bearers to return back: the elephant came forward. They threw the palanky, with their master, in the street, and fled to save their lives. Shere saw his danger. He had just time to rise. He drew a short sword, which always hung by his side: with this weapon he struck the elephant across the root of the trunk, which he cut off with one blow. The animal roared, turned from him, fell down and expired. The emperor was looking out at a window. He retired with amazement and shame. Shere continued his way to the palace. Without any suspicion of treachery, he related the particulars to Jehangire. The latter disguised his sentiments, but relinquished not his designs. He



praised the strength and valour of Shere, who retired satisfied and unsuspecting from the presence.

Whether the emperor endeavoured to conquer his passion for Mher-ul-Niffa, or felt remorse from his own behaviour, is uncertain; but, for the space of six months, no further attempts were made against the life of Shere, who now retired to the capital of Bengal. The former designs of Jehangire were no secret. They were the subject of common conversation, little to the advantage of the character of a great prince. Absolute monarchs, however, are never without men who flatter their worst passions, and administer to their most pernicious pleasures. Kuttub, Suba of Bengal, was one of these convenient sycophants. To ingratiate himself with the emperor, though perhaps not by his express commands, he hired forty ruffians, to attack and murder Shere, when an opportunity should offer. Shere was apprized of the intentions of Kuttub. He continued within doors: but such was his confidence in his own strength and valour, that at night he would not permit his servants to remain in his house. They, according to custom, retired each to his own home. An old porter only remained of the men servants, under the same roof with Shere. The assassins were no strangers to a circumstance common in India. They made their observations upon the house. They found that there was a room, on the right hand, within the principal door, which Shere used, as a writing-chamber. This room communicated, by a narrow passage, with the sleeping apartments. When it was dark, they took advantage of the old porter's absence, and conveyed themselves, without discovery, into the house.

The principal door being bolted at the usual hour, Shere and his family went to bed. Some of the assassins, when they thought



he was fallen asleep, stole silently into his apartment. They prepared to plunge their daggers into his body, when one of them, who was an old man, being touched with remorse, cried out with a loud voice: "Hold! have we not the emperor's orders? Let us behave like men. Shall forty fall upon one, and that one asleep!" "Boldly spoken," said Shere; starting that instant from his bed. Seizing his sword, he placed himself in a corner of the room. There he was attacked by the assassins. In a few minutes, many of the villains lay, weltering in their blood, at his feet. Scarce one half escaped without a wound. The old man, who had given warning, did not attempt to fly. Shere took him by the hand, praised and thanked him for his behaviour, and, having enquired about those who had hired the assassins, dismissed him, with handsome presents, to relate the particulars abroad.

He is murdered.

The fame of this gallant exploit resounded through the whole empire. Shere could not stir abroad for the mob, who pressed around him. He, however, thought proper to retire from the capital of Bengal, to his old residence at Burdwan. He hoped to live there in obscurity and safety, with his beloved Mher-ul-Niffa. He was deceived. The Suba of Bengal had received his government, for the purpose of removing the unfortunate Shere; and he was not ungrateful. After deliberating with himself about the means, he, at last, fell upon an effectual expedient. Settling the affairs of his government at Tanda, which was, at that time, the capital of Bengal, he resolved, with a great retinue, to make the tour of the dependent provinces. In his rout he came to Burdwan. He made no secret to his principal officers, that he had the emperor's orders for dispatching Shere. That devoted Omrah, hearing that the Suba was entering the town in which he resided, mounted his horse, and, with two servants only, went to pay his respects. The Suba received Shere with affected politeness,



politeneſs. They rode, for ſome time, ſide by ſide; and their converſation turned upon indifferent affairs. The Suba ſuddenly ſtopt. He ordered his elephant of ſtate to be brought; which he mounted, under a pretence of appearing with becoming pomp in the city of Burdwan. Shere ſtood ſtill, when the Suba was aſcending; and one of the pikemen, pretending that Shere was in the way, ſtruck his horſe, and began to drive him before him. Shere was enraged at the affront. He knew that the pikeman durſt not have uſed that freedom without his maſter's orders: he ſaw plainly, that there was a laid deſign againſt his life. He turned round upon the pikeman; and threatened him with inſtant death. He fell on the ground and begged for mercy. Swords were drawn. Shere had no time to loſe. He ſpurred his horſe up to the elephant, on which the Suba was mounted; and having broke down the amari or caſtle, cut him in two; and thus the unfortunate Kuttub became the victim of his own zeal to pleaſe the emperor. Shere did not reſt here: he turned his ſword on the other officers. The firſt that fell by his hands, was Aba Chan, a native of Caſhmire; who was an Omrah of five thouſand horſe. Four other nobles ſhared the ſame fate. A death attended every blow from the hand of Shere. The remaining chiefs were at once aſtoniſhed and frightened. They fled to a diſtance, and formed a circle around him. Some began to gall him with arrows; others to fire with their muſquets. His horſe, at length, being ſhot with a ball in the forehead, fell under him. The unfortunate Shere, reduced to the laſt extremity, began to upbraid them with cowardice. He invited them ſeverally to ſingle combat; but he begged in vain. He had already received ſome wounds. He plainly ſaw his approaching fate. Turning his face toward Mecca, he took up ſome duſt with his hand; and, for want of water, threw it, by way of ablution, upon his head. He then ſtood up, ſeemingly unconcerned. Six balls
entered.



entered his body, in different places, before he fell. His enemies had scarce the courage to come near, till they saw him in the last agonies of death. They praised his valour to the skies: but in adding to his reputation, they took away from their own.

Mher-ul-Niffa

The officer, who succeeded the deceased Suba in the command of the troops, hastened to the house of Shere. He was afraid that Mher-ul-Niffa, in the first paroxisms of grief, might make away with herself. That lady, however, bore her misfortunes with more fortitude and resignation. She was unwilling to adopt the manners of her country, upon such tragical occasions. She even pretended, in vindication of her apparent insensibility, to follow the injunctions of her deceased lord. She alleged that Shere, foreseeing his own fall by Jehangire, had conjured her to yield to the desires of that monarch without hesitation. The reasons, which she said, he gave, were as feeble as the fact itself was improbable. He was afraid that his own exploits would sink into oblivion, without they were connected with the remarkable event of giving an empress to India.

ill-received at court.

Mher-ul-Niffa was sent, with all imaginable care, to Delhi. She was full of the ambition of becoming the favourite Sultana. Her vanity was disappointed. Though she was received with great tenderness and affection, by Rokia Sultana Begum, the emperor's mother, Jehangire refused to see her. Whether his mind was then fixed on another object, or remorse had taken possession of his soul, authors do not agree. They, however, assert, with great improbability, that the emperor was so much affected with the death of his favourite, the Suba of Bengal, that he resolved to punish Mher-ul-Niffa, for an accident in which she had no concern. Be that as it will, he gave orders to shut her up in one of the worst apartments of the seraglio. He even would



would not deign to see her; and, contrary to his usual munificence to women, he allowed her but fourteen anas, about two shillings of our money, a-day, for the subsistence of herself and some female slaves. This coldness to a woman whom he passionately loved when not in his power, was at once unaccountable and absurd.

Mher-ul-Niffa was a woman of a haughty spirit, and could not brook this treatment. She had no remedy. She gave herself up, for some time, to grief, as if for the death of her husband; but it was disappointment only that preyed upon her mind. She was at length reconciled to her condition, from a hope of an opportunity of re-kindling the emperor's former love. She trusted to the amazing power of her own beauty; which, to conquer, required only to be seen. The emperor's mother, who was deeply interested for Mher-ul-Niffa, could not prevail upon her son to see her. He turned away from her in silence, when she spoke of the widow of Shere. An expedient, however, offered itself to Mher-ul-Niffa. To raise her own reputation in the seraglio, and to support herself and slaves with more decency, than the scanty pittance allowed her would admit, she called forth her invention and taste in working some admirable pieces of tapestry and embroidery, in painting silks with exquisite delicacy, and in inventing female ornaments of every kind. These articles were carried, by her slaves, to the different squares of the royal seraglio, and to the harems of the great officers of the empire. The inventions of Mher-ul-Niffa excelled so much in their kind, that they were bought with the greatest avidity. Nothing was fashionable among the ladies of Delhi and Agra, but the work of her hands. She accumulated, by these means, a considerable sum of money, with which she repaired and beautified her apartments,

Not seen by
the emperor.



ments, and clothed her slaves in the richest tissues and brocades, while she herself affected a very plain and simple dress.

till the end
of four years.

In this situation the widow of Shere continued four years, without once having seen the emperor. Her fame reached his ears from every apartment in the seraglio. Curiosity at length vanquished his resolution. He determined to be an eye-witness of the things which he had so often heard, concerning Mher-ul-Nissa. He resolved to surprize her: and communicating his resolution to none, he suddenly entered her apartments, where he found every thing so elegant and magnificent, that he was struck with amazement. But the greatest ornament of the whole was Mher-ul-Nissa herself. She lay half reclined, on an embroidered sofa, in a plain muslin dress. Her slaves sat in a circle round her, at work, attired in rich brocades. She slowly arose, in manifest confusion; and received the emperor with the usual ceremony of touching first the ground, then her forehead with her right hand. She did not utter one word; but stood with her eyes fixed on the ground. Jehangire remained for some time silent. He admired her shape, her stature, her beauty, her grace; and that inexpressible voluptuousness of mien, which it is impossible to resist.

Her nuptials
with Jehan-
gire.

Jehangire did not, for some time, recover from his confusion. He at length sat down on the sofa, and requested Mher-ul-Nissa to sit by his side. The first question he asked, was, "Why this difference between the appearance of Mher-ul-Nissa and her slaves?" She very shrewdly replied, "Those born to servitude must dress as it shall please those whom they serve. These are my servants; and I alleviate the burden of bondage by every indulgence in my power. But I that am your slave, O Emperor



“peror of the Moguls, must dress according to your pleasure and “not my own.” Though this answer was a kind of sarcasm on his behaviour, it was so pertinent and well turned, that it greatly pleased Jehangire. He took her at once in his arms. His former affection returned, with all its violence; and the very next day, public orders were issued to prepare a magnificent festival, for the celebration of his nuptials with Mher-ul-Niffa. Her name was also changed by an edict into Noor-Mâhil, or the Light of the Seraglio. The emperor’s former favourites vanished before her; and during the rest of the reign of Jehangire, she bore the chief sway in all the affairs of the empire.

The great power of Noor-Mâhil appeared, for the first time, in the immediate advancement of her family. Her father, who, in the latter end of the reign of Akbar, had been chief treasurer of the empire, was raised to the office of absolute visier and first minister. Ferid Bochari, who, under the title of Mortaza Chan, managed the affairs of the empire, had been, by a stroke of the palsy, rendered unfit for business, which opened the way for the promotion of the Actemâd-ul-Dowlat. The two brothers of Noor-Mâhil were raised to the first rank of nobility, by the titles of Acticâd Chan and Asiph Jah. Her numerous relations poured in from Tartary, upon hearing of the fortune of the house of Aiafs. Some of them were gratified with high employments, all with lucrative ones. Her father was not dazzled with the splendor of his high station. He was a man of probity in private life, of ability in office. He became a great and good minister. His name is revered to this day in Hindostan. The talents of her brothers were rather popular than great. They behaved with honour and moderation upon every occasion; strangers to insolence, and enemies to oppression. The invidiousness of their situation did not raise envy. Men allowed, that merit intitled

Promotion of
her family.



them more to their high stations, than their relation to the favourite Sultana. The writers of the affairs of Hindostan remark, That no family ever rose so suddenly, or so deservedly, to rank and eminence, than the family of Chaja Aiafs; and this is our apology for the minute relation of their progress to greatness.

The change of the Sultana changed the mind of Jehangir from all public affairs. Easy in his temper, and naturally voluptuous, the powers of his soul were locked up in a pleasing enthusiasm of love, by the engaging conversation and exuberant beauty of Noor-Mahal. The late, however, did not suffer from the negligent indulgence of the emperor. An ample field was left for the virtues and abilities of the new Sultana, who turned his attention more to domestic improvements than to foreign conduct. Agriculture, which had been almost neglected, was encouraged. Many provinces, neglected by the former administration, and which were by degrees retaken and secured. Security of property was given to the farmer, the industry of the merchant was revived, and a new face was put on the empire. The Sultana was revered and loved in the empire. The Sultana

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J E H A N-

