

A GLANCE AT THE ARTS OF PERSIA.



NASCH WRITING BY MIR. REDUCED ONE-HALF.

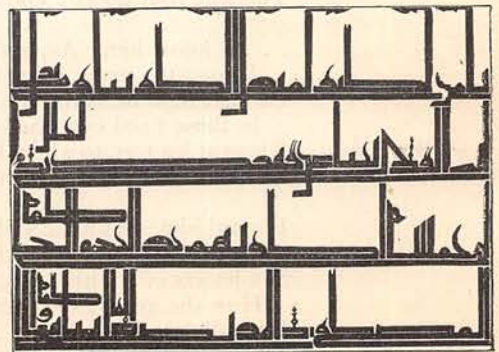
THE present is perhaps a favorable time to glance at Persian art, as it is in a transition state, passing, as it has often done already, from one form of expression to another. One of the features peculiar to contemporary Persian art is the evidence it affords that it is coming under European influences. This is not the first time that foreign and especially occidental art has directed the development of Persian art; but it is interesting to be able to note from a contemporary point of view the agencies at work in producing such results.

Persian art has been essentially industrial. The Persian artist has displayed his genius and taste in adapting his practice to the materials at hand and to the influences of his age and clime combined with utility, much if not all the arts of that historic race being eminently constructive, as may be said when builder and architect act in concert in designing a handsome building. By ever adhering to the principle of rendering his work subordinate to this principle, the Persian artist has been not only true to his instincts, but has given a vitality and endurance to his work that make it indeed national and therefore immortal. They who are wedded to the theory that easel-paintings and sculptures, independent of decorative aim, are necessarily the highest form and end of æsthetic expression, would probably relegate the greater part of the art of Persia to an inferior position. None the less, the fact remains that no people was ever more permeated by the art spirit than the Persians.

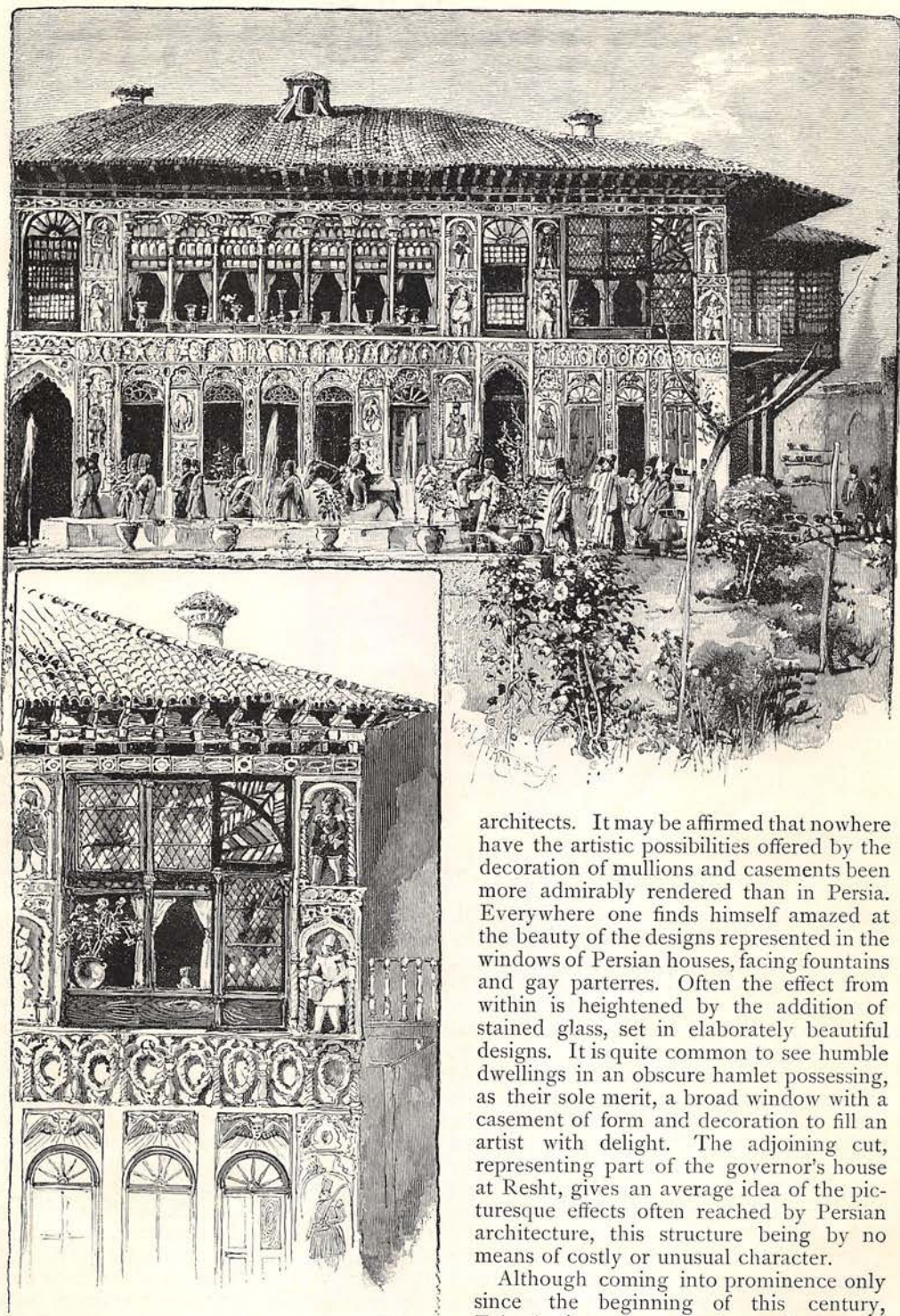
Grant, if you please, that it is not of the highest order, as I am likewise inclined to admit, and yet one may conscientiously ascribe to Persia a very high position among the races that have contributed most to the progress of the arts. The long-continued existence of Persia as an integral people and autonomy, exhibiting for twenty-five hundred years an

almost unbroken national career, is well-nigh without a parallel in the history of art development. The arts of Egypt, Assyria, and Greece culminated long ages ago; those of the Saracens have arisen and decayed since then; but the artistic life of Persia is still active, and it would be a mistake to assume that the present decline of some of the most important branches of her art indicates more than that it is passing through one of the numerous periods of transition in which her artists and artisans have seemed to rest while gathering inspiration for a new departure. Consider, for example, the far from dormant genius still displayed at this very time in the practice of architecture in Persia. It was in architecture that she acquired her first triumphs, and her hand has not yet lost its cunning.

An interesting and important feature of Persian architecture has always been, and continues to be, with some recent exceptions, its entire adaptability to existing conditions. In the south, where good stone and marble were easily procurable, they entered largely into construction. In the Caspian provinces, where wood is abundant, it is the chief building material, the roofs being made of wood covered with tiles, while the exterior is decorated with wooden piazzas such as one might look for in vain elsewhere in Persia. The beams, lintels, and eaves are quaintly, sometimes elegantly, carved and tinted with brilliant hues. The climate also suggested windows of such form that, on being thrown open, they would leave almost the entire side of an apartment clear to the unobstructed passage of the breeze. This naturally affords a rare opportunity for artistic effects, which has been successfully seized by the Persian



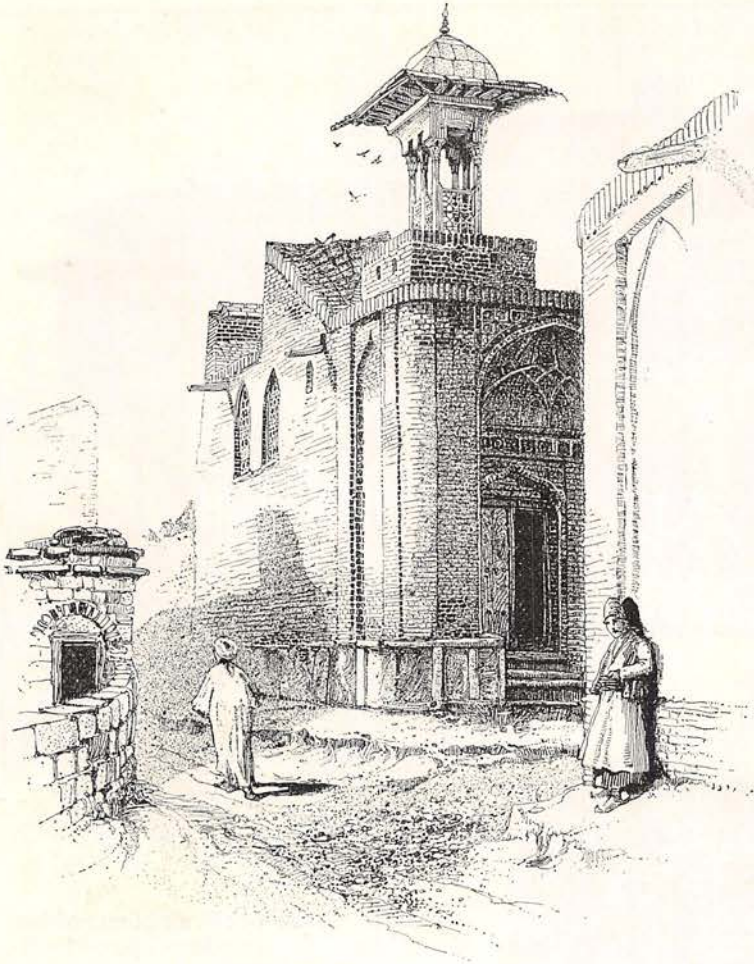
CUFIC WRITING ON VELLUM. REDUCED ONE-HALF.



THE GOVERNOR'S HOUSE AT RESHT.

architects. It may be affirmed that nowhere have the artistic possibilities offered by the decoration of mullions and casements been more admirably rendered than in Persia. Everywhere one finds himself amazed at the beauty of the designs represented in the windows of Persian houses, facing fountains and gay parterres. Often the effect from within is heightened by the addition of stained glass, set in elaborately beautiful designs. It is quite common to see humble dwellings in an obscure hamlet possessing, as their sole merit, a broad window with a casement of form and decoration to fill an artist with delight. The adjoining cut, representing part of the governor's house at Resht, gives an average idea of the picturesque effects often reached by Persian architecture, this structure being by no means of costly or unusual character.

Although coming into prominence only since the beginning of this century, Teherán is not a new city, and possesses some old dwellings which offer bits of great beauty to the connoisseur. Owing to the



MINARET OF SMALL MOSQUE IN TEHERÂN.

at the corners of the colonnades. The result is a singularly effective combination of lightness and strength, grace and repose. Sometimes the effect is increased by the continuation of the capitals into delicate arches that relieve the otherwise heavy horizontal skyline of the roof.

What a wealth of decoration is sometimes lavished on the elegant dwellings of Teherân may be gathered from the accompanying views of a portico and façade of the superb country-seat called the Bagh Ferdôze, or Garden of Paradise. It belongs to the Moayer-ul-Mamolêk, and during his exile has unfortunately been left in an incomplete condition. The entire interior of this stately establishment is consistently carried out on this sumptuous scale, bewildering the eye with the opulent fancy and mar-

scarcity and expense of wood at the capital, the materials used in construction in that city and environs are, with scarcely an exception, sun-burned bricks and *cargêl*, or mud toughened with straw. The better class of buildings are reënforced at the angles with kiln-burned bricks. One would hardly imagine that out of such prosaic materials the artist could evolve art and beauty; but the fact that he has done so is a strong additional proof of the innate and universal taste existing in Persia for artistic decoration. By the aid of *gatch* or plaster of Paris, the artisan of Teherân often transforms these mud structures into dreams of loveliness.

The skill of the Persian architect is once more apparent in the method taken to avoid the appearance of weakness or disproportion suggested by roofs of enormous weight supported by slender shafts. Massive piers are therefore alternated with the pillars or placed

velous handiwork displayed in the realization of such results from such materials as sun-dried bricks, *cargêl*, and *gatch*, and here and there the addition of burned bricks or polished alabaster. It will be perceived from the accompanying illustrations that the scheme of decoration at the Bagh Ferdôze is semi-European or classic, a sort of bastard Renaissance, as if an architect of old had for once cut loose from the severe canons of his art, and given the reins to a fancy intoxicated by the freedom it had usurped. This indicates the transition through which Persian art is passing. The residence of the Moayer-ul-Mamolêk in the capital is still more foreign in its character, the façade, although of *gatch*, being altogether of a florid Renaissance type. There is a tendency now apparent among the better class of new buildings rising at Teherân to imitate European ideas; but the imitation is generally far from slavish, being rather an adapta-

tion or assimilation. A very agreeable combination of Persian and European styles is also seen in the summer palace of the Prince Naib Sultanéh or Secretary of War, at Kammaranieh.

One of the most remarkable features of the Bagh Ferdôze is the wonderful grotto-like hall on the first floor. The apartment is sixty feet by forty feet. In entire contrast to the general Renaissance-like scheme of decoration exhibited in the Bagh Ferdôze may properly be considered the hall of which we have just

Although this hall at the Bagh Ferdôze is incomplete and unfurnished, yet one who visits it cannot avoid a thrill of rapture when gazing as from a cavern roofed with stalactites upon the magnificent landscape that recedes in the distance into the vapory mirage of the vast plains of Persia fading away in the south.

Of the taste and skill displayed by the artisans who can devise and construct such a building there can be no question. But one is still more astonished when he learns that these patient idealists are aided by little or no



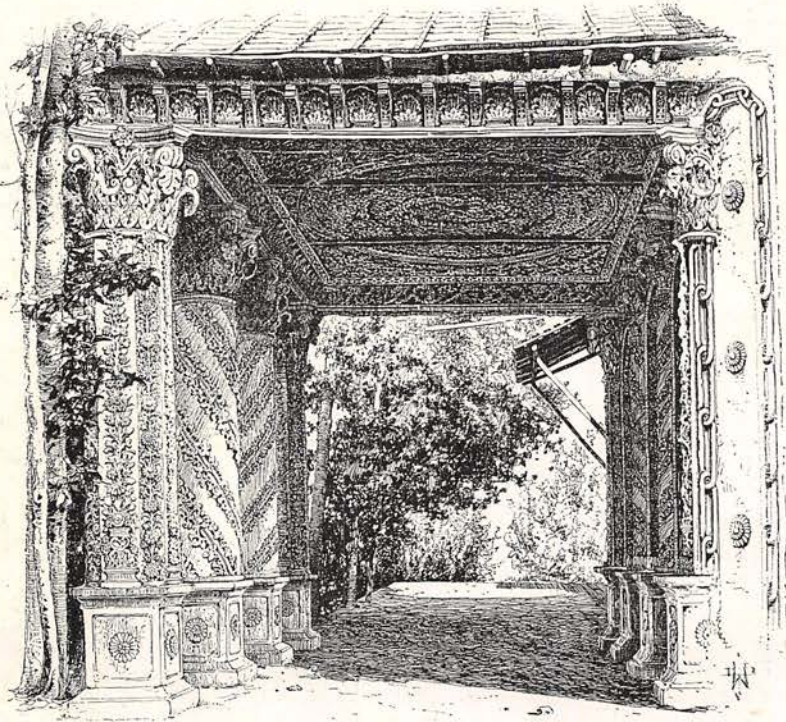
HOUSE OF PRAYER AT RESHT.

spoken. Ordinary Persian gatch decoration is called *gatch pourrêe*; but that presented in the ceiling of this apartment is designated as *mokarness*. Those familiar with architecture will recognize this honeycomb-like pattern for filling arches as especially Saracenic. Brilliantly colored and gilded, it forms one of the most striking attractions of the Alhambra and other celebrated oriental monuments. Few are aware that this beautiful style owes its origin to the Persians, from whom it was borrowed, like several other important features appropriated by artistic nations.

scientific study, but are guided entirely by natural instincts supplemented by practice and tradition. You will see a workman carefully molding an intricate design out of a mass of plaster without any pattern to guide him, often with neither rule nor compass, and using only a slight shaping-tool of wood. If you ask him who were his instructors and what principles he follows in reaching such exquisite results, he will reply that he had no systematic instruction and gives himself little trouble about art-principles. He grew up to the business, and produces such designs

because he feels inspired to create them. It is true that Shah Abbas* established art-institutions under government patronage, to which the artisans were only admitted after satisfactory proof of ability. His immediate successors

create forms with daring confidence. While the plaster is yet soft the minute surfaces are inlaid with an incrustation of minute mirrors. It is needless to add that the effect is one of bewildering splendor, as if the light were



PORTICO OF BAGH FERDÔZE, SHOWING WORK IN GATCH OR PLASTER OF PARIS.

continued to foster the culture of the arts in like manner. It is reasonable to believe that Darius and Anushirwân, the greatest monarchs of the Achæmenid and Sassanid dynasties, also encouraged the arts of Persia by a patronage as liberal if not exactly identical in method. There are traditions that Anushirwân invited Byzantine sculptors to Persia, and it is well known that the revival of a high order of decorated pottery in Persia, under the name of Kashee, owes its existence to the skilled Chinese artisans brought to Ispahân and Kashân by Shah Abbas the First. Doubtless each of these periods of artistic renaissance has had its influence in perpetuating the art-instinct in a race naturally imbued with æsthetic feeling; but it is quite certain that several centuries have now elapsed without any public and systematic methods of art-instruction in Persia. One of the most beautiful arts of Persia is the form of gatch pourrèe called *ainâh karree*. The gatch ceiling and wall are molded into the most intri-

flashed from the polished facets of millions of gems.

It is surprising that while searching the past and present, and almost the future, for designs rare and dazzling enough to whet the pampered appetite of New York millionaires, our architects have not yet borrowed from Persia a style of decoration the splendor of which eclipses all their previous efforts.

Tiles! methinks I hear the tile-devotee say; but what about tiles? Are there no tiles in Persia? To speak frankly, it must be stated that what the Persian artist does not know, or did not know in former times, about tiles, is scarcely worth the mention. The tiles now made in Persia are of a far more common order than those of former ages. This fact, however, does not prevent the present use of decorative tiles in Persian art from being one of great interest. The absence of good marble in the vicinity of Teherân, or the cost of working it, causes a great demand for the incrustation of floors and walls with elegant colored patterns, composed of glazed tiles of various

* This name is pronounced as if spelled Abbauss.

degrees of excellence and of endless variety of design.

The interior of the baths is often covered with tiles; the effect of glistening walls and roofs in the half-twilight of these vaulted rooms is artistic and beautiful. The outer surface of the domes of the mosques, as well as the minarets and city gates, are also overlaid with glazed tiles, producing at the proper distance fine chromatic effects, which tell in a magical way against the intense azure of the cloudless skies of this scenic tropical clime. When smitten by the full rays of the setting sun they flash like gold. In this connection one naturally calls to mind the face-bricks glazed like the tiles, which form one of the most common means of decoration in Persia, and especially at Teherân. In skillful hands they adapt themselves readily to many forms of constructional decoration, and might with great propriety be introduced into the facing of gateways or even entire façades in the United States, where it is becoming the fashion to employ variety of colors in architectural decoration. Unlike the American decorator, however, the Persian artist generally understands the importance of combining these

bricks in such manner as to produce broad designs effective at a proper distance, instead of being rendered practically useless by a mincing scrupulosity in the rendering of minute details which are entirely lost sight of at a short distance.

In considering the old tile-work of Persia, and indeed the greater part of its art-development during the last dozen centuries, one cannot avoid observing three or four prime influences which, although apparently having little relation with the pursuit of the fine arts, have nevertheless exerted a powerful effect in directing the art-progress of Persia since the fall of the Sassanids. These influences are the conversion of the country to the doctrines of Mohammed; the consolidation of the legends of Persia into a popular form by Ferdöusee in his great nationalepic of the *Shah Namêh*, thus reviving the



A COUNTRY HOUSE NEAR TEHERÂN.



A PERSIAN DOORWAY.

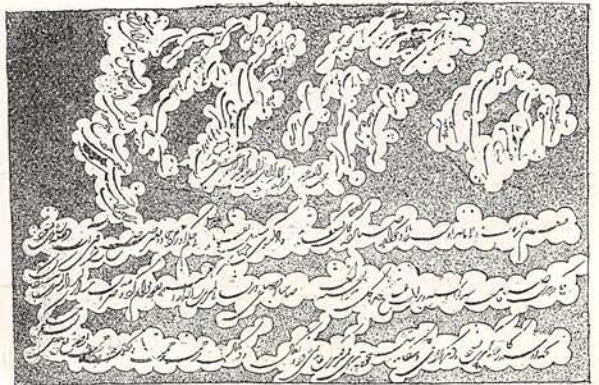
interest in subjects which attracted general attention, and stimulating the fancy of the people at a time when the arts were entering on a new phase of expression; the induction into power of the Sefavean dynasty; and the importation of Chinese and Indian artisans into Persia. Numerous minor influences may also be traced giving direction to the former artistic instincts of the people, but these seem to be the most important.

The acceptance of the faith of the Prophet brought with it the Arabic language, which since that time has entered largely into the literature and language of the cultivated classes of Persia. But in nothing is the influence of the Saracenic invasion

more evident than in the results following the adoption of the Arabic character. Never was there a greater revolution than that effected over half the known world in less than a century by a horde of enthusiastic nomads. The Christian who has never lived in the East but little apprehends how complete was the transformation which attended the overwhelming conquests of the followers of Mohammed.

With the acceptance of Islamism the Persian artist renounced for a time the delineation of the human figure; but with the acceptance of the Arabic character he found new scope for his exuberant fancy. The Saracens also introduced into Persia and the regions beyond a turn for mathematics, which it may be justly inferred was one cause of the origin of the intricate geometric designs in which Mohammedan art has been so successful, that the word arabesque has become one of the most prominent terms in the nomenclature of decorative art.

The religious fervor of the people made it a congenial task to erect numerous tombs and shrines of prayer over the length and breadth of the land. To make of these mere receptacles for people living or dead, without comeliness or attraction, was altogether foreign to the genius of the Persians. The result was a distinct school of architecture and decoration. The Persian artist found a suggestive source of decorative inspiration in the pithy precepts of the Koran and the singularly suggestive and pictorial forms of the Arabic letters. His quick fancy discerned the opportunities they suggested; his new interest in mathematical pursuits and his native love for flowers, aided by an unsurpassed feeling for color, added to his decorative resources; while the scarcity of wood and the abundance of various clays suggested the employment of the kiln as the means for giving the final strokes to the results of his artistic aims. Hence a school of keramic decoration was very naturally evolved



NASCH WRITING BY MIR. REDUCED ONE-THIRD.



BOOK-COVER DESIGN — FRONT. REDUCED.

Cufic letters invariably take precedence in age.

The peculiar character which the Persians adopted from the Arabs led also to the development of calligraphy to a point where it actually became one of the fine arts. Combined with the art of illumination, which is still practiced with extraordinary ability and artistic feeling at this very time in Teherân, results were reached which arouse the enthusiasm of the Persians even now, when the printing-press is invading the province of the scribe and rapidly relegating illuminated manuscripts to the past. It is a significant fact that while the names of many of the leading artists of Persia are forgotten, the fame of a Mir or a Dervish

which, it is no rash assertion to say, has never been surpassed, nor even equaled, at least in the direction of glazed tiles. A multitude of shrines and tombs still exist to testify to the splendor of this phase of Persian art. But yet, alas! how many of them have been spoiled, not only by the ravages of war or of time, but also of avarice, which has steadily stripped many of them of some of their noblest decorations, torn away to enrich the museums and private collections of Europe. One of the finest interiors of this sort was the celebrated mosque at Sultaniéh, of which only a mere crumbling shell remains.

Of the many varieties of tiles which were produced at the two best periods of the art, the most interesting are those called *reflets*, because of their iridescent glaze. A playful fancy has interwoven vines and flowers among the lovely combinations of the calligraphic art, which in the best examples are also in relief. The graceful letters, spreading across the entire width of the tile, are generally of a magnificent ultramarine blue on a delicate cream or buff ground, while the vines and flowers are of variegated but harmonious tints interlaced with gold. The entire surface gleams with a massive polish or glaze which, in a broad front light, gives the effect of polished marble, while a glancing side-light reveals mysterious opalescent flashes. The secret of compounding those intense blues and this iridescent glaze has become one of the lost arts of Persia, buried with the millions whose genius has illustrated the historic pages of Persia, although there seems to be a tradition that gold entered into the composition of these glazes. It should be carefully noted that the relative antiquity of these tiles is indicated by the form of the characters. Those with

or some other celebrated calligraphist is cherished like that of a Veronese or a Rembrandt. The specimens of their work still extant are very highly prized, and he who is so happy as to possess such autographs causes them to be carefully mounted on illuminated pages and elegantly bound in such manner as to escape destruction. Notwithstanding that numerous printing-presses now exist in Persia for printing books and periodicals by lithographic processes, the art of calligraphy is still cultivated to some extent, as I have already observed, and its followers are held in much esteem. The most celebrated living calligraphist of Persia



BOOK-COVER DESIGN — BACK.



REFLËT TILE.

is Mirza Gholâm Rezâh. He lives at Teherân. His portrait indicates a refined and thoughtful character; and such is indeed the case, for he is not only a calligraphist, but likewise a poet and philosopher of repute. He has many disciples of what, to apply an old term in a new form, may be truly called a "gentle craft." The five chief forms of calligraphy practiced in Persia since the Saracenic conquest are the following, given in the order of their introduction. First is the Cufee or Cufic character, angular and representing straight rather than curved lines. It holds the same relation to the contemporary character that the old English lettering holds to the modern English characters. Next comes the Nasch, a word in which the final h is guttural. This style is curved, but with a tendency to perpendicular rather

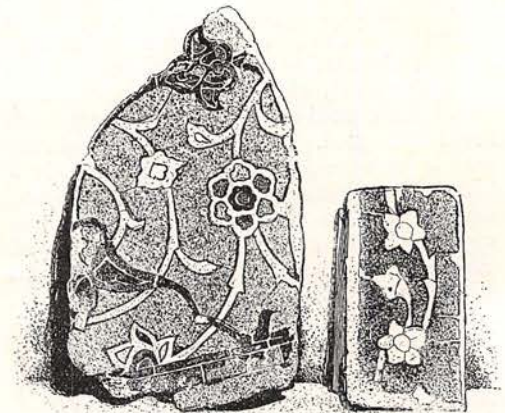


BLACK AND POLYCHROMATIC KASHEE WARE.

than horizontal lines. These two characters are the most common on old Persian tiles, and the latter is the character chiefly used at present in manuscripts and printing. The Nastalich is also used in manuscripts, and also the Reihanee. The Shekestéh, the most recent character used in Persia, is more running, and is ordinarily used for letters and accounts.

The absence of designs representing the human form either in the flat or the round is a marked characteristic of the ante-Sefavean period. But while the faithful disciples of the Prophet, following, as they supposed, the precepts of the Koran in abstaining from such art, were finding a vent for their æsthetic aspirations in ingenious and beautiful arabesques, a new intellectual influence was looming up which was destined eventually to prove a powerful agency in the shaping of the Persian art of subsequent ages. I refer to Ferdöusee, the great epic poet of Persia. Under the patronage of Mahmood of Ghizneh, Ferdöusee gathered together the historic legends of Persia in a national epic called the Shah Naméh, or Book of Kings. This magnificent poem gives noble versions of the legends into which the imaginative Persians had crystallized the prominent events of their history until the Sassanid epoch, and thus became for Persia what the Iliad was to Greece or the Arthurian legend to England.

But fully to bring the poetry of Ferdöusee into harmonious association with the arts of Persia, it was necessary that his counterpart should appear who would give a fresh impulse to the artistic instincts and yearnings of the great people of Irân. He seemed long in coming, but he came at last with the intellectual grasp and the administrative power requisite to give rise to a great revival of the arts. It was the renowned Shah Abbas the

FRAGMENT OF MOSAIC FROM THE PALACE WALLS OF ISPAHÂN.
GREATLY REDUCED.

Great. Never has a monarch done more to beautify his capital, to foster the arts, and to develop the taste of his people. Those who have studied the plates in the magnificent work of Chardin, who visited Persia in the succeeding reign, may form some notion of the opulence and magnificence which made Ispahân more than the rival of Bagdad, and rendered its name proverbial for splendor. The people of Persia, especially those of the central province of Irân, are of a gay, fickle, mercurial, and imaginative character, loving change, moved by a sensuous love of the beautiful, and impatient of aught that tends to curb their galliard temperament. Revolting against the severe inculcations of the Koran regarding wine and spirits, many of them rebel against them, and are said to indulge secretly in the use of intoxicating liquors. In like manner to such a people the time came when license should be allowed for a wider range of artistic expression. The rise of the Sefavean dynasty offered the long-expected occasion for such a vent to the national sentiment. The founder of that dynasty introduced Sheah doctrines; with these doctrines came greater rigidity of belief in certain directions, but also greater liberality in others, admitting a larger scope to artistic expression. The result was almost immediately apparent, in the rise of the most important revival of art Persia had seen since the palmy days of Anushirwân the Just.

Happily the reign of Shah Abbas was comparatively so recent that numerous exam-



EWER OF SOLID SILVER, MADE AT ISPAHÂN—PROBABLY TWO HUNDRED YEARS OLD.

Repoussé and champlevé work, inlaid with turquoise blue, orange leaf, green and brown enamel. Illustration is one-half the size of the original.

ples of the art of the time have come down to our day. The character and number of the artistic treasures of this palmy period are still sufficiently numerous to be classified with



MURAL PAINTING ON TILES FROM PALACE OF SHAH ABBAS.



TILE REPRESENTING RUSTÊM AND WHITE DEMON.

a system that gives a clear idea of the subject. But while Ispahân was the center of the art-activity of Persia in that age, it would be a mistake to overlook the fact that the general thrift and prosperity of the empire naturally caused the practice of the industrial arts to be widespread, and many places became prominent at that period for the production of special objects displaying a high order of skill and æsthetic talent. Shirâz, Kermân, Koom, Meshed, Yezd, Zenjân, and Kermanshah were among the capitals of prosperous districts which acquired a repute that they retain to this day for the fabric of articles of great artistic merit. The secret of making reflêt pottery, if it had been forgotten, was rediscovered at that time, and continued in full efflorescence until the disastrous invasion of Mahmood the Afghan. But in addition to the reflêt tiles, a new ware was produced by Chinese artisans which was excellently imitated by their Persian pupils. The ware was called Kashee because the potteries were established at Kashan. Admirable faience, either polychromatic or of prevailing black or blue-black tints, was produced by these Chinese artisans, who at the outset represented on many of these Kashee dishes the lightness of touch and the few suggestive strokes characteristic of blue china ware, interwoven with quaint bits of landscape and lovely floral patterns in a conventional but thoroughly decorative style. A Chinese monogram was on the reverse side of these wares. But soon the Persian genius for ceramic art awoke once more under these new influences,

and the designs of the Chinese artisans were modified by Persian ideas, the joint result being a ware entirely distinct and national.

When the resemblance between the faience of China and the Kashee work is such that it is difficult to decide between them, the test is found in the greater lightness of the latter and the softer quality of the material employed in the Persian ware. The Kashee can be cut or scraped by sharp steel, while the Chinese blue ware is hard as flint.

Another ware of great value and exceedingly rare and precious is the white porcelain made at an earlier period. It is of a translucent milk-white, invariably ribbed or fluted with delicate moldings. The translucent effect was produced, it is said, partly by shaping the inner and outer shells over a mold of wax, which on melting left a hollow space between. The glaze is hard and pearl-like. Most of the examples of this ware have been picked up by collectors, and can hardly be considered as being longer objects of general sale, so rare have they become.

The Sefavean monarchs found it entirely in accord with the new creed they induced their people to accept to redecorate the sacred tombs after a style in harmony with the Sheah interpretations of the Koran; and hence a species of reflêt was introduced, resembling the iridescent tiles of earlier times, but generally of more fanciful shapes and with a greater variety of tints.

It is to the magnificent patronage of the royal Sefavean house that Persia is also indebted for the pictured tiles which incrust the walls of the enchanting palaces and pavilions of Ispahân, and which yet, after the repeated ravages of ruthless invaders, preserve to that storied capital traces of her former glory. These tiles were divided into two classes. The first belongs rather to the order of mosaic. The general character of the designs, which of course were numerous and varied, is indicated by the accompanying engraving representing fragments from the palace walls of Ispahân. Aside from the intrinsic and effective beauty of the designs, this mosaic is remarkable for two special features. I refer to the imperishable loveliness and vividness of the colors, and especially the deep lapis-lazuli blue, which it is impossible to produce to-day in Persia. The other feature of these mosaics is the fact that they are



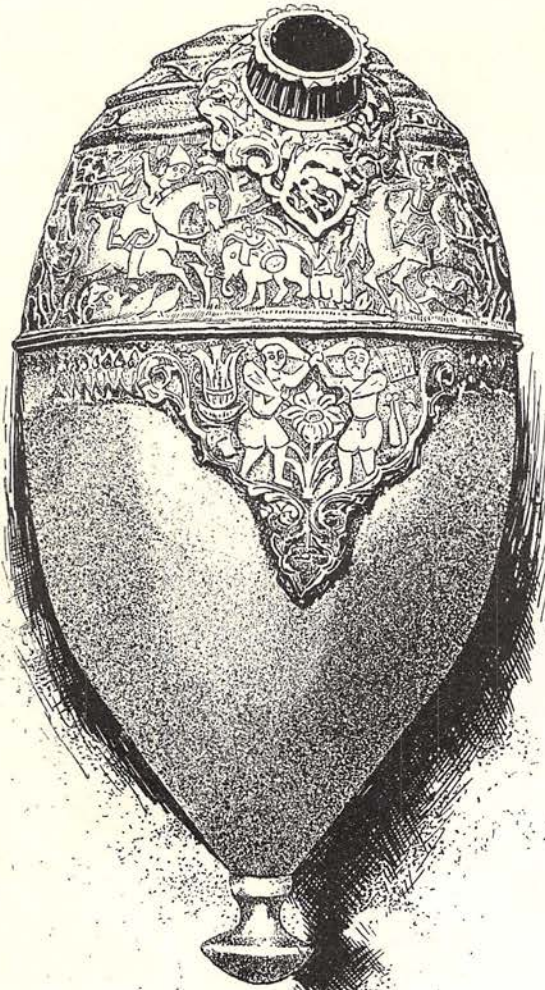
OPEN BRASS ORNAMENTAL WORK.

composed of thin pieces of glazed brick or tile made specially for each part.

At other times the Persian artists gave free rein to a fancy inspired by the magnificent strophes of Ferdöusee. The tiles were then emblazoned with fancifully grotesque designs in relief, representing Rustém overcoming his enemies in battle. A favorite design, which frequently reappears with variations, is Rustém engaged in deadly combat with the Div Sefeed, or White Demon of Mt. Demavênd. The accompanying illustration represents one of three mural paintings on tiles which belong to the period of Shah Abbas the Great, and are mentioned by Jacquemart in his history of the ceramic art. This painting is in thirty-six tiles, forming a picture seven feet six inches long, and containing no less than seven colors, of which three are no longer produced in the

ceramic art of Persia. The student of oriental art will be struck by the admission of human figures in this work, a fact of extreme rarity in this department of Mohammedan art.

The art in metals was carried to a high degree of excellence in the ages preceding the Sefavean period. Relics of the handiwork of the early and middle periods of the Mohammedan era are not wanting, but such examples are now unfortunately rare, and it is to the Sefavean age that the collector must turn for the most abundant and magnificent evidences of the success reached by Persia in the metallic arts. The metals selected for developing the native talent were iron, steel, gold, silver, copper, and brass. Ispahân was the center of this pursuit, as it continues to be to the present day, although several cities



EXAMPLE OF OLD PERSIAN CARVING IN BRASS.

entered into close competition in the working of special metals. The cities of the province of Khorassan, such as Meshed, Astrabâd, and Damghân, vied with the capital in the production of steel blades but little, if at all, inferior to those of Damascus. The steel of the best period of Persian art is possibly a trifle less ductile than that of Damascus, but the damaskeening, or wavy surface resembling watered silk, is similar in each, and was probably reached by the same methods. Some old Persian scimitars are still to be found with the end of the blade divided into a double point. Inlaying helmets, shields, breast-plates, and swords with silver and gold was carried to great perfection; and it must be admitted that this art is not yet forgotten in

Persia. Two processes were and are still followed. One process is called *zerneshan*, and also *telakoob* and *nograkoob*, according as the inlay is of gold or silver. It consists of engraving a design on the steel with a fine graving-tool, slightly undercutting the surface, and hammering a fine gold or silver wire into the groove, the result being practically imperishable. Another method employed is to cut the surface with transverse lines, somewhat like the cross-hatching of wood-engraving, beat in gold or silver, and smooth the surface. Superb were the helmets and shields which were decorated in this manner for the warriors who won the victories of the Sefaveans and their mighty successor Nadir Shah.

The manufacture of gun-barrels was also at one time carried to a high point of excellence at Ispahân. Two makers were especially famous, Hassân and Hadji Mehmêt. The work of each bears the name of its maker. Those of Hassân are the most elaborate, but those of Hadji Mehmêt were superior in texture.

The other method alluded to, for combining the precious metals with iron and steel, is by overlaying them in a thin coat scarcely more solid than gold-leaf, and fixing them with mercury. The effect is very pleasing, but, as may be easily imagined, is far less durable than the former. While still quite capable of working in *telakoob* and *nograkoob*, the metal-workers of Persia prefer, at the present day, to produce after the latter process; and most of the beautiful imitations of the ancient work which are now made at Ispahân for the

foreign market are therefore of this inferior sort. The entire surface of the elegant blades, vases, ewers, and helmets or bucklers is covered with a varnish of which two parts are said to be alum and shellac, although the secret of the compound is difficult of discovery. This varnish unites the entire surface like a scumbling, and gives the effect of a high polish; at the same time it communicates a delicate buff tint to the iron, resembling, but not equaling, the color of steel.

The Persian artists in metal also acquired great excellence in the handling of articles in brass-work, a pursuit which they have not yet forgotten, although the old Persian work is far superior to what is produced now at Ispahân. This, I am convinced, is due less, however,

to lack of ability than to the facts that the demand for the best brass-work has practically ceased in Persia, and a more showy style or a cheap imitation of the antique seems to meet a ready demand abroad. While such continues to be the case, little improvement can be expected in the quality of the supply. There seems to be little evidence that the manufacture of articles in bronze ever became popular in Persia; but from early ages brass has been a favorite metal with Persian artists. Although understanding how to fuse metals and cast them, as in the case of cannon, the metal arts of Persia have generally consisted of hammered ware or of designs chiseled or engraved, alike in iron, brass, silver, and gold. The *kaliân*, or water-pipe, has been one of the favorite objects on which these artisans of old were wont to lavish exquisite beauty and endless variety of design.

It would be impossible to surpass the extraordinary beauty of some of the carved iron-work formerly produced in Persia; and the workmen of the present time have apparently abandoned the field as hopelessly beyond competition. It should be added, however, that the inclination of Persians now to prefer imported articles naturally tends to discourage native artisans. But a good degree of excellence is still exhibited in the manufacture of brass and silver objects, which are extensively produced at Ispahân and Zenjân, and in a lesser degree at Teherân. The most important articles now made in brass, or cut out of thin plate or rolled brass, consist sometimes of direct imitations of the antique.

Besides iron, steel, and brass, copper has been one of the metals wrought to good effect by the artisans of Ispahân. This may have arisen from the fact that this material appears to have been employed for ages for the cooking-vessels of Persian households. It became the habit to decorate even these humble utensils with engraved designs. The facility for making these articles suggested many other objects susceptible of far more beauty of form and decoration; and hence arose a school of art in copper, not only very interesting, but also affording the collector numerous artistic objects which, while comparatively inexpensive, are often possessed of exquisite beauty. Although many of the finest copper vases, bowls, and salvers are centuries old, this art is by no means abandoned, the Persian artificers still displaying a good degree of skill in engraving designs on copper. It is the usage to whiten all these copper objects, while the engraved design is made prominent on the white silvery ground by being blackened.

The Persians seem to have been less successful, or at least to have made less effort, in

the engraving of the precious metals than of the baser metals. And yet I say this with some hesitation when I consider some of the bracelets and belt ornaments I have seen, which are certainly exceedingly effective. But it is perhaps their success in brass and iron, metals apparently so much more difficult to engrave, that makes the results in gold and silver relatively less original and remarkable; certainly the chasing of steel by the artisans of Persia has never been surpassed. The most interesting achievements of the Persians in the precious metals have been in the art of filigree or filigrain. The art is still pursued with fine results at Zenjân. The fairy-like work executed by the artists of that city has never been exceeded by the best filigree work of Damascus or Florence. Perhaps one reason why the Persians have not developed a great art in the fabric of other articles of gold has been because they use little or no alloy, professing to despise as base and beneath the name of gold the metal alloyed with silver or copper employed by European and American jewelers, even though it be eighteen carats fine.

The Persians have shown the most skill in working the precious metals in combination with enamel, which they call *minâr*. It is difficult to ascertain when this beautiful art first began to be practiced in Persia; but from a comparative examination of many of these enamels, I am inclined to think the art was not introduced into that country before 1560, and possibly at a later date.

Persian enamel has generally been made directly on a surface of silver or gold, but more generally on copper. Often the enamel and the gold are blended together in intricate and exquisite designs on the copper, a common scheme of color being an intense *bleu de roi* of enamel interlaced with wreaths of flowers of gold or silver. One of the most beautiful *kaliâns*, or water-pipes, I have seen represents the conventional cypress or palm-leaf design, so common in oriental textile fabrics, wrought on a field of blue in minute raised stars of gold resembling a cluster of snow-crystals.

But it would be a mistake to suppose the rich ultramarine blue to be the chief color successfully produced in these Persian enamels, for there seems to be hardly a limit to their chromatic splendor. Three of the most noted artists in enamel that Persia has produced were Agâ Mehmêt Hassân, Agâ Mehmêt Ameen, and Agâ Mehmêt Alee. Agâ is a title equivalent to the French word *sieur* and our word *esquire*. A tea-service of gold overlaid with enamel which is in the palace at Teherân, one of the most brilliant works in this art ever produced, whether in Persia or Europe, was executed by Agâ Mehmêt Hassân.

Of *cloisonnée* work, strictly speaking, it can hardly be said that any is to be found in Persia of native production. But of silver and gold utensils, sometimes *repoussé* and sometimes made after the style called *champlevé*, there are still some fine old examples which are becoming rare. It is a little singular that while so successful in engraving steel, brass, and the precious metals, the Persians have made so little advance in the sculpture of marble. It is true that Persepolis shows abundant evidence of the great capacity of Persian genius for sculpture in early periods, a talent revived under the Sassanids, as evidenced by the vast and magnificent sculptures of the Rock of Behistoun near Kermanshâh. Rock sculptures of less merit, but similarly ambitious in design and extent, have also been executed under the orders of Feth Alee Shah and Nusr-ed-Deen Shah. But it must be admitted that since the time of the Greek conquest Persian art has been more distinguished for its keramic achievements than for its sculpture. In wood-carving, on the other hand, the Persians have shown and continue to show great skill and considerable taste. This is the more remarkable on account of their very poor means for working in wood, and the indifferent results generally reached by Persian carpenters and cabinet-makers. For the same reason, also, one is astonished at the marvelous ingenuity, skill, and taste developed in the art of inlaid work or mosaic on wood. It would be impossible to exceed the results achieved by the Persian artisans, especially those of Shirâz, in this beautiful and difficult art, which, after what I have seen, I can hardly hesitate to consider as *par excellence* a Persian art. No object seems too singular and difficult in shape to be attempted by these clever artificers, and the amount of surface covered with minute designs in mosaic is equally remarkable.

It may be inquired what has Persia accomplished in what are strictly called the arts of design, including the employment of color, whether in the so-called industrial arts or in works executed for their own sake, such as portraits and landscape or figure compositions? To this it may be replied that a vast field opens up before us when we enter on this branch of Persian art, but that it dates wholly from the time of the Sefavean dynasty. One who really desires to consider every form of a nation's art expression and thought in an inquiring and respectful spirit must divest himself of all his prejudices in favor of European pictorial art before approaching the subject of the arts of design in Persia. Vast studios invested with vague depths of picturesque gloom, decorated with sumptuous and costly

draperies and bric-à-brac for which every clime and every age has been ransacked, and where the artist in the picturesque garb he has evolved for himself in harmony with his surroundings is himself a wonderful creation of art; life schools where the palpitating curves of the human form divine are studied by eager crowds of art-enthusiasts; colossal canvases on which historic and allegorical compositions on a grandiose scale startle the eye and bid loudly for the popular applause; imposing galleries hung with paintings by the thousand, illumined by the glare of chandeliers and gazed at by the beauty and intellect of lordly capitals,—none of these things let the art-student associate with the pursuit of the arts of design in Persia. Let him rather picture to himself humble artists clad in white or green turbans and flowing tunics, seated on their heels upon a rug in an open booth by the bustling wayside, or under a spreading *chenâr* in the marketplace. If the artist is prosperous and honored with the favor of the great, then he is content. Around him on their knees are seated his *chagirds*, or assistants, who aid him in his labors. He makes his colors after recipes learned from his father or his master, and devises varnishes of his own, which add a deliciously mellow effect to the delicate designs over which he devotes such patient and loving toil. He does not live in dread of art-critics who, for private gain, will hold him writhing on their quills before the public in the daily prints, and make sport of the truest emotions of his nature, as if he were a condemned criminal; his customers are his only critics; when they approach his booth, he courteously invites them to examine his productions with a "bismillah," and the offer of a pipe and a cup of tea, or, with his works carefully wrapped up and borne by a chagird, he goes forth, and exhibits them at the houses of purchasers who send for him. His ambition is gratified when he can stroll at eventide or on a Friday with dignified mien to the tea-house or the public gardens counting his beads, repeating verses from the Koran or stanzas from Hafiz, and in restful mood devising new designs for the morrow. Whether he sells his paintings or finds them a drug on his hands, he is resigned, for it is the will of Allah, "to whom be praise."

Portrait-painting as a special branch of art has never acquired prominence in Persia. But it would be a mistake to deny that considerable talent has been displayed by numerous painters in Persia for two hundred years in an art which is so highly esteemed elsewhere and seems to be almost the first that would demand attention among a civilized community inspired by taste and sentiment. Some of the old Persian portraits which have come

down to us from the time of the Sefaveans, and for a century later, are very interesting as preserving the costumes of those times; frequently, also, they give evidence of being striking likenesses.

The art of portrait-painting in Persia took a fresh start in the reign of the good Kerim Khan of blessed memory. Agâ Sadék, one of the most noted artists of modern Persia, lived in that and the subsequent reign, and from studies of his which are still extant appears to have devoted some attention to painting from the life. His pupil Mehmêt Hassân Khan executed the really admirable series of life-size portraits in the palace of Negaristan, representing Feth Ali Shah and his numerous sons, together with the foreign envoys and prominent courtiers at the court of that distinguished monarch. Aboul Hassân Khan, the son of the above painter, now resides at Teherân, where he occupies an honorary position at the court, with the title of Sanié ul Mulk. He has inherited a portion of his father's talents, as shown by a number of portraits of distinguished Persian gentlemen.

But the pictorial art of Persia, like its other arts, has found most favorable expression in the form of industrial works. In this direction it has assumed importance. We read in Scripture of ink-horns as far back as the time of Ezekiel. The familiar way in which mention is made of these objects indicates that three thousand years ago the ink-horn was already as indispensable an article of civilization as the scribe who carried it in his belt; and it continues to be indispensable in oriental countries.

Every great man is attended by a secretary who carries in his belt an ink-horn. Being ordered to write something, he drops on his knees and takes out a roll of paper and the inevitable ink-horn, which he holds under his left arm. He has no other desk than his left hand, which holds the paper. He writes from right to left diagonally across the page, leaving a wide margin. If the document is not completed when the bottom of the page is reached, the writing is continued in the margin in short lines at right angles, running around the page like a border. Even the most important official documents and books of price are written in this manner, which allows of considerable beauty, if the scribe is an adept and varies the style of handwriting as he follows the margin round.

In Turkey and Persia the ink-horn is called *kalemdân*, or reed-holder. In the former country it is made of brass, being a flat, oblong box, not unlike a spectacle-case, and, like that, opening at the top. But the Persian *kalemdâns* are different in shape from that,

and altogether diverse in material. They are always shaped as an even-sided, oblong box with slightly convex top, from eight to twelve inches in length, and one inch and a half more or less in width. One end pulls open and discloses a drawer extending the entire length, which contains the brass ink-stand and the pens. The material is papier-maché. In the *kalemdân* the best pictorial artists of Persia have found a worthy medium for expressing their love of the beautiful. To the Persian artisan one may indeed apply the well-known sentence in the epitaph of Oliver Goldsmith, "*Nil tetigit quid non ornavit.*" To study a collection of Persian *kalemdâns* is like reading the odes of Horace or Hafiz. Here we generally find the lighter side of life and nature depicted in colored designs corresponding to the galliard strains of the poet's lyre — not the reckless and despairing music of Omar Khayyâm, which leads the soul to lose itself in the vague and hopeless mazes of the problems of destiny, but rather the blithesome chords which draw the heart to the observation of sunny skies, and green fields, and nibbling flocks, or the pursuit of the antelope over grassy plains, or the delights of love in gay pavilions, by running streams, on a sod cushioned with flowers, where the glitter and the nightingale blend their tender melodies with the lover's song. One enters here on the Arcady of Sidney or the Forest of Arden, with *Jaques* and *Rosalind*. Why does one, in enjoying these lovely productions of the old artists of Persia who thus delineated life in her palmy days, stop to grumble that the drawing is sometimes rude and the perspective askew, and the trees of the sort which made Ruskin hurl the ink-pot in whimsical wrath at the luckless landscape artists of the Renaissance? It is not criticism that is required here, but appreciation. Did not Shakspeare make Bohemia a seaboard country? Did not all our old dramatists disregard, not once, but scores of times, the unities and the laws of versification? There are cases in which criticism becomes hypercriticism, and when censure but reveals the narrowness of the critic's intellectual scope. These *kalemdâns* of Persia, and the mirrors and boxes painted in the same style, transport the fancy back to the splendor and the delights of a great empire in a happy period. If we study the decorated ink-horns of that age with the true spirit, we are transported back to it once more, and gain another and an earnest glance at the better thoughts and the real character of a remarkable epoch in the history of civilization. We find withal that these pictures, so interesting to the student of the various phases of humanity, are also glowing with sunny

colors harmoniously blended in effects that charm every eye that is susceptible to the subtle music of chromatic tones. It would indeed be impossible to surpass the tone that pervades these delightful bits of life concentrated in the space of a few square inches. I am willing to grant that, to those who are accustomed to admire only immense canvases and pigments loaded an inch thick, the pictorial art of these Persian mirrors and *kalemdâns* are mere "trifles light as air." But they who can see beauty as well in the delicate touches of the finest miniature painting, or concede merit to a Malbone or a Meissonier, may find a rational satisfaction in some of the exquisite work that has been lovingly lavished upon this great school of Persian miniature painting. The effect of these compositions is broad, and yet the workmanship is so minute that a magnifying glass is necessary fully to appreciate the patient and loving toil the master has bestowed upon it. What in a large canvas might seem to resemble the vapid minuteness of Denner ceases to appear such in a surface ten inches by two, on which sometimes fifty to one hundred figures are grouped. I have seen a *kalemdân* on which were three hundred figures. I have before me another *kalemdân* ten inches long and one and three-quarters broad representing a battle-scene between Persians and Turks, mounted and in the armor of two centuries ago. It includes fifty-six distinct figures, of which eighteen are in the foreground. The beauty of this extraordinary composition would make it creditable to any living artist. The vivacity of the scene, the infinite variety of action displayed, the rush, the terror, the pomp, the circumstance of war are all there. The most celebrated battle-painter of Persia was Alee Koulé Beg, who lived in the time of the first Shah Abbas; he left many beautiful mirror cases and *kalemdâns*.

In the time of Nadir Shah flourished Abah Ger and Agâ Mehmêt Houssein, both justly noted for their flower-paintings. They have had many imitators, but none quite their equals. Their works are generally found on the lids and backs of the cases containing hand-mirrors, and on book-covers, and are often very cleverly executed. They show conclusively that in this branch of art at least the Persian artists drew and painted from nature. In other still-life paintings they have shown less aptitude. The exquisite arrangements of roses and lilies are generally on a gold ground, which gives them exceeding brilliancy. Combined with them one commonly finds one or more nightingales painted with the utmost delicacy.

These miniature compositions are invaria-

bly executed on papier-maché, and are glazed and scumbled into harmony as well as protected by a rich varnish. The older pictures show evidence of having been repeatedly cleaned and varnished. The greatest known masters of this branch of Persian art are A' Zadek, A' Zemân, and A' Najeff.

One of the lost arts of Persia, because no longer practiced, is the embroidering of the *pantalets* formerly worn by Persian ladies, and called *nacsh*. These *nacsh* are usually about two feet long and sixteen inches wide. They consist of some superb pattern embroidered entirely in silk so firmly and solidly that they are like carpets in miniature. Some of the old patterns, still preserved in ancient families and dating back for centuries, have acquired a soft gray tone that harmonizes the intricate medley of brilliant colors. *Nacsh* embroideries are becoming rare, really good ones being now excessively scarce.

Still another form of embroidery which is now nearly extinct in Persia, the more's the pity, is due to female handiwork and directly owing to the peculiar custom of female seclusion. This is the embroidery of prayer-carpets and of veils for street wear on fine linen or silk; the design is produced both by working a pattern with white silk and drawing the threads, the result being a raised pattern in silk lightened by open lattice-like spaces. Masculine appreciation of such work as this must, after all, be cold and perfunctory, and yet I venture to hazard the assertion that this embroidery sometimes rivals in workmanship and beauty the finest needlework of Mechlin or Valenciennes, or the point lace covering the robes of European queens.

Among the forms of Persian embroideries which happily are yet not extinct are the shawls and *portières* of Kermân. In general scope the needlework of the province of Kermân is allied to that of Cashmere. It differs from that in being of coarser texture, although often wrought on very fine stuffs similar to those made of Cashmere wool. The design is also ordinarily in wool, but sometimes of silk thread on fine Cashmere or the fine wool stuffs of Kermân which resemble Cashmere. The shawls of Cashmere are intended for a different purpose, and are generally made by a different process. The work of Kermân is very beautiful, although the pattern commonly consists of variations of what we call the palm-leaf pattern, a design which orientals affirm is properly intended as a conventional rendering of the cypress, the tree of immortality. The design is worked with an exquisite union of rich, soft colors associated with effective borders of flowers. The ground is generally scarlet or pure white.

Numerous other varieties of embroidery have been and are still made in Persia, but none presenting perhaps, the same delicacy of artistic feeling, although sometimes exhibiting an amount of work almost beyond belief, and certainly surpassing, as is the case with most of the needlework of Persia, all similar work produced in the United States. The most important of these elaborate schools of art-embroidery are probably those of Shiráz and Resht, and in lesser degree of Karadagh. They resemble each other in general character; the main features are massive and intricate designs wrought with silk in chain-stitch, with a wonderful massing of brilliant colors on broadcloth, which is generally scarlet or gray, or more rarely black. The richer specimens are distinguished by having the design partly made of small bits of cloth of other colors sewed into apertures cut into the ground-work. In the Shiráz embroideries the inserted pieces are generally of velvet. Sometimes entire carpets are made on this elaborate scale, which are necessarily expensive, and for such purpose scarcely fitted for any but oriental countries, where people leave their shoes at the door. In this connection it would be unjust to omit allusion to the superb embroideries with gold and silver thread which at one time rivaled the very best work of that sort made in Europe in the middle ages. These embroideries were made on crimson and black

velvet, or on blue and crimson silk. They often contain quotations from the Koran or the poets, interwoven with magnificent designs of flowers and vines. Those made for the royal family are sometimes embossed with diamonds and pearls. Fine examples of this sort of work are now becoming scarce, and collectors should not hesitate to snatch them up whenever they appear.

The manufacture of rugs forms not only one of the great industries of Persia, but, owing to the rare beauty often displayed in their texture and design, a fine art as well. But even a mere glance at the chief points of this industry would take far more space than is included in the scope of this article.

In summing up the present aspects of Persian art, I think it reasonable to conclude that it does not so much indicate that it is moribund as that it is in a transition state. There is less breadth and force now apparent in the designs of Persian artists, less firmness, less originality, less humanity, less vitality, perhaps; but the national love for the beautiful is still active, and shows its yearnings by reaching forth to Europe for new ideas and forms of expression. Before an entirely new system of art-expression worthy of note and perpetuation is evolved, we may look for every sort of artistic solecism and absurdity, relieved by occasional gleams of the new light that shall again dawn over Persia from the realms of the ideal.

S. G. W. Benjamin.



A SEPTEMBER VIOLET.

FOR days the peaks wore hoods of cloud,
The slopes were veiled in chilly rain;
We said: It is the Summer's shroud,
And with the brooks we moaned aloud,—
Will sunshine never come again?

At last the west wind brought us one
Serene, warm, cloudless, crystal day,
As though September, having blown
A blast of tempest, now had thrown
A gauntlet to the favored May.

Backward to Spring our fancies flew,
And, careless of the course of Time,
The bloomy days began anew.
Then, as a happy dream comes true,
Or as a poet finds his rhyme—

Half wondered at, half unbeliev'd—
I found thee, friendliest of the flowers!
Then Summer's joys came back, green-leaved,
And its doomed dead, awhile reprieved,
First learned how truly they were ours.

Dear violet! Did the Autumn bring
Thee vernal dreams, till thou, like me,
Didst climb to thy imagining?
Or was it that the thoughtful Spring
Did come again, in search of thee?

Robert Underwood Johnson.