ROUND THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF PERSIAN ART

II

THE beginning of the fifteenth century finds the Persian miniature style completely formed, to be very soon stabilized; it reached its acme about the end of the first quarter of that century and for a hundred years from then showed little development save for the greater vivacity which appeared in the latter part of that period and which is pre-eminently connected with the great name of Bihzâd, the "marvel of his age." It will not therefore be out of place to give now a short review of its distinctive qualities and an account of its position in the social life of a Muslim community.

The garden element is now strongly established; flowers, strewn in tufts, an arrangement not unknown in the last part of the thirteenth century, began to fill the ground in a rather stylized manner, they become naturalistic, faithfully studied after the originals; flowering trees and shrubs grow in favour and bare trees, carefully conceived, in the Chinese manner—from which they were evidently modelled—are often used as valuable elements of composition. Of line-work enough has been already said: of colour we may add that it is flat and solid, depending for effect largely on its pure mass, yet subordinate to the harmony of the whole; it is ever vivid, with the brilliancy of gems, the materials being most carefully chosen and often very costly, such as lapis lazuli, not to mention the gold and silver which were lavishly employed: the lapis blue was not sufficiently vivid, in the eyes of these amateurs of brilliance, to convey the brightness of the sky, so they painted it often in pure gold and, similarly, sea, lakes and meadow-streams were usually painted in silver—with unhappy results for posterity, since the metal has oxidized, of course to a dull black.

The landscape is usually very rocky, a feature derived, perhaps, from the mountainous regions of Eastern Persia

where the art was chiefly nourished, though it may have been partly suggested by Chinese landscape drawings in which high, jagged rocks are a usual convention; the rocks are of a fantastic, piled-up kind, very brightly coloured —in some cases the whole palette-range of colours seems to have been spilt on them, each single one brilliant in its red, blue, purple or other high-keyed hue. A lofty screen of rocks frequently forms the backing of the scene and, in the later times, the upper parts of knights and horses are often shown peering over the top as if waiting for events below; banners and the tops of ensigns are sometimes depicted on the summits of the rocks or at their edges, a method—adopted doubtless from the Chinese—to denote a host hidden from view behind the rocks.

No longer, except in portraits—which are not common —do large figures fill the space, as in many of the Mesopotamian illustrations, but human beings are shown in their right proportions in the various scenes in which they are placed, natural or architectural; these scenes have gained their full share of importance in the pictorial composition.

In the fourteenth century the flame-halo and the cloud-scroll are directly copied from the Chinese; the former, as previously indicated, is now reserved for saints and prophets only, unlike the circular haloes of the preceding centuries which were bestowed with a totally indiscriminating profusion; the artists had learnt from China their true use and had adopted the characteristic Chinese form. The cloud-scroll, however, is introduced with little discrimination, especially in the earlier miniatures, where it is sometimes given a disconcerting prominence; its use was continued long and it found its way also into textiles, especially carpets.

The technique has acquired great virtuosity, an extraordinary power of delineating with the finest lines and in minute and accurate detail certain elements of the picture such as the ornate architectural work and the complicated patterns on tiles and stuffs, especially the carpets. The very direct and thorough study given by Persians to Chinese drawing is strikingly demonstrated in a MS. from Constantinople of the beginning of the fifteenth century, belonging to the Turkish Government and illustrated in pls. 30 and 31 of E. Kuhnel's "Miniaturmalerei islamischen Orient" (Cassirer, Berlin): the Persian artist has produced pages of line-drawing of highly stylized birds and flowers hardly distinguishable from Chinese, yet the

line is so vigorous and swift that there can be no doubt of the originality of the work ; the artist had impregnated himself thoroughly and intimately with Chinese feeling. (The Chinese on the other hand sometmcs copied the Persians, as in a MS. of the early fifteenth century in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, illustrated by Kuhnel in pl. 39).

The pictures are proffered as illustrations of matters recorded in favourite poems or chronicles, but their illustrative value is not their chief virtue, their object being rather to enliven the leisure of the courtly amateur with a gay and harmonious presentment of knightly, or occasionally religious, society, fascinating in its brilliant technique and making but little call on the reflective faculty. The more popular character of the Mesopotamian illustration—never truly Persian—has been left out, and under the care of appreciative princes the art has assumed the shining garb of gaiety so concordant with the Persian genius of the time. How great was the share of princes and their ministers in this development and how conscious they were of it may be gathered from the remark of the emperor Bâber that the great Bihzâd owed his supremacy in painting to Mîr Ali Shîr, the gifted minister of the last of the Timurid rulers in Persia, Husain Mirza, and in other passages we find kings proclaiming the efficacy of their guidance to great artists. Shah Husain Mirza, who ruled at Herat (1487-1506), made of it a busy centre of literature and art and became the eager patron of Bihzâd. On the death of the Shah the city fell, after raids by the Uzbegs, to the new Persian dynasty of the Safavids, and its victorious founder, Ismail, not only put Bihzâd under his protection but gave him, in 1522, great powers as head of the Royal Library and absolute master of its staff, including copiers, painters, gilders, etc. ; the very warrant of appointment, drawn up in the strangely hyperbolic symbolism of the time (Arnold, "Painting in Islam", Appendix C), indicates the hold that the art of miniature had then gained on the minds of Persian kings and courts. Bâber, himself a Timurid, was a keen lover of the art and in this was followed by his successors on the throne of India who introduced it there, founding the Moghul school. In Persia at least one Safavid Shah, Tahmasp (1524–1576), is reported to have taken lessons with the brush, and royal patronage continued till the reign of Shah Abbas, who, however, seems to have taken a less active interest in painting than his predecessors.

This strictly courtly standing of the art explains largely its flourishing in a Muslim society. It was not general but confined to a small circle of amateurs of aristocratic status and mentality, little likely to be troubled by religious scruples in a matter which in fact impinged so little on real religiousness. The paintings were closed up in books, not accessible except at the owner's will ; the enjoyment of them was for the elect alone. Frescoes were painted occasionally on palace walls, but here again they, too, were not open to the public gaze and it is significant that they were generally restricted to the bathing-rooms, the most private and remote of all. The whole matter has been dealt with learnedly by Sir Thomas Arnold in the first chapter of " Painting in Islam " where many interesting details are recorded and good reasons adduced for not giving too much importance to this infraction of an Islamic rule intended in its origin to prevent pagan idolatry, a sin which was in no way likely to be promoted by these works —yet he records instances of remorse on the part of some amateurs.

A common supposition is that the interdiction was not binding on the Shiah sect to which the Persians belonged, but Sir T. Arnold has corrected this, with chapter and verse, and it should be noted that the Shiah doctrine was not officially adopted in Persia till the early part of the sixteenth century, with the coming of the Safavid dynasty, anxious to accentuate the nationalism which they affected, for in the East the strongest distinctions between man and man are those of religion : in this they followed, all unwittingly, the same method as their Sasanian predecessors, with their return to strict Zoroastrianism.

Apart from these considerations, the most important factor in the matter was the Persian temperament ; it has always been most susceptible to art and eager in its pursuit and in these harmless and stimulating paintings it found a most congenial outlet for its activities.

The most famous exponent of the art, Bihzâd, was born in the middle of the fourteenth century and died about the end of the first quarter of the fifteenth : much has been written about him, sometimes with an excess of zeal ; his qualities may be well judged from a book by Sir T. Arnold, " Bihzâd and his paintings in the Zafar-nâmah MS." (Quaritch, London, 1930), which reproduces them in colour, with a good account of the artist : nearly all the work attributed to him has been questioned by one authority or another, and it becomes therefore difficult to say in

what respects he really excelled—it is certain, as Basil Gray points out ("Persian Painting," pp. 55–6, with special reference to figures 5 and 6) that some of his contemporaries nearly, if not quite, reached his state of virtuosity, the perfection of which was the principal desideratum of the time. Colour had become more varied and even more brilliant, the line-work still finer and the detail more minute and accurate, but besides all that—which was really but a perfectioning of qualities already highly developed—we find great predilection for the depicting of movement, and especially of violent movement, the clash of arms, the rush of knights on horse or camel; the markedly static quality of the work in the early Timurid period has disappeared and the scene displays a greater liveliness. Sometimes, though rarely, attempts were made to represent states of mind, they are usually confined to some conventional pose, as when a finger to the lips represents wonder or admiration.

The virtuosity, in so difficult a technique, is indeed remarkable and it was probably Bihzâd's excelling in this respect that gave him his fame and caused the attribution to him of many pictures on the strength of their technical accomplishment. We may perhaps compare the art of this period to that of the twentieth century cosmopolitan ballet, fascinating with its marvellous technique, its glow and glitter, and as a Karsavina or Pavlovna, by her higher finish and, most of all, by her inspiriting personality, conquers distinction from her brilliant contemporaries, so did Bihzâd, the superlative master of his technique.

This, however, was not all; a true sympathy in the observation and rendering of nature now appears, a human intimacy of feeling of quite a different category from mere brilliance of technique, for now we may observe, delicately rendered, the grace and vigour of animals, the slenderness of some, the mass of others—the beauty of trees, the varied tones in the mass of foliage of the plane, the sense of movement in its leaves—the smiling grace of flowering shrubs, the gem-like quality of blossoms, often wild, in the grass. Inspiration has perhaps been drawn from Chinese sources, but the rendering is Persian, with its own joy.

The art could not of course be maintained at this height but, like all others, Greek, for example, or Italian, carried in its very perfection the seeds of its decay. Greater wealth was expended on the work, of which a chief note now became its gorgeousness, a quality betraying something of the barbaric, a reaction, perhaps, against the

rough realities of life; it flamed forth at its height, in the middle of the sixteenth century, in the wonderful large miniatures in the MS. of Nizami's Poems now in the British Museum (published by "The Studio," London, 1928), unequalled in its lavishness but in true beauty scarcely competing with the earlier masterpieces. At the same time the demand for paintings grew wider, painters increased in number and multiplied their output for the benefit of less exalted clients than the courtly ones hitherto purveyed for; splendour became too often tawdriness and a decadence set in, very noticeable in the reign of Shah Abbas (1586-1628) who withdrew his official patronage from the art. In his time a convention in design, first noted about 1550, made great headway, reigning also in ceramics and textiles; all are impressed with a kind of swirling willowiness in the figures, an over-gracefulness of pose which, becoming an exaggerated mannerism, ends by producing a sensation of drooping debility. Yet work of the older type was still produced, some of it really attractive, especially in the delineation of animal life: for example, the margins of MSS. were sometimes decorated with various animals, amidst trees and flowers, in gold on a cream or blue ground; the best of these evince as much proficiency in their particular subject as the masterpieces of the early sixteenth century, with more variety; their aim has been excellence in pure decoration and they have attained it. No movement seems too swift for them to grasp, no grace so subtle as to elude them; the swirling effect is displayed in the foliage alone, in which it is natural. A fair example of this kind of work is shown by Blochet, in pl. CLI, illustrating a book-cover of the beginning of the seventeenth century (the margins of the Nizami MS. just noticed are decorated in this way, but are not of the best). A very fine example is illustrated by Kuhnel in pls. 55 and 56 from a MS. in the Leipzig Museum of industrial art.

In the reign of Shah Abbas European paintings reached the country and had some little influence on native work—for example, in the bushy eyebrows which make an occasional appearance, unlike the thin curved type of earlier works, derived from the Chinese—but it was reserved for the youthful Abbas II (1641-1658) to fall openly under their attraction; he sent one of his chief artists to Italy to learn its technique, thereby hastening the end of the true Persian manner. The eighteenth century saw an accentuation of the movement towards Europe; prints and copies of pictures were obtained and taken as models

by serious painters; many a Persian picture has been painted from a Christian Holy Family, trees, rocks and all, in the eclectic style of Italy, with the faces and costumes translated to a Persian cast; the native style degenerates simultaneously and, clever artists as the Persians still are, the best work has of late consisted of pastiche—though one modern example in the exhibition seemed to show that modernist painting has effected its entrance and may possibly produce, with the native style, a mixture from which new charm, or at least humour, may spring—but it could not, and should not attempt to, emulate the old.

Before leaving this subject we must turn once again to the seventeenth century, to take notice of the work in pure line which then became fashionable and of which several good examples were shown at the exhibition. Some forerunners in previous centuries, and their connection with Chinese art, have already been discussed; the same fundamental characteristics are seen in both periods but in the later one the drawing does not show so patently the underlying Chinese influence, it has become freer and more at its ease. moving in an ambit that has now become truly native to it. This facility does not necessarily make for the highest excellence and the works of this age cannot be considered the equals of the drawings in the MS. of Sultan Ahmed Jalâyir's Poems previously referred to, except perhaps in one particular, their superb presentment of the grace and vigour of animal life which we have already noted in dealing with decorated margins. The more lively drawing of faces would lead us to expect good pencil portraiture, but this seems to have been rarely wanted in Persia and we must look for it in contemporary work in India, doubtless—at least at first—by Persian artists who have left wonderful portraits of the first Moghul emperors, almost equal to the finest European.

It is probable that the seventeenth century fashion for drawings in pure line, with no colour—or but little, and that not costly—was due to the wider demand from a public which could not afford the very expensive paintings of the previous century, and in fact these drawing were soon engulfed in the general decadence of the time, becoming heavy and even vulgar, in spite of the efforts at gracefulness of the willowy style, which only accentuated the essential weakness. In this criticism the much talked-of Riza Abbassi must have his share and the fact that he was so much praised by his contemporaries and had such a good conceit of himself only denotes the general

lowering of taste that had then set in (for convincing examples see Blochet, pls. CLVII and CLVIII, and Basil Gray, " Persian Painting," figures 14 and 15).

To end this sketch of Persian painting on a more cheerful note, even if on a minor theme, let us note that many artists since the middle of the seventeenth century have excelled in a naturalistic but somewhat formal rendering of flowers and birds, often illustrating the widespread theme of the Rose and the Nightingale ; this phase of art, overlooked at the exhibition, is well illustrated by Blochet in pl. CLXVII, of a goldfinch on a stalk of narcissus in bloom, with butterflies and insects (dated 1653) ; though the origin of this phase is of course European, the delicacy of observation which it manifests is in full keeping with the Persian sympathy for nature. Less successful are the direct imitations of European work, well exemplified by Mohammed Zamân's painting of Bahram and the Dragon in the great Nizami MS. in the British Museum, previously referred to (Arnold, " Painting in Islam," p. 149 and pl. V) ; gay and dashing as this is, its chief success is that of curiosity, yet it is conceivable that some genius might fuse to a fresh and captivating whole the reflective impressionism of Europe with the Persian passion for splendour.

The main difficulty would probably be the matter of shadows, which has ever been an essential factor of division between the pictorial arts of West and East. The Persian miniature admits of no shadows whatever, all is a brilliant mosaic of light ; if the art had owed its inspiration wholly, or mostly, to the Hellenistic school, it would surely have inherited the chiaroscuro effects which we know to have been strongly developed in that school, but the inspiration came with greater force from Central Asia, in fact Serindia, where Chinese culture strongly prevailed, and the Chinese convention of shadowlessness kept the field. There is possibly a philosophical foundation for this convention, to be explained perhaps from the parallel case of Ancient Egypt : there the representation of human beings on the walls of tombs and temples had a magico-religious import and it behoved the artist to display them in their very quiddity, as nearly as he could, and not merely according to the fleeting vision of the human eye ; the same idea very likely underlies the Chinese convention, perhaps originally from similar motives but not in later times, when utilitarian Confucianism provided the working philosophy of the literates. In India there was no objection to shadows ; the Ajanta paintings are conceived in

chiaroscuro, though the outlines, painted probably in pure fresco, have so often survived the inner painting, done on the dry wall with a medium (I have to thank Mr. K. de B. Codrington for technical advice), that they have sometimes been praised especially for their calligraphic virtues and certainly the line-work is usually very sure and swift. Similarly, on the introduction into India of the Persian miniature style, in the sixteenth century, it soon became tinged with the native feeling for chiaroscuro and when the popular Hindu style (sometimes termed Rajput) was developed, branching off from the Courtly Mogul, it adopted it consistently, though in a conventional manner, not strictly naturalistic—in this like the Ajanta paintings, compelled to speedy memory work from the nature of their medium ; both, too were essentially naturalistic, in spite of their method of using shadow.

The splendour which characterizes Persian miniatures is as remarkable in their textiles and to these we will now turn.

The woven stuffs of the early Islamic period followed faithfully the Sasanian tradition, with equal skill and sense of design ; few fragments have survived, guarded carefully in museums or private collections, and not many appeared in the exhibition ; a good idea of their qualities may be obtained from Korchlin and Migeon's "Oriental Art" (Albert Levy, Paris and Benn, London), pls. LX-LXII, followed by similar ones of Hispano-Moresque origin, all in the Sasanian tradition and hardly to be distinguished from the contemporary woven products of Egypt, Sicily or Syria.

With the advent of the Turko-Persian fashion of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, the figured stuffs underwent also a parallel development ; the patterns on the costumes represented in the miniatures of MSS. or painted on the pottery of Reyy show usually large designs of true weaving type, savouring considerably of the Sasanian, often simplified, though we know from the remains of stuffs of the Seljuk period that a high degree of intricacy was then attained. But a new type of decoration also appears in the stuffs represented on the pottery of Reyy, consisting of long vine-like floriations of a somewhat naturalistic kind more suitable for embroidery than for weaving ; they are clearly derived from Chinese originals, for this type of pattern was manufactured in China at least as early as the T'ang dynasty ; it may have originated there in embroidery, for which the Chinese were famous at all

times—in the days of Shah Abbas embroiderers were brought from there to Persia and the art was called " the Chinese," just as painting had been in Bokhara. Quite possibly the patterns were in fact embroidered and this seems the more likely that miniatures of the fourteenth century show decoration on the shoulders only of the costumes, of very Chinese style, apparently embroidered : a specially notable example is the covering of a divan with its Chinese phœnix, and the decoration of tents in miniatures of a MS. apparently of the middle of that century, reproduced by Blochet (pls. LIX-LXI—some authorities consider it of the early part of the century). This decoration of the shoulders continues till towards the middle of the fifteenth century (Blochet, pl. LXXIX), but in the latter part of it a new type of pattern comes into view, the beginning of the true Persian style which flourished so exuberantly in the days of the Safavids. Its beginning is seen, in great delicacy on the saddle-cloth of a horse in a Herat MS. of 1499 (Blochet, pl. CVII), a refinement, it would seem, on the scrolls previously noted in the stuffs painted on the pots of Reyy, while the coat of Bâber in his portrait painted about 1505 (Blochet, pl. CIX) is made of a stuff evidently, from its repeats, woven, decotated with the graceful plants and running deer characteristic of later Persian designs.

Thus we see that in textiles, as in painting, the older styles, Sasanian in one and Mesopotamian in the other, begin to yield, about the end of the twelfth century, to Chinese influence which gradually transformd them into quite different types, eventually stabilized in the characteristic forms of the sixteenth and following centuries. The sixteenth century saw the fine perfection of textile decoration, in knotted pile-carpets as in woven stuffs ; the floriated scrolls, stiff in earlier times, became free and gracious, well balanced in composition as in colour, trending as nearly on the naturalistic as the technique of weaving will conveniently allow yet always with the sense of formality so needful to this medium. The colours used are unsurpassable, strong and deep, brilliant often yet always with a sense of rich reserve : the good dyer in Persia was a great craftsman, sincere and careful and proud of his secrets, often inherited, until the entry of anilines and chemical mordants, in the latter part of the last century, wrought havoc in the ancient craft and, though good dyers still probably exist, the beauty of the old colours will be sought for in vain.

As to the weaver, his mastery, conspicuous in the earlier fabrics that we have noticed, grew even greater in this period of perfection and has never been surpassed. The wonderful intricacy of the patterns, their delicacy and restraint, with the never failing harmony of colours, place the master at the very summit of his art. The examples to be seen at the exhibition were rich, plentiful and varied, a sheer delight for whoso loves beautiful and finished workmanship, and more satisfying, in these qualities, than the rathen artificial beauties of the paintings, being nearer wedded to the real needs of humanity—for the paintings, with all their splendour, had no touch of the emotional or reflective qualities that have given fine art, as we call it, a higher place than craftsmanship in the Western mind, since the days of the Greeks. The designs were sometimes inconceivably intricate, beyond the Seljuk examples before referred to, so that a weaving purist might hold that they denote decadence in the art and that the skill of the craftsman had overcome his sense of fitness. leading him to attempt the painting of naturalistic pictures, in weaving, on his stuffs, rather than composing a true weaving design —in this, perhaps, the Seljuk weaver, following his older traditions, was the better artist. The representation in weaving of men and women, birds and animals, trees and landscapes began to be common at the end of the sixteenth century—we have seen an early and comparatively simple example in Bâber's portrait, about 1505—and in the first part of the seventeenth became most elaborate: noblemen might be seen at the court adorned with pictures of the naked distraught Majnûn and his quite unmoved Leila, among trees and ibexes, or of a horseman leading his captives through a dense wood or galloping after game with hawk and hound—evidently the painters had had too great a voice in the composing of textile patterns. It was perhaps their influence, also, that brought into these stuffs, in the early part of the seventeenth century, the quality of glitter that was so evident in the exhibition—the lavish use of gold—and silver-faced thread to mix with the colours of the design or form a background—brilliant indeed must have been the courts of those days, with their excessively "Persian trappings."

In the seventeenth century, too, the weavers followed the painters in their latest mode of willowy slenderness; youths and maidens wilt among the waving trees and flowers, not, as one might infer, from the pangs of a Majnûn-like love, but because it was the moment's fashion; it is true, nevertheless, that such figures if simple

in themselves and without elaborate setting, make when repeated a satisfactory weaving design, just as knots of flowers will do—yet this simplicity was seldom observed.

The famous velvets and cut-velvets of the period must not be passed over; they seem to have been articles of exceptional luxury even in Persia and proportionately prized in Europe—Philip II of Spain's camp-stool for his gouty leg, preserved in his cell in the Escorial, is made with a piece of 'Shah Abbas' figured velvet. Their workmanship is on the high level of the smooth-woven stuffs of the period and the designs follow the same modes, but with more restraint, owing doubtless to the more complicated technique: gold and silver are sometimes used here also, to heighten the richness of the stuff.

Of all Persian textiles, the carpets are undoubtedly the most famous and the country has made for itself so great a reputation that it might well be thought that it was their original home, but of Persian specimens none have survived with a definite dating earlier than the first part of the sixteenth century, of which the best known example is the magnificent one from the Ardebîl mosque, dated 1540, which is one of the great treasures of the Victoria and Albert Museum; a still earlier one, lent to the exhibition by the Poldi Pezzoli Museum of Milan, is dated 1523. These are both of the highest level of perfection in carpets, with very intricate designs, the former of purely floral nature and the latter floral with hunting scenes; they both bear the artist's signature and are evidently expressions of the most refined luxury of their luxurious age, the Safavid. The hanging lamps in the design of the former doubtless indicate that it was made for the mosque, probably by order of the Shah Tahmasp, for in the mosque, which was a famous centre for pilgrimages, was buried the saintly Sheikh Safi-ud-dîn, the ancestor of the Safavids, who took their name from him, and also Tahmasp's father, the victorious Ismail, founder of the dynasty; it would appear thus as a royal specimen and probably its predecessor may take equal rank.

The earliest surviving pile rugs, with a technique of knots tied on the warp threads of a web, are, in the opinion of experts, those in the mosque of 'Ala-uddîn, at Konia in Asia Minor, estimated to date from the early part of the thirteenth century (Victoria and Albert Museum "Guide to the collection of carpets", pp. 3 and 28), while fragments of similar textiles in silk were found by Sir Aurel Stein in tombs of Eastern Turkestan, dated by him to the

first century ; this dating is disputed by some authorities but in any case the fragments must be at least three or four hundred years earlier than the Konia rugs. From these circumstances and from the fact that nomad Turkomans are till our days among the most skilled weavers of pile stuffs made with knots, making of them not only rugs but saddle and tent-bags and appendages for their tents, often of velvet-like fineness, authorities have inferred that this class of textiles originated with Central Asian nomads and came to Asia Minor with the Turks, from whom the Persians adopted it. A further consideration is the angular, geometrical form of design characterizing most of the work of Asia Minor where it has not been invaded by the curved floriations of Persian patterns ; this feature would appear to be derived from woven designs, perhaps of the tapestry kind called Sumak ; the rugs depicted in European paintings of the fifteenth century and later have all got these geometrically planned designs and are evidently of Asia Minor origin ; it is not always clear, from the painting, if the rugs are pile-woven or smooth. The Turkish domestic rugs, woven in the house for family wear or for the daughters' dowries, are also of this character, but it is nowhere more marked than in the rugs of the Turcoman nomads of Central Asia known generally as 'Bokhara' in which the floral origins of the elements of the design are almost completely veiled by their extremely geometrical treatment ; the general conclusion is therefore warranted that this craft is indigenous to the Turcoman and his congener, the Turk. (It must of course be understood that Turkish designs are often much influenced, even swamped, by those of Persia, compelling in their grace and masterliness).

The perfection of the dated carpets discussed above makes it certain that there were predecessors in the art in Persia, but, owing to the perishableness of the material, none have yet been traced : a fragment in an American collection, illustrated by Koechlin and Migeon (pl. LXXXII), is estimated to be of the fourteenth century, in view of its archaic character ; it is bordered by an inscription or pseudo-inscription and a pair of confronted elephants, conspicuous on the tawny yellow ground, would seem to denote a Persian origin ; the design, formally conceived but not rectangular, is coarse and ill-defined and suggests the Mesopotamian school of art as a possible source, but, in our present lack of definite knowledge, this fragment yields scanty information.

There can be little doubt that the first impression on entering the exhibition was of magnificence derived from the great and noble carpets covering the walls, lent by museums, private owners and, a most noteworthy and exceptional grace, by the controllers of mosques in Persia : they formed a unique collection, delightful to the uninstructed as to the connoisseur while for the latter they presented an unparallelled opportunity for study, never to come again. The richness and purity of the colours, the balance in design, the intricacy of the delicate unending scrolls, the vigour of presentment, marked them indeed as superb manifestations of Persian luxurious art. All the main classes of design were well represented, the purely floriated, like that from Ardebîl, the hunting or animal variety, the garden carpet with its wavy streams carried in soldierly straightness through the shrubs and flowers, and the ' vase ' and ' dragon ' variety, the former derived from vases holding flowers and the latter from conventional designs of Chinese origin or even birds or feline animals, highly stylized.

It is obvious that this was no unconscious art of simple weavers, with ' folk ' basis, but the work of very practised artist-designers, controlling workshops in which every branch of the craft had reached high perfection. The designs are of the kind used on woven stuffs of the period but of course much expanded and developed, for the knotting technique allows of a freedom quite impossible for weaving ; the designer was quite likely to have worked for both classes and to have been versed in miniature painting, for the decorative scrolla and patterns are the same as those freely used in miniatures, and the animal and hunting scenes are worked with the vigour and keen observation of the best painters of the time ; it is difficult, in fact, not to conclude that the designs were prepared by them, especially since they were of a kind common not only to textiles of all kinds and miniatures, but to all the decorative work of the period such as the tiles which lined the walls of palaces and mosques and the architectural low-reliefs, largely in plaster. These were carpets for princely use, their purpose being to bring the floors of palaces to the luxurious level of the rest of their appurtenances, or, in mosques, to mark the taste and generous piety of royal or noble donors.

Smaller carpets, of similar designs, were of course more widely used, as we may gather from the miniatures, but have hardly survived, from their greater wear, except the

very gorgeous ones in silk heightened with gold and silver, generally known as 'Polish'; the latter found their way largely into the Eastern parts of Central Europe, whether as gifts or by trade, for the satisfaction of the semi-oriental taste in luxury of the noble of those regions; further examples of this taste were exhibited in the glittering Polish belts, copying Persian originals. The 'Polish' carpets, made mostly in the seventeenth century, denote once more the rising taste for gorgeousness which we have already observed in the woven stuffs and miniatures of that time; they have been carefully preserved in the foreign countries to which they were sent but that they were in common use by Persians of courtly standing is amply proved by the glints of gold enlivening smaller carpets in many a miniature.

These carpets, as depicted in the miniatures, were spread on the ground as seating places for princes and their attendants and for wealthy nobles, in gardens or on their travels, they covered thrones and divans, matching the splendid canopies spread overhead, enhancing the general note of courtly magnificence. They were designed with the same taste and ingenuity as the large ones, the patterns being adapted to suit the restricted areas without losing their character of richness. In this they differ much from similar rugs of recent make which copy designs from the larger ones of the Safavid period without proper adaptation; the result is mechanical and dull; they might as well be made by machinery—perhaps better, for they would at least display the one quality that good machinery can impart, clear crisp outline. It is to be regretted that a few such rugs found their way into the exhibition, detracting from its general high level, while another and older class, truly artistic and of great interest to the public was not represented.

These are the runners and small rugs known in the trade as 'antique,' but mostly dating from the early nineteenth century and a few still earlier—the 'Ferahans,' 'Joshagans' or 'Sarabands' and so on. The best of these display a very real art of their own which consists of reducing the sweeping floriations and scrolls of the larger carpets to smaller elements of design, of non-geometrical shape, and arranging them in regular repeating patterns so that they fit intimately into the whole and bring it to the semblance of weaving rather than an embroidering technique. The art displayed in this re-arrangement is of a high order, though veiled perhaps by its very success

and modest sobriety when compared with that of the larger products : moreover, this class of rugs is eagerly sought out by many art-lovers of moderate means to whom its absence was a considerable disappointment. At its best it was probably made by men in workshops, directed by an artist-designer, as in the royal factories, but with increasing demands from abroad, the factories multiplied and spread to many centres ; women undertook the work for a small wage and the designs gradually broke down to the low level of modern workmanship (For a description of the method see p. 25 of " Oriental Rugs," by J. K. Mumford, London, 1901—a book devoted to this class).

We may diverge here for a moment to a comparison with the industry as carried on in Turkish Asia. There, as we have seen, it is indigenous, each family making for its own needs, and the leaning to geometrical forms natural to weaving has been consequently maintained, though there are many exceptions, due to Persian influence which entered freely into the products of the best looms (but, as remarked before, the elements of the designs in the large Persian carpets are most visible in the renderings of floral subjects on the enamelled faiences of Anatolia). There were also workshops in the centres of best production, such as Ghiordes, to satisfy the demands of city clients and the export merchant, and some of them have maintained a high standard of craftsmanship till recent times. An interesting development took place in the Caucasus ; the designs there have always been of Persian inspiration but have been constricted to severely geometrical patterns, more formal than the Turkish ; the weaving was excellent and often remains so—in fact Caucasian rugs have suffered less degradation in every way than others, thanks, as some think, to the wise interest taken in the industry by the Russians.

Criticism was often directed against the manner of lighting the carpets on the walls, at least in the early part of the exhibition ; coloured lights were thrown on them worthy of a showman in a market-fair, hiding effectually one of their chief glories, their richness of colour, which only appeared on close examination : if artificial lighting were necessary, it should have been supplied by one of the systems devised for giving ' daylight ' effects.

Some attention is due to the embroideries. Very few were shown at the exhibition and in fact this method of decorating textiles does not appear to have been largely

followed in Persia, as a result, probably, of the great excellence of the figured weavings. It is interesting to note that the patterns of embroideries follow in nearly every case a weaving design, with repeats, and might well have been executed on the loom ; it would seem that the stitching technique was adopted in private houses where the richer products of the professional loom would have been too costly but were taken as models by the embroiderers. The best known examples are the very fine and close embroideries made for women's trousers and called '*naqsha*,' most of which display in every way the high standard of Persian taste ; (collectors' modesty used to describe them as 'waistcoats'). Embroidery was also used for small prayer-rugs, meant for domestic use, probably in the hareem ; white cotton stuff is sometimes used as a basis, stitched with white silk ; the cotton threads are occasionally drawn in parts, to compose an open-work decoration, a method often adopted also for stuffs of other uses such as small mats or coverings. Domestic prayer-rugs, of stronger and larger make, were often decorated with Resht-work, so called from the town that made it famous ; it consists of *applique* designs, cut out and sewn on the woven ground, which was usually of woollen stuff ; the applied material may be of wool or silk of various colours, and often silver or gold threads were also used for additional brilliancy. The designs in this case do not follow those of weaving but are usually in the form of panels, with proper supports and finishings in a quasi-architectural style which does not prevent, however, the lavish use of floral elements, often in brilliant colours and occasionally supported by stitched embroidery. Beside prayer-rugs, saddle-housings were often made in this way, and quilts ; in many parts of the Near East, and notably Cairo, tents and marquees are decorated internally with this work, with bright and gay effects, the Cairene examples, made with cotton, being often finely cut and the patterns, mostly geometrical, still retaining the real taste of older times---though dreadful degradation has recently ensued from the ignorant and inartistic use of foreign elements. This form of decoration is not recent ; a most interesting and important example of it rests in the famous armoury in the royal palace at Madrid, being the great pavilion captured by Charles V from Francis I at Pavia, in the year 1525 A.D.; it may perhaps be of Turkish workmanship for this kind of work was much used in Turkey, perhaps more than in Persia, and may be, in

fact, of Turkish origin.* No example of Resht-work was shown at the Exhibition, a regrettable omission that might have easily been avoided, for the more brilliant specimens of it have long been coveted prizes for Continental collectors.

A somewhat analogous form of embroidery became popular in the eighteenth century, in the satin and velvet stuffs, usually of a tint of red, decorated with designs in heavy gold or silver thread and applied much to saddle-cloths, holsters, tomb-covers and so on : it was perhaps derived from Turkey, where it was much used, and often followed Turkish designs, refining on them on occasion. (In Turkey, as in the neighbouring countries of Europe, embroidery seems to have been much more widely spread than in Persia, being practised by the women of all classes ; the peasants used it to protect the parts of clothing most exposed to wear).

Other subjects for embroidery were the handsome, often gorgeous, coverings for trays used to bring in wedding and other ceremonial gifts, coverlets, quilts, bath-rugs, usually quilted, and other domestic articles ; all the usual stitches were practised, satin, cross and chain, couching and thread-drawing, always with the good Persian taste, except of course the garish modern objects tainted with European bad taste and the sometimes over-decorated tray-covers, made gaudy with metal spangles ; it is a pity that they were almost wholly omitted from the exhibition.

Returning to ceramics, which we left in the 13th to 14th centuries, we find a continuation of the styles of that period, with slight modifications, till the 15th century. Vessels for use still followed old models and designs, but Chinese influence was beginning to assert itself, in both form and colour, celadon, notably, or a colour approaching it, gaining special favour. Inscriptions formed often the sole or major element of decoration, executed in relief or strong colouring with great calligraphic skill, which is visible also in the various scrolls and figures enamelled on the glazed surfaces. Among the schemes of decoration clear-cut black figures or lettering on a green ground, or a blue one, were common ; a similar use of colour is found on Chinese porcelain vessels of even or somewhat later date ;

* This may be compared with two pieces of Persian work captured from the Turks by the Poles at the battle of Vienna 1683, which were shown at the exhibition : No. 95, a piece of cut-velvet representing Alexander killing a dragon with a rock, and No. 822, a beautiful carpet, much worn, of woollen pile.

and it is possible that in this particular those supreme potters, the Chinese, admiring Persian excellence, adopted their scheme, modifying it to suit their native taste. Reliefs began to appear on wall-tiles, though rarely, in the last part of the 13th century; they were very effective in the bold friezes of inscriptions, with the Kufic lettering in relief on a lustred ground, sometimes touched with blue, consisting of floral and other scrolls, the whole in good proportion and supplying often a magnificent architectural adornment: but this state of pure decoration did not continue long; reliance on reliefs for effect grew rapidly until it attained much prominence in the 17th and following centuries, eventually dominating that art and ending, with polychromatic accompaniments, in a complete disintegration of taste.

In the ages following the birth of the New Persian style the old manner of ceramic decoration had ceased to please and in the 16th century other fashions arose. The most noticeable was the craze for Chinese porcelain, now concentrated on the blue-and-white variety of the Ming period, of which imitations were made in the sixteenth century and became common in the seventeenth; a brilliant white background was produced by means of a highly levigated slip and the figures were painted in Chinese fashion. whether flowers, men or beasts, but usually with a controlling touch in Persian taste; absolutely direct imitations were not unknown but were rare. (The Chinese, naturally, did not neglect the market thus favourably open to them and poured out from King-te-chen numberless porcelain vessels in blue-and-white adapted to Persian use, a large proportion consisting of great rice-platters, also made in celadon). Blue-and-white was not used only for designs inspired by the Chinese but occasionally, and with great success, for floral designs in the best Persian manner; a pale orange-pink slip was sometimes added, rarely improving in effect; in another class of ware, known in Europe as "Gombroon," the walls of cups and bowls were pierced with small openings of rice-grain or lozenge shape, arranged in patterns, usually geometrical, these openings were filled with transparent glaze; the Chinese, in the early seventeenth century, perhaps a little earlier, practised this kind of decoration, with great refinement, and it probably passed from them to Persia.

The Caucasian polychrome faience known as "Kubadja" has already been mentioned; a similar ware was made

in Khorassan in the late sixteenth century, with colours resembling those of Anatolian faience, but paler; the human figure was commonly represented; the line-work was, at its best, strong and sure, equal to that of the miniatures, which had great influence, naturally, on the tile-painters. The Khorassan school does not seem to have fallen to the facile temptation of reliefs which, as we have seen, proved disastrous to other tile-decorators in Persia.

Metal-work was not well represented in the exhibition, which was strange considering that the collection of fine examples has long been carried on vigorously throughout Europe; probably interest has of late been more aroused in the comparatively recent discoveries of the old ceramics; but, beautiful as these are, they by no means eclipse the great merits of the decorated metal-work, unsurpassed in its kind.

The fine and spirited work of Mosul and Khorassan, which we have already noted, was widely valued and strongly influenced all Western Asia and Islamic countries where, as notably in Egypt, it took root. The style underwent all the influences that marked the painting and ceramics, losing gradually the almost hieratic quality of the early work and becoming somewhat looser and more occupied with purely decorative elements, principally of a floriated nature; the surfaces of candle-sticks, bowls and platters, even of dervishes' begging-bowls and axes, were often all covered with such elements, hardly different from those lavished on the architecture or on the splendid illuminations framing the first page of books or the openings of their chapters (*unvan*). Inlays in gold or silver were often added to heighten the effect, but the chiselled or engraved work alone was of great beauty; it reached Europe early and was imitated with great success in the sixteenth century at Venice, where Eastern artists, probably from Syria, had settled, as did Syrian glass-workers. Much art was expended on arms and armour, the former being often enriched with precious stones, especially jade and turquoise. Steel was elaborately damascened and chiselled, an art that grew so popular that it was easily degraded, especially with the use of acids for biting the metal in place of engraving it. All kinds of vessels were covered with intricate engravings, even the tinned cooking pots, to which, in order perhaps to bring them in line with vessels of more exalted use, verses of poetry were sometimes added, in praise of hospitality, but such utensils were

doubtless brought to the table from the kitchen, like the highly decorated bronze frying-pans of the ancient Romans, with their handles cast in exquisite models of animal-heads; the Persian examples likewise reach a high standard of decoration.

The metal-work designs followed the same development as those of ceramics, undergoing the same influences; the older tradition lasted, with the constant modifications due to these influences, till the Safavid period when foreign infiltrations, chiefly Chinese, brought the art to that freer state which is so noticeable in the later period of lustred ceramics; but the metal-workers avoided the willowy forms of over-tenuous grace that characterized the contemporary textiles and ceramics.

The later kind of intense decorativeness, specially in the arms, turning as it did to an almost barbaric gorgeousness, was well represented at the exhibition, especially in the striking display of the royal specimens, with their theatrical profusion of gold and precious gems. (We may be allowed here to note a curious mistake in the catalogue, in the description of the long thin scissors used for cutting off lengths of writing-paper from the rolls in which, as in China, it used to be sold; they are conjectured as being for "astrological use", whereas the Arabic words cut on the handle, "O Opener", the beginning of a well-known verse in the Koran, are obviously suggested by the use of the instrument).

It is perhaps in metal-work that the intensity of the Persian impulse towards decoration is best witnessed; the ingenuity shown in the best period in covering whole surfaces without a hint of excess, the variety of elements employed, all of an essentially homogeneous nature, the skill and ease of adaptation of these elements to all forms and contours, in short the mastery and control, place the Persian decorator in the highest rank of all time.

We may notice, as a feature characteristic of Persian decorative schemes, that the designs coveringlarge surfaces are laid out almost precisely as in weaving, with multiple repeats of one or very few elements; in embroidery this has already been remarked, and there it is perhaps somewhat natural, as deriving from the earlier textile art of figured weaving, but it is equally observable in the designs on metal-work, such as the repetitions of the "broad-arrow" previously noted. In China also the same method was commonly followed, as, for example, by the repetition of the 'Thunder' symbol in the decoration of old bronzes

or, later, when in the Ming period porcelain began to be covered with figured designs, they were taken straight from woven or embroidered patterns, similar in this to a much earlier class of ceramic ware, from ancient Greece, in the "Phaleron" and "Corinthian" styles. Yet this repetitive mode is more widely found in Persia than elsewhere—it almost monopolizes the smaller rugs for middle-class use whose absence from the exhibition we have deplored, and in them will be found what is perhaps its most ingenious and artistic manifestation.

To the picture presented above of Persian excellence in decoration there must of course be an inevitable reverse, for such skill and ease must lead, the first fine period ended, to too great facility, to over-decoration and vulgarity and hence to negligence; all of which defects may be seen making their sure progress in the later ages of Persian art. An obvious instance is that of architecture; it could not, by its nature, be represented at the exhibition but there were a number of photographs displaying the decorative schemes and elements employed; they showed quite clearly how early over-decoration entered into the art, to the great injury of the noble forms engendered by the genius of the architects, especially under the Seljuks. The large lustred prayer-niche (*mihrab*) from Kashan, of the second half of the thirteenth century, splendid example though it is of ceramic excellence, lacks in dignity, with its over-elaborate ornamentation, while the model, one-third scale, of the "main doorway of" the great Isfahan mosque of the early seventeenth century, the *Mesjid-i-Shah*, made in painted plaster, with its sham water-tank in mirror-glass and cement, could hardly evoke any idea but that of triviality—but of course we cannot judge an architect by an imitation in the mode of Wembley. The fact seems to be that the Persian taste for decoration combined with their masterly skill in ceramics led to the application of that art to buildings with an indiscriminative profusion which often obscures the nobility of the actual construction; Captain Creswell has shown how high the architects of Persia must rank, with their inventions of true domical building by means of the squinch, the axial construction of mosques, so conducive to dignity, and the magnificence of the inner court (*sahn*) with its sides composed of lofty half-domed arches (*eivan*); the simple majesty of these features, without the mask of excessive ornament, may be best seen, perhaps, in the monuments of Syria and, especially, of Egypt, where ornament is exquisite indeed but applied in due proportion to the

surfaces which it covers—I need but refer to the Cairene mosque of Sultan Hassan; even the later period of increased decoration gives evidence of a controlling restraint, as we may see in the mosque of Kait Bey outside the walls of Cairo, built at the end of the fifteenth century. (An excellent introductory essay on Persian architecture by Captain Creswell is included in Luzac's very recommendable little handbook on "Persian Art" published for the occasion of the exhibition).

Here we conclude our summary sketch of the specimens of Persian art brought together at Burlington House; their great qualities and their fallings-off have been appraised as each development was examined and so there is no need to attempt a general summing up of their æsthetic qualities. With regard to the standing of the art in the world at large, we may say that on the decorative side there is no country in Europe or Asia, including even China—that ohter supreme mistress in decoration—that has not freely drawn from it; in Europe the debt is incalculable while in art the India of the Moghuls was practically a province of Persia, with the variations usual to provincial art. In the purely intellectual sphere which we call 'fine art,' represented by the miniatures, while we shall not find the spiritual qualities which we connect with that phrase, we can accord it a high place in our affection for its clear and shining gaiety, the very face of youth and spring, and the magnificence of its technique; these qualities indeed mark the whole of Persian decorative art at its best and make it for us one of the real gifts of creative mind.

Let us end with thanks to the initiators and contributors who carried to a successful end, with so few omissions and lapses in taste, the very heavy task of organizing the exhibition and thus made possible for us the exploration at first hand of these happy fields of art.

G. D. HORNBLOWER.