



The Fall of the Moghul Empire

H.G. Keene

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For nearly two centuries the throne of the Chaghtais continued to be filled by a succession of exceptionally able Princes. The brave and simple-hearted Babar, the wandering Humayun, the glorious Akbar, the easy but uncertain-tempered Jahangir, the magnificent Shahjahan, all these rulers combined some of the best elements of Turkish character and their administration was better than that of any other Oriental country of their date. Of Shahjahan's government and its patronage of the arts both decorative and useful we have trustworthy contemporary descriptions. His especial taste was for architecture; and the Mosque and Palace of Dehli, which he personally designed, even after the havoc of two centuries, still remain the climax of the Indo-Saracenic order, and admitted rivals to the choicest works of Cordova and Granada.

The abilities of his son and successor ALAMGIR, known to Europeans by his private name, AURANGZEB, rendered him the most famous member of his famous house. Intrepid and enterprising as he was in war, his political sagacity and statecraft were equally unparalleled in Eastern annals. He abolished capital punishment, understood and encouraged agriculture, founded numberless colleges and schools, systematically constructed roads and bridges, kept continuous diaries of all public events from his earliest boyhood, administered justice publicly in person, and never condoned the slightest malversation of a provincial governor, however distant his province. Such were these emperors; great, if not exactly what we should call good, to a degree rare indeed amongst hereditary rulers.

The fact of this uncommon succession of high qualities in a race born to the purple may be ascribed to two main considerations. In the first place, the habit of contracting, marriages with Hindu princesses, which the policy and the latitudinarianism of the emperors established, was a constant source of fresh blood, whereby the increase of family predisposition was checked. Few if any races of men are free from some morbid taint: scrofula, phthisis, weak nerves, or a disordered brain, are all likely to be propagated if a person predisposed to any such ailment marries a woman of his own stock. From this danger the Moghul princes were long kept free. Khuram, the second son of Jahangir, who succeeded his father under the title of Shah Jahan, had a Hindu mother, and two Hindu grandmothers. All his sons, however, were by a Persian consort the lady of the Taj.

Secondly, the invariable fratricidal war which followed the demise of the Crown gave rise to a natural selection (to borrow a term from modern physical science), which eventually confirmed the strongest in possession of the prize. However humanity may revolt from the scenes of crime which such a system must perforce entail, yet it cannot be doubted that the qualities necessary to ensure success in a struggle of giants would certainly both declare and develop themselves in the person of the victor by the time that struggle was concluded...

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