

first of the Kajar dynasty, the cruel eunuch Agha Muhamed; his nephew, Feth Ali Shah, who in unfortunate wars lost whole provinces to Russia, was succeeded by his grandson, Mehemet Shah, who in his turn made room for his son, Nasr-ed-din Shah, murdered in 1896 by an adherent of the Bab sect, which he had tried to root out. Now it was the turn of his son, Muzaffar-ed-din Shah; and Ali Muhamed Mirza, the Valiad in Tabriz, was only waiting for the message which would one day summon him, as the sixth ruler of his dynasty, to place on his head the imperial crown of the Kajars.

It is said of the Shahs of the Kajar dynasty that they have been alternately strong and weak. Agha Muhamed was a powerful ruler; Feth Ali made only unsuccessful war, and under his government the limits of the ancient kingdom were contracted. His son, Abbas Mirza, Valiad in Tabriz, was an able and promising man, who died before his father, and his son was a weak and inefficient ruler. Then followed the forty-eight years' reign of Nasr-ed-din Shah, who, in many respects, raised the condition of Persia, and surrounded himself with all the outward display of power and pomp of a real Oriental despot. His son, Muzaffar-ed-din, was in every respect a wretched and incapable ruler, and if the rule holds good as hitherto—that every alternate Shah shall be an honour to his country—then the present Valiad will concentrate the dying forces of his kingdom, and the smoking flax shall once more flame up into a bright glow before it is extinguished in the night of time.

And, indeed, Ali Muhamed is looked upon as an energetic and strong man who knows his own mind, though he often went recklessly to work as long as his power prevailed in Tabriz. When the Shah undertook his journey to Europe, the Valiad was summoned as regent to Teheran, and the very day the cautious Muzaffar-ed-din drove away from the capital his son began to rule energetically, and condemned some dangerous gentlemen to death. In Tabriz he lived as a kind of banker or speculator, bought up and obtained control of as many villages as possible, and increased his private income.