



## ABU'L-ḤASAN KHAN ĪLČĪ

**ABU'L-ḤASAN KHAN ĪLČĪ**, MĪRZĀ, Persian diplomat, b. 1190/1776 in Šīrāz. He was the second son of Mīrzā Moḥammad-'Alī, the brother-in-law of Ḥājjī Ebrāhīm Khan E'temād-al-dawla (q.v.), the prime minister of the Qajars Āgā Moḥammad Khan and Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah; he married Ḥājjī Ebrāhīm's daughter. In 1215/1800, when Ḥājjī Ebrāhīm fell out of favor and was imprisoned, all his relatives either fled or were put to death or blinded. Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, then the governor of Šūštar, was exiled to Šīrāz. Fearing for his life, he fled to Bašra and from there set off for India, where he eventually joined the court of the Nāzem in Hyderabad. In 1223/1800, he received a royal pardon and returned to Iran. With the help of Ḥājjī Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Khan Amīn-al-dawla, the influential relative of his wife, the Mīrzā entered the court of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah and accumulated considerable wealth.

The first mission of Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, to the court of George III, earned him the title of Īlčī (envoy). Napoleon's plans for marching to India made Iran suddenly the pivot of the great powers' interest in the Orient. Napoleon had signed a treaty of friendship with Iran at Finkenstein in 1807, and Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah hoped to recover Georgia from the Russians with his help. But the same year Napoleon made peace with the Russians at Tilsit, and Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah turned to the British.

Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, traveling with Sir Harford Jones Brydges (the returning British ambassador) and James Morier, who was at this time secretary to the mission, left Tehran on 7 May 1809, reaching Plymouth November 25. Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan kept a detailed diary of the trip entitled *Ḥayrat-nāma-ye sofarā*.



Morier, who later based some incidents of his *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (London, 1824) on the events of this journey, gave a detailed and often satirical account of the mission in *A Journey Through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor to Constantinople, in the years 1808 and 1809* (London, 1812). Another account is given by Brydges in *An Account of His Majesty's Mission to the Court of Persia, in the years 1807-1811* (London, 1834, 2 vols.). In London the famous orientalist [Sir Gore Ouseley](#) was appointed the mehmandar (or host) of Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, and between them a long friendship developed. Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan's mission was to secure the help of England in making Russia return the occupied Iran territories in the Caucasus, but according to a letter written by Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan and addressed to Marquess Wellesley (British Foreign Office 60/4, January-December, 1810), none of the objectives of the Iranians was attained. Accompanied by Sir Gore Ouseley (the new envoy to Iran), his family, his brother Sir William Ouseley, and James Morier, Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan departed from Portsmouth for Iran on 16 July 1810. A severe storm drove their ship to South America, and they eventually arrived at Būšeher on 1 March 1811. Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan and his suite of eight servants probably were the first Iranians to visit South America. The account of this part of the mission is contained in Morier's *A Second Journey Through Persia . . . to Constantinople, 1810-1816* (London, 1818), Sir William Ouseley's *Travels in Various Countries of the East, More Particularly Persia . . .* (London, 1819, 3 vols.), and William Price's *Journal of the British Embassy to Persia . . .* (London, 1832, 2 vols. in 1).

In England Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan began to learn English and became able to converse in it. His progress is shown by two letters written to an anonymous English lord which were published in *The Morning Star* of 29 May 1810. The letters give an interesting insight into the mind of Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan and his ideas on English society. In the London of 1810, Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan caused quite a sensation. According to Charles Lamb, who devoted an essay to him, the Mīrzā was “the principal thing talked of” for some time (*Collected Works*, London, 1876, II, p. 241, letter CIV). “There was in the manners of Mīrzā,” Sir Walter Scott wrote, “all the address and dexterity of a courtier with some points which seemed to indicate a deeper degree of reflection than we are accustomed to connect with the idea of a Mussalman” (*Edinburgh Review* for January, 1829, p. 91). Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan was a witty and amiable person, and some of his repartees and anecdotes appear in contemporary English sources (see Millard, “A Diplomatic Portrait”). Some of his remarks appear in Morier's *Hajji Baba* and in Stephen Weston, *Persian and English Ambassadors* (London, 1812).



During his stay in London Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan was initiated into the Freemasonry brotherhood and attained the title of “Past Grand Master” (R. F. Gould, *The History Freemasonry Throughout the World*, London, 1887, VI, p. 338), but it is not known if he brought the masonic order into Iran. Some Iranian historians have criticized him for joining Freemasonry and also for receiving gifts and an annuity from the British (E. Rā'īn, *Ḥoqūthat-begīrān-e Engelīs dar Īrān*, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 20-43). Receiving gifts was not uncommon among the courtiers of Faḥ-'Alī Shah, but a regular annuity from a foreign government was unusual. James Fraser, who did not think highly of Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, wrote of him: “Although he has for a long time past, and I believe still receives a considerable annuity from the English government, and has returned to Persia loaded with its presents, he constantly opposes its interests, and talks of it before his countrymen generally in very slighting terms” (J. B. Fraser, *Narrative of a Journey into Khorasan in the Years 1821 and 1822*, London, 1825, p. 151). Despite Fraser's statement, most of the sources confirm that Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan was a staunch supporter of the British, and for his good services he was paid an annuity of 1,000 rupees from 1810 to 1845, the year of his death. According to the British Foreign Office documents (F.O. 60/vol. 118), in 1843 Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan asked that after his death his salary should be paid to his son; correspondence (31 January, 13 May, 18 March, and 27 March 1848; cf. Rā'īn, op. cit., pp. 37-38) indicates that his son pursued the same aim without success.

After his return to Iran, Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, who received the honorary title of Khan from Faḥ-'Alī Shah, worked closely with the British ambassador, who played an important part in drafting the **Treaty of Golestān**. Sir Gore Ouseley—who had included Mīrzā Šafī' (q.v.), the prime minister, in the British payroll (F.O. 60/7 1812, letter no. 16)—enlisted the services of these two officials and outmanoeuvred Mīrzā Bozorg Qā'em-maqām (q.v.), the patriotic minister to 'Abbās Mīrzā, who opposed this ignominious treaty. Ouseley's main concern was to safeguard the British and Russian interests and enable the Russians to face the Napoleonic army without being disturbed by Iran. On behalf of Iran, Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan signed the treaty in the village of Golestān in March, 1813.

The Golestān treaty enacted a ceasefire but left the fate of the Iranian territories occupied by the Russians to be resolved later. In 1815 Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan was sent to the court of St. Petersburg as special envoy; though Sir Gore Ouseley had promised Faḥ-'Alī Shah to negotiate for the return of the Iranian



territories with the czar, nothing came out of this trip, and Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan returned to Tehran after two years. In 1819 he was again sent to England, traveling overland via Constantinople, Vienna, and Paris, and he returned in the following year. In 1239/1823 he was appointed minister of foreign affairs, the second foreign minister of Iran after Mīrzā 'Abd-al-Wahhāb Mo'tamad-al-dawla Našāṭ (q.v.). Until 1250/1834, when Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah died, Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan held this position and was involved in most Iranian major foreign policy decisions. He and Našāṭ were among the very few officials who opposed the policy of war with Russia, but they could not cope with the wave of militancy which was being fanned by some of the 'olamā'. When Iran was again defeated in her struggles against Russia, Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan and 'Abbās Mīrzā, the crown prince, signed the Treaty of Torkamānčāy (q.v.) on 5 Ša'bān 1243/28 February 1828.

After the death of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah, his son 'Alī Shah Ḍell-al-solṭān proclaimed himself king. Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, learning that Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem Qā'em-maqām had been declared prime minister by Moḥammad Shah in Tabrīz, took the side of 'Alī Shah. When 'Alī Shah was defeated and Moḥammad Shah entered Tehran, Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan took sanctuary in the shrine of 'Abd-al-'Aẓīm (Ramaẓān, 1250/February, 1835), and did not leave it until the fall and execution of the prime minister on 26 June 1835. The new prime minister, Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī, accorded him the position of foreign minister for the second time in 1254/1838. Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan held this position until his death in 1262/1845.

Though most of the contemporary British travelers speak favorably of Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan's character and his friendliness with the British (see J. Johnson, *A Journey from India to England through Persia in the Year 1817*, London, 1818, p. 154), James Fraser is harshly critical: "He is so mean and dishonest, in all his dealings, that none who can avoid it will have anything to do with him; and so proverbially false, that none believes a word he says" (*Narrative*, p. 149). Iranian scholars also give a generally unfavorable estimate of his character.

Apart from a number of official letters, *Ḥayrat-nāma-ye sofarā* is the only work written by Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan. One copy is in the British Museum (Add. 23, 546) and another in the Maḵles Library. The present writer has seen a third in the possession of the descendants of Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan in Tehran, longer and more detailed than the British Museum copy. The book is written in the usual florid style of the period and illustrates many of the incidents that are humorously described in *Hajji Baba* and its sequel. Five portraits of Mīrzā



Abu'l-Ḥasan were painted during his European journey. The two most outstanding pictures are by Sir Thomas Lawrence and Sir William Beechey (see Millard, "A Diplomatic Portrait").

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