

"Hawaizeh, Khalafabad, Durakh, Shushtar and Bihbihan and Zaitun, and Pul-i-Pulad "have done so.

"Now he is taking it up with the Armenians and other Christians, wanting all to apostatize. The brother of the patriarch, who was (himself) an archbishop, has voluntarily become a renegade, and I think this poor Armenian community will in the end have to become completely Muhammadan. . . . He does not allow them to leave the country, and I think the Fathers will too be sent away. . . . The Pasha here" (in Basra) "has received letters from the king of Persia exhorting him to purge his country of the 'infidels', for so they term all those who do not follow the religion of Muhammad. . . . So they are also in dread, the Sabaeans in particular."¹

In thus extending their zeal for Islam outside the frontiers of Persia the Shah and his ministers were evidently actuated not by mere administrative motives as regards certain sections of his subjects, but by sheer intolerance: and the evidence of this persecution does not rest on a single letter. Fr. Cornelius of S. Cyprian from Isfahan itself had already reported, 24.2.1657:²

"Affairs here are not likely to prosper our holy Faith . . . every now and then there are disputes with the chief minister. *The Jews have been forced to become Muhammadans*, and in order to 'purify' the city of Isfahan they are obliging all the Armenians who were near the city to go and live outside: and there are other signs so that I do not know whether we shall stay long in this house of ours. . . . Some 'Franks' who are married here are leaving of their own accord and going to live near the place assigned to the Armenians, in order not to remain in the midst of the Muslims. . . ."

In a letter of 9.7.1656³ Fr. Dionysius of the Crown of Thorns had explained the influences at work over this expulsion and the assignment of

"ground one league from the city . . . so that they may build for themselves there. The author of this innovation is, they say, a Muhammadan 'doctor'" (i.e. a Mulla) "whom the Shah has taken as his 'chaplain', very fanatical for his Muhammadan religion and hostile to Christians, who are considered unclean in the eyes of Muhammadans. Nothing so far has been notified to us about this, although they say that the Mulla in question has set his heart on having all the European Religious also expelled from the city, and even that the king adds that no church shall remain any longer inside the city. But we have no definite news about this. . . ."

The same Religious added, 3.1.1657:

"Le roi a fait par force Mahométans tous les Juifs de ceste ville, et en a chassé tous les Chrestiens Arméniens et Sirians, auxquels a fait assigner un champ en dessus de Guilfa pour y fabriquer et i faire leur demeure. . . ."

Two years later, 4.6.1659, the Vicar Provincial, Fr. Felix of S. Antony, answered an enquiry from the Sac. Congregation as to progress and prospects⁴ of conversions among Muslims:

"The vineyard is sterile: no credit should be given to stories of conversions. I have found these Persians far from the truth. Lately the Shah of Persia has expelled from the

¹ This and the other contemporary evidence shows how mistaken and unreliable are Fr. du Cerceau's words and estimates of Shah 'Abbas II written a century later:

". . . He loved justice and had no mercy for the governors and other public officers who abusing their authority oppressed the people, of which several instances may be seen in Tavernier. He had a great and noble soul, was very kind to strangers and openly protected the Christians, whom he would not have in the least molested for their religion. . . ."

² O.C.D. 237 a.

³ *Idem*, 237 c.

⁴ *S.R.*, vol. 236, p. 24.