

"During the time he stayed in Nakhchiwan he observed the exactions and ill-usage, to which Christians there were subjected by the Muhammadans, the former being also led to become renegades from the Faith, *not so much from the motive of desiring to be freed from this ill-treatment, as to get possession of the property of their relatives, which, by virtue of a law promulgated by the king of Persia, devolves on those who pass over to the Muhammadan faith.*

"In order to rescue the people from being so harassed and to get rid of that inducement to apostatize, which avarice (a vice to which Armenians are very prone) caused them, Fr. Tani on his return to Italy tried to get various Christian princes to press the Shah of Persia to abolish the law in question. . . .

"After he had obtained the letters (from the Christian princes) he returned to those parts and, though he did not succeed in getting, as desired, the annulment of the impious law, his efforts did not fail to bear fruit, inasmuch as the king of Persia ordered that all governors should be removed from their posts and that the people of that diocese should be placed under his own immediate control. As the result of such decision the Christians are spared the ill-treatment the governors used to inflict on them by heavy impositions, and the outrages suffered at the hands of tax-collectors, and they are relieved, too, of the burden of giving lodging to strangers at their own expense. The ease with which they could become renegades has been counteracted, seeing that at present, *in order to take possession of the property of relatives apostates must appear before the king and bring with them sixty (? sic) witnesses . . .*"

is the wording of a report of 1669 to the Sacr. Congregation.¹

On 14.5.1668 a successor to Mgr Piromalli was appointed in Fr. Matthew Hovannes, an Armenian, of whom there are letters extant on his journey from Rome, and from Abranar after his arrival in his diocese, 26.9.1669:² at Erzerum, accused by the Turks of having things for the Persian Court, with two Carmelites his companions he was put in prison and spent 400 pieces of eight to be freed. In October he left Abranar for Tabriz, whence he wrote again,³ about to go to find the Shah in Isfahan, for he was the bearer of a Brief from Pope Clement IX.

"Archbishop Matthew of Nakhchiwan was given a reception here, as if he had been an envoy from the Pope; but he was treated in very miserly fashion" (presumably, in the matter of subsistence allowances customary at the Persian Court): "however he has obtained something . . ."

reported the Carmelite Fr. Angelus to Rome, 12.8.1670.⁴

Perhaps that "something" included a reply from Shah Sulaiman to Pope Clement IX, for that pope reigned only from 20.6.1667 to 9.12.1669: and it is known from his successor's Brief of 25.10.1672 (which see in the Appendix of Latin Briefs, as also p. 480) that a letter had been received in Rome from the Shah addressed to Clement IX, i.e. between mid-1667 and the end of 1669—a letter apparently not preserved in the Vatican archives.

Then in 1669, as a 'précis' made in the Sacr. Congregation relates:⁵

"Monsignor Arachiel, Armenian archbishop,⁶ has come to Rome to represent to your Eminences that, having constructed a church in Erivan with the help of Azariah the Armenian Catholic (a person well known to the Sacr. Congregation) where the Capuchin missionaries were to officiate, it had been demolished by officials of the king of Persia at the instigation of the schismatic Armenians, and the archbishop expelled and deprived of his emoluments. He begs for His Holiness to be asked to write a Brief to the Shah of Persia so that he may be given permission to build a new church in Erivan . . . and orders for there to be restored to him the revenues of the church of S. Gregory in that town. . . ."

¹ S.R., vol. 421, p. 119.

² *Idem*, 7.11.1669.

³ S.R., vol. 418.

⁴ 10.5.1669, S.R., vol. 423, and S.R., vol. 434, p. 167, 170.

⁵ See the Brief in Arch. Secr. Vat. *Epist. ad Princ.*, 67, p. 367: Fr. Angelus, O.C.D. 236 i.

⁶ He is mentioned as 'archbishop of Erivan' in 1667.