

“near and contiguous to Persia, is the most suitable place for assisting and increasing the weal contemplated in the conversion of this kingdom. In confirmation of this unanimous opinion we have both signed here

“JOHN THADDEUS of S. Elisaeus

“FR. VINCENT of S. Francis,

“And, in conformity with the above statement, I, Fra John Thaddeus of S. Elisaeus, by virtue of the seniority that I possess, tell your Reverence, Vincent of S. Francis, priest of our Order, to go in the name of the Lord and of the most holy Virgin, and carry out at Hurmuz this holy work, on which depends all the harvest and which is to be the seminary for the missions in Persia. At Isfahan, 30.1.1609.”

This ‘resolution’ is included in a ‘Brief Account of matters concerning the king of Persia and his habits’<sup>1</sup>, which Fr. John Thaddeus sent away to Rome by Fr. Vincent on 15.8.1609, and that “brief account” makes unexpected and startling revelation of the utter viciousness and personal licentiousness of this monarch, so often vaunted as great:

“When the Augustinian Fathers came here, the king of Persia had taken an Armenian boy of good looks, named John, and put him in his ‘haram’: the boy did not want to become a Muslim and asked his father to try and get him away from there. The parent went to the Augustinian Fathers and begged them to speak to the king. They did so and asked that, as the boy did not wish to become a Muslim, he should be given his liberty. The king had him brought before the Fathers, and the Augustinian Father asked him if he were a Christian and desired to remain in his religion. The boy answered ‘yes’. The king then told the Father to take him away, but, as they were about to depart, the king added in the Turkish tongue to the boy: ‘All right: thou canst go off now, but do not think I shall give way and thou canst escape from my hands.’ The boy got so alarmed at those words that, when he was again asked what he wished to be, he replied that he wanted to be a Muslim: and so they took him back to the saraglio.”

For not only did ‘Abbas I, according to Fr. John Thaddeus, ‘have five Baigums, queens as it were’, and several hundred women in his *andarun*, but ‘more than two hundred boys’: when he went to any place “he would cause the best-featured boys to be placed at the entrance: he would go to the baths accompanied by thirty to forty naked boys”: and this Father declares that ‘Abbas I was responsible for the introduction of the worst of all sins into this land, ‘where hitherto it had been abhorred’. The next charge is to be noted, because of the terribly cruel sequel, so accurately foreseen by the Carmelite.

“He had lent for a term of three years to all the poor Armenians of Julfa<sup>2</sup> 20 or 30 scudi each and made some stand guarantee for others. One year has passed, and many have spent the money and have not the wherewithal to pay it back and are cogitating how they can escape. We shall see many tragedies when the time for repayment comes. “He has many spies to see that the Armenians do not return to their lands” (in Armenia) “without his permission, and we know of no one who has obtained it. Two nephews of the deputy to the patriarch ran away from Isfahan. They were brought back and beaten, and then taken off to the encampment, where the Shah was; he ordered that they should go back to Isfahan, saying that, if by his own return they had not become Muslims, he would have them killed. These lads were so terrified when the king returned that they died of fright.

“He embarks on no undertaking, takes no action without first an astrologer, who accompanies him, saying whether the hour be propitious or not.

<sup>1</sup> O.C.D. 237 m.

<sup>2</sup> It will be recalled that only in 1604 had ‘Abbas begun the transplantation of Armenians to the new Julfa from their old home; doubtless many of the newcomers were poorly off and needed money for grainseed, etc.