

“was wont to say that he would have killed a hundred children in order to reign alone for a single day. To this end he employed a vast dissimulation, hiding in his own heart his real intentions and deceiving others. . . .”

After receiving news of his death, on 2.2.1629 the Factors of the East India Company at Gāmbnun, William Burt and John Benthall, reported<sup>1</sup> to headquarters of the company at Surat:

“This king . . . inhumanly hath added to the numberless terrors of his conscience the death of his owne and onlie sonne, causing his eyes to be cut fourth with a rasour: whose owne child was a spectator of his father’s misery, whome in his rage hee bereaved of life as afterward did unto himselfe by poysonous pills, the king having since sent for the sonne of Merza Sophie, who was elder brother of the last unfortunate prince, who was also bereaved of life by the same cruell hand. . . .”

Moreover, before ’Abbas I died he issued an infamous edict<sup>2</sup> that whoever of a Christian family should turn Muslim should inherit possession of the property of all his relatives, up to the seventh generation. By 1654, i.e. in twenty years, it was calculated that in order to escape beggary more than 50,000 Christians were renegades and lost to the Christian Faith.<sup>3</sup>

A careful quartermaster and energetic adjutant in particular, it is as a successful general, an organizer of military forces, that, judged by all the detail available in these manuscripts, ’Abbas I would seem to have the best title to the regard of world opinion and his countrymen—albeit it was his fortune that his reconquest of the border lands lost mainly in his father’s reign was rendered easier by a period of indecision and military incapacity on the Turkish side, and his successors were to lose by degrees everything, so that of those reconquests nothing except Gilan, Laristan and eastern Khurasan remain within the frontiers of Iran. More than sufficient has been revealed above to show how utterly at variance with the facts, how tragically mistaken and untrue was the statement in several editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: “To his Christian subjects he was a kind and tolerant ruler”: the Armenian race especially has reason to curse his tyrannous transplantation of scores of thousands, followed by systematic forced conversion of the scattered units; while Georgians, Circassians, Chaldaeans all suffered in their thousands.

The Shah was already dead when, unaware of that event, Pope Urban VIII addressed him on 8.3.1629 a Brief (Arch. Secr. Vat. *Epist. ad Princ.*, vol. 43, fol. 44) explaining that the Carmelites had no worldly interests in Persia, but were intent on serving God: so he asked the Shah to allow them access to himself, and reminded ’Abbas I of the many previous relations he had had with the Holy See, the envoys he had sent—an invitation, in fact, to a return to the former friendlier terms and greater consideration for the Religious in his realms. The text is given in the Appendix of the Latin Briefs. Translated it runs:

“Pope Urban VIII to the most puissant and illustrious King of the Persians.

“Most puissant and illustrious King, greetings and the light of Divine grace. It is to the will of Him who is almighty over all rulers that a life which despises earthly vanity has been consecrated by the Discalced Carmelite priests commissioned by Us for the present to Persia and everywhere spreading the Kingdom of heaven and the rule of religion. Now since they rate a voluntary poverty above wealth that breeds enmity, and wander through the most distant lands destitute of everything, yet they will approach Your Highness equipped with copious supplies of those praises that can among all races be considered favours from heaven. We hope that a virtue that consults the common

<sup>1</sup> See *Factory Records*, East India Company—Early Documents relating to Persia, 1620–97.

<sup>2</sup> MSS. *Hist. Miss.*, chap. 27, book 5, part 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* also the letter from Fr. (afterwards Bishop) Paolo Piromalli, O.P. from Abranar in Nakhchiwan to the Sac. Cong., 18.1.1632, S.R., vol. 104: “. . . The Persians have the custom in this Armenia, when a Christian becomes a ‘Turk’, to dispossess his relatives up to the 7th generation and give everything to the renegade.” The terrible working of this decree will be noted later in this work, as far as Sultan Husain’s reign.