

“riches of Christ. For truly wisdom is above choice gold; and to teach it a rough and very hard journey has been undertaken by the Religious, Brother JOSEPH of S. MARY, the Discalced Carmelite. And so We urgently beseech Your Highness to embrace him with great kindness and zeal. Assuredly You, who entertain such friendly feelings towards Us, are worthy to gain the greatest good. But truly You ought to be sufficiently persuaded that You will never be sorry for kindness shown this Religious. It were easy to relate how obedient a happiness and one that delights in its own affairs they possess whose energies are bent on increasing and advancing the Christian religion. But even as We desire for You a good success and one not at all unstable, so We care not much for one that is mortal and fleeting. So meanwhile, if You help that same Religious with Your power and influence where needed, We shall understand that the proofs of Our goodwill and well-disposed desires have found Your Highness right well pleased. Now being Yourself a lover of virtue You will have, firstly, why You greatly and with reason like him which, had it not been outstanding and remarkable in him, he would never with so great contempt of them have entrusted himself to so many dangers and also to an almost never absent risk of death. With very great earnestness We pray for Your Highness from God all successes and that at long last His light may beam on You.

“Given at Rome at S. Peter’s under the Fisherman’s ring, the 18th February 1656, in the first year of Our Pontificate” (*vide Arch. Vat. Epist. ad Princ.*, vol. 60, p. 325, formerly 305).

With that brief picture of the external influences affecting conditions in Persia<sup>1</sup> during the reign of ‘Abbas II, such as they can be gleaned from the letters left by the Carmelites, it is convenient to pass to one particular feature of internal policy, which appears to have been quite wrongly interpreted by some European writers on the period, e.g. the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, tenth and later editions:

“‘Abbas II was tolerant to all religions, always regarding Christians with especial favour. . . .”

As already quoted, a letter of 2.3.1646<sup>2</sup> mentioned:

“. . . Things here are not going well at present for the poor Armenian and Syrian Christians, because a new Grand Wazir has been made . . . he is a bigoted Muhammadan and antagonistic to Christianity. . . .”

In 1652 the Shah ‘had sent to have old Julfa ruined once more’ (i.e. the town on the Araxes, the former centre from which had been expelled in 1602–4 many of the Armenians settled in the new Julfa):

‘and the brother of the most important Armenian of (new) Julfa had become a Muhammadan.’<sup>3</sup>

Writing, 12.5.1657, the same Religious makes circumstantial statements regarding the tyrannous rule of Shah ‘Abbas II:

“I cannot say all, but shall only tell you that the king of Persia has thrown off the mask, and let the venom he has in his heart be seen. He has ordered that *all the Jews in his realm should become Muslims*, to the number of 100,000. He has ordered that the Sabaeans” (i.e. Mandaean) “also should embrace the religion of Muhammad: and so all those at

<sup>1</sup> The political situation at Basra, as it touched the Carmelites, is treated at length in the section of this work dealing with the Residence at Basra, and the reader should refer to it at this point, for the situation there was full of movement at this stage.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Dionysius, O.C.D. 237 c.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Barnabas, 12.10.1652, O.C.D. 241 f.