

“city of Isfahan all Christians living there, and assigned them a place outside the city. “So your Lordship will see how far this agrees with what some persons from another Order “have spread abroad in Christendom—i.e. that this king and the greater part of his notables “could be converted. Neither do we read in history, nor in the East itself, where there “are so many apostolic missionaries from divers Orders, do we see that there have ever “been great conversions of Muhammadans. . . .”

Moreover, that iniquitous decree, or law promulgated at the end of the reign of 'Abbas I —to which the loss of countless thousands of Christians in Persia has been attributed—whereby any Christian embracing Islam was allowed to claim all the property and goods of his dead relations back to the fourth generation, to the exclusion of the other relatives and kin, was renewed in this reign: and a fanatical Wazir had much to do with this persecution, so Fr. Francis of the Passion wrote from Shiraz, 20.8.1660:¹

“Everything is done by one of his” (Abbas II's) “ministers, called 'Itimad-ud-Dauleh, “who is very hostile to Catholics and Christians, whom he has expelled from Isfahan. “Armenians in Julfa and the Hebrews he has forced to become Muslims, and many of the “Armenians at the present day are becoming Muslims, especially the sons, in order to “inherit their fathers' property; because they have made an accursed law, by which all “Christians who become Muslims inherit everything. . . .”

How strongly Pope Alexander VII (Chigi) protested against this measure and took up the cudgels on behalf of Christians in general, schismatics as well as Catholics, will be read in his Brief of 21.9.1658 (see appendix for Latin text: Arch. Vat. *Epist. ad Princ.* vol. 63, p. 157, No. 114):

“Illustrious and most puissant king, greeting and the light of Divine grace.

“Just as with more kindly affection We feel esteem for the fine gifts of Your royal mind “and particularly your zeal for uncorrupt justice and Your singular benevolence towards “Our subjects, so too have We assuredly the more sorrowfully heard how in some parts “of Your very flourishing dominions a certain custom has unknown to You crept in of “handing over to apostates from Our religion the estates of their kinsfolk, and of excluding “other nearly related Christians to their own great loss and misfortune. Now of course “this is contrary not only to upright equity and the common law of almost all nations and “races, but can also be even a great bar to the peace and weal of civil rule, since it has “been found by long use that men of this kind, who are led to change their religion by “avarice and money bribes do not even at heart cleave to that which they adopt; but “rather they disregard and despise both out of love of lucre, and indeed spurn God Himself “and His worship and heed for Him altogether, and cease to revere princes, and are ever “ready for all kinds of wicked emprises and dastard crimes.

“Since therefore popular agreement considers it certain that on first learning of such “new-fangled ways Your Highness would have gone counter to them from the beginning, “and will not let them remain longer in any way, We earnestly beg of You to grant Us, “as to a person now urgently praying and beseeching You, that boon which You yourself “once had even of Your own motion been about to vouchsafe. And We hope for it as a “certainty in view of the proved worth and reputation of Your outstanding justice and “clemency. But furthermore both Ourselves and also all Christians will freely give all “thanks and praises to Your kingly fairness and generosity, and will not cease to intercede “with Almighty God for the safety, peace and glory of Yourself and of Your vast realms. “It is for the rest among the chiefest desires of Our heart that all prosperity and happiness

¹ S.R., vol. 238, p. 62. This reign appears to have seen a revival of enthusiasm for the Shiah tenets and scrupulousness in practising them. Fr. Anselm of the Annunciation wrote from Basra, 5.4.1660, that “in the month of “February of that year (1659) there returned from Mecca the caravan from Persia, consisting of more than 6,000 persons “with more than 4,000 camels. . . .”