

“insatiable avarice, the seeking of profit at every opportunity. Corn stored in the royal granaries is sold at such a price that his toil will not be sufficient for the food of the poor man. When all are groaning at the unhappy fate of the country the king like a Sardanapalus continues to glory in his splendour and thinks himself greater than Solomon.

“ . . . As all were apprehensive of a great barrenness of the soil from a protracted drought, a general dearness of corn being already experienced, everyone began to pour out prayers to God, each in the fashion of his own religion to implore the gift and succour of rain. But certain zealots of the Muhammadan faith anxious, as they had been unable to obtain anything from God by the rites and prayers enjoined on their own sect, lest possibly some more fortunate result should happen to be attributed to the votive offerings of another religion, complained to the king that the Jews and the Armenians by the unbounded licence of their tenets had contrived the harm of the Muhammadan faith, and brought to naught the national religious rites with alien sacrileges.

“So the Shah, not in possession of his wits, admitting as a serious crime what he had heard exaggerated by the pretended sincerity of the false accusers, orders on the 10th day of the month of May” (1678) “those of the Jews, whose flight could be forestalled, to be seized and, with a hasty sentence of his furious temper, that the abdomens of their principal men should be ripped open—which was at once put into execution. The bellies of the Rabbi or priest of the Hebrews and of two of their chief men having been slit open, they perished: and their corpses, thrown out into the great royal square, called the Maidan, lay for a week unburied, while for a burial permit a tax of four Tumans was being levied for each. Then for the rest of them” (the Jews) “fetters and chains were waived on payment of a fine of 600 Tumans (one Tuman is 15 scudi, or piastres).

“But the Armenians, who were involved in the same accusation and were in peril of being generally slaughtered, having a certain grandee to protect them with the king, obtained pardon by paying some hundreds of Tumans as the price of their remaining unharmed.

“As a cloak for the deed the tale was bruited abroad that sorceries had been devised for the destruction of the king and the kingdom, to wit on the road leading to Shiraz the skull of a living ass, which going up and down the road, with flames pouring out of it from light lit inside, was carrying about a dry gourd scooped out, in which there was a small cat: and this, when it died, the king’s death and other similar disasters would follow. . . .”

A new Vicar Provincial of the Carmelites, Fr. John Baptist of S. Joseph, from Bandar ‘Abbas a year or so later, 15.2.1680,¹ enquired of the Sac. Congregation in Rome whether a practice he had found was permissible or not—a practice which sheds more light on the persecution and villainies done:

“In Persia the Catholic Christians make a practice of marrying off their boys and daughters at the age of 7 or 8 or 9 years: and the reason they give for this is because, if they are not married, often the Shah takes them for his own saraglio, which he does not do when they are already married. Thus the espousals take place very often when the children are barely born, because, the Catholics being insufficient (in numbers) to provide all the matches, they are obliged to marry them to schismatic Armenians. . . .”

“The whole country is peaceful: the king lets some of his officials govern, who are very bad to the Christians,”

was a remark in a letter of 25.9.1681² from Isfahan by Fr. Fortunatus of Jesus Mary, who expanded it some two years later,³ as follows:

“The kingdom of Persia is at peace: and there is no appearance of the king making war

¹ *S.N.R.*, I, p. 471.

² *O.C.D.* 237 k.

³ Letter of 20.2.1683, *O.C.D.* 237 k.