

“sum to a miserable Armenian renegade, and became Muhammadans, thinking to free themselves from this vexation. . . .”

In 1697 a second Augustinian Hermit had distressed and shamed the whole European community by becoming a Muslim, marrying and settling in Isfahan: so the letter quoted above continued:

“The miserable Antonio the Portuguese, formerly Prior of the Augustinians in Isfahan, who became a renegade three years ago, is plotting to ruin us, and it was he who advised the enemies of the Sharimans and he will do us enormous damage. He is a rascal to a superlative degree. . . .”

Markar Shariman not long afterwards migrated to Venice himself, and seems to have remained there for the rest of his life, perhaps in order to escape from practice of the religion forced on him, and to live as a Christian: Michael's sons were established at Leghorn.

Another letter, five months later,¹ from the then Vicar General of the diocese emphasizes the seriousness of the situation for the Catholic children owing to the accursed law or edict:

“There is nothing to be hoped of the two Sharimans, who in the month of December last became Muhammadans . . . in this evil and wicked country the son of Khwajeh Markar must become a Muhammadan, when his father dies, so that he may get his father's money, and the same will be the case with Khwajeh Michael. These boys were well educated by Bishop Elias and I have already admonished them many times; but they have now to say whether they prefer to die with or without that money. I do not want to see the fathers die, lest I should see the sons remain without divine life. . . .”

Similarly and simultaneously, the special province of the Dominicans, Nakhchiwan, was suffering from oppression by Persian Shiah officials, and an appeal to the Pope in the Armenian language by the Dominican clerics and people of the diocese, according to the translation in Italian along with it,² runs:

“. . . For the Catholic Faith in these regions of Nakhchiwan is steadily going under and the light of the Faith, which formerly shone through the darkness of unbelief, is about to be extinguished. These people, in order to destroy us utterly, despoil us of our goods and take from us by force our wives, our sons and our daughters and, converting them by force to their wicked religion, give them the power, according to the licence bestowed by their law, to seize the goods and possessions of their Christian relatives. Therefore it is that many unfortunate persons, having apostate relatives, in order not to lose the little property they possess, of their own accord become renegades from the Faith. Others having quitted their motherland have gone off, as if they were so many exiled persons, into Turkey, dwelling there, some ten, some twenty, some more years still, without any hope of returning again to their homes, where their wives and children, finding themselves abandoned by all human help and chiefly deceived by those perfidious tyrants, become Muslims. Others, in despair and disconsolate, bewail constantly their own misery. Besides this, the officials of the Persian king, who exact the royal tribute, in various ways torment us, subjecting us to unjust penalties. We pay twice and thrice the tribute due, and so many, being unable to pay, leave their homeland. Others become renegades from the Faith, and yet others go off to live among the Armenians and follow their rites.

“To get free we have no other remedy, Holy Father, than to hope for a visitation from our Lord, and from your Holiness that, moved by a more than paternal kindness towards these wretched children of yours, you will visit us by the person of an envoy to the king of Persia . . . because, although many times together with our bishop we have appealed

¹ Fr. Antonio d'Desterro, Prior of the Augustinians, 5.7.1700, *S.N.R.*, II, p. 372.

² *S.R.*, vol. 538, p. 320.