

the Armenians present, showing on their faces how disturbed they were, returned home in much perturbation. After their departure the Bishop of Cyrene proceeded to ask for a house to be near *his* Armenians, a request no sooner uttered than granted: and for a quantity of wine, which was sent to him that night. Mgr de Gouvea went off with the Carmelites, full of satisfaction at the courtesy shown him; but the Carmelite Superior (then Fr. Redempt), knowing something of the nature of the despot—how proud, suspicious and annoyed—remarked:

“Your lordship is consoled by this; but I feel, as it were, a knife in my heart. Tomorrow morning you will see the effects of the favours of this evening.”

The apprehension was correctly founded: 'Abbas I took the course of intimidating the Armenians against any dalliance with the movement for closer relations with Rome, which some of their chief ecclesiastics particularly desired. The next day a royal decree was promulgated prohibiting any Armenians, under pain of grave penalties, from visiting the houses of the European Religious, while at the same time ordering them to satisfy and pay up a debt contracted with the Shah's exchequer five years previously. For after he had transplanted the bulk of the Armenians from Greater Armenia (i.e. after 1604), in order that they should not die of starvation 'Abbas I had lent and advanced them at their request 4,000 Tumans to be repaid within three years: a condition attached was that, if the capital were not repaid by then, for every three Tumans they were to give and surrender to him one Armenian boy, for every two Tumans a girl. According to the position of the families participating in this advance the sum had been made over to them partly in silk, partly in coin: and their dire straits blinded them to the barbarous penalty hanging over them in case of delay in repayment, the certainty of exposing their sons to loss of their Christianity and their girls to shame as well. As time went on the Armenians had taken the Shah's silence as a sign that he had forgiven and waived the debt.

This decree threw the Armenians into indescribable consternation: many of the families were without their heads who had at the time gone off trading elsewhere: others had saved no money. They appealed to the Bishop of Cyrene and the Carmelites, explaining that apostasy would be their only remedy, unless the European Religious came to their help. Mgr de Gouvea contributed 1,000 ducats, the Carmelites 400 gold reals: with the money got together by the principal Armenians several thousand Tumans were collected and taken to the Wazir. But that part of the money subscribed by the missionaries was sent back with the sarcastic comment that the Shah was astonished that once more Mgr de Gouvea should have made so bold as to meddle in the sovereign's dealings with his own vassals. Notwithstanding exhortations by the Carmelite and Augustinian Fathers to the Armenians to keep their faith, 300 households apostatized, the apostates being released from their debts and given money besides: later they repented and went to the European Religious, who hesitated to reconcile them, fearing a second lapse. As to those Armenians who did not declare their readiness to conform to Islam, the Shah's myrmidons, not satisfied with money offered, tore away their children, “as if it had been during the persecution of Herod”, remarked the chronicler. A conference of the Religious and principal Armenians was held to consider how they could deal with the situation without causing the Shah still more annoyance, while doing their utmost at the time, or later, for those Armenians likely to apostatize, or who had apostatized.

The Carmelite superior, Fr. Redempt, ransomed through the priest Bagdasar twelve young people belonging to Uniat families for 150 scudi, but had not the funds to intervene on behalf of the schismatics.¹

¹ There exists a slightly varied account of the outcome and issue of the persecution in O.C.D. 236 b, a 'Report' “by Khwajeh Virdi, an Armenian of Julfa regarding the persecution perpetrated by the king of Persia on the Armenians in the year 1613, in the month of October.

“In the year 1613, and month of October, when the Shah made Muslims of the Christians who were owing him a certain sum of money which he had lent them, he gave orders that all the Armenians in the city of Isfahan must on the day following make profession of the creed of Muhammad, and even those who did not owe money, nor had received