

“Khvajeh Virdi sent answer to Hurijan that, if he fled, his children and the village people, whom God had committed to his charge, would fall into the hands of the Muslims and become renegades from our holy Faith, and put it to him ‘what reply would he have to make in the presence of Christ’. He further sent and told him that, to remedy this state of affairs, it was requisite that in each place they should leave 5 or 6 persons as a guard, while Hurijan with the heads of the other places and all the people, men, women, big and small, should come in to Isfahan, and present themselves at the king’s gate, and say to him: ‘O king! to send and tell us to abandon our religion is tyranny and violence. . . . If the king wishes to kill us, we are ready to die for the Faith of Christ. This is my opinion,’ said Khvajeh Virdi to Hurijan, ‘and that you should remain strong in the faith of Christ and fear not to die for it. . . .’

“Copies of this letter, taken in triplicate, were carried round the three villages called Iskandarieh, Parwari and Parhiz, and these three copies were read in all the places and hamlets, from each of which there set out two, three or four persons, totalling in all 150, among those being one vartapet, two priests and the rest laymen. Then when these 150 persons arrived Khvajeh Virdi reproached them, telling them that they had not been steadfast in the Faith and all come, as he had written them, to the gate of the king’s palace. For answer they said . . . 94 of us have made profession of that accursed religion, and are sorry for it and wish to die. Fifty did not make the profession (of the Muhammadan religion), because they fled away from the hamlets: and they are come with us: and we are all here, ready to do what you bid us.

“Khvajeh Virdi told them: ‘What I counsel you is to go, the 150, just as you are, every day to the gate of the king’s palace, until you get speech with him and are able to tell him that you will not abandon your faith, but wish to die for Christ and his religion—the Shah may do what he will with your heads, and you are ready for him to cut them off your shoulders.’

“They continued for 20 days to go to the gate of the king’s palace; but, although the Shah knew of it, he would not give them audience and pretended not to know about it. “When they saw this they drew up a petition and gave three copies to the officials at the gate, so that it might reach the king. The substance of the memorial was this, that they begged the Shah not to use force with them, asserting that they were his vassals, rendered him service, paid their tribute: they said that their possessions and lives were at his service . . . but that their Faith belonged to Christ, God: that he was doing them injustice in seeking to deprive them of their religion: what they had already done” (i.e. those who had apostatized) “had been under *force majeure* and against their will, which was now—they declared—to abide in the Faith of Christ and die for it. The king might do whatever he pleased, but not take on himself this sin—he should allow them to live as Christians and order that their sacred books be restored to them, when they would ever pray for his safety. Many of their race, because of the fame of the justice and good treatment which his Highness used towards Christians, from the lands of the Turks fled thence to his Highness’ protection. Now, if he treat them ill, they would once more flee wherever they might obtain better treatment.

“They waited another 20 days, and no reply reached them. Seeing that, the 150 persons went to interview the great officials and favourites of the Shah, saying to them that for 40 days past they had wanted to have audience of the king and had been unable to do so: so they warned them that all the people in their villages were fleeing away, and the king should be informed: complaint should not be made later, since they were fulfilling their obligations and would answer that they had given notice.

“After another five days the officials verbally replied that they (the Armenians) might depart in peace: what the Shah had done had been in anger: that it was nothing, and they could remain as they had been previously, and no one would molest them.

“At this juncture the Shah fell ill. Twelve of the 150 persons went to ask the advice of Khvajeh Virdi. He told them that the unmarried and those without children had