

“If my letters have reached your Eminence’s hands you will have already known all that passed during my stay in Armenia and my journey to Tabriz, where I found Mgr Isaac, the Armenian archbishop of S. Thaddeus, to whom, after a profession of his Catholic Faith and many signs of his sincere affection towards the Catholic Church, I handed over the Brief from the Pope, as had been enjoined on me. From Tabriz, after travelling forty-odd days on the road we reached the city, almost all ill by reason of the fatigues and the excessive heat experienced on the way. Monsieur John Baptist Casmont, the only missionary remaining of the five who had crossed the sea, after twelve days’ illness ended his mission in a holy manner. The first (of the five) who died in Aleppo caused me some grief; but this one, from being such an accomplished missionary and already advanced in his knowledge of languages, prudent and fervent to a marked degree, has left a wound in my heart which will always remain.

“After three months’ residence in this city” (Isfahan) “I had audience of the king, or Shah as they are wont to call him.

“I was received by him with all benignity and respect, and with some preference over all the other ambassadors. He was so gracious as to make me approach his person. He listened patiently to my discourse (which was explained afterwards by my interpreter), replied with kindly words, put to me various questions about my journey, about affairs in Europe and in particular about France, about his most Christian Majesty and his undertakings. It pleased him to hear about the bombardment of the island of Chios, and about the expedition against Algiers, which was being got ready. The audience ended with a very magnificent banquet served on dishes of gold of such sizes that for some two men were needed to carry them. But what was abundant in dishes was lacking in the matter of knives, spoons and forks, which were not to be seen: it behoved us to follow the example of the king¹ and eat the pottage of rice with our fingers and without other instrument, the other victuals similarly. The banquet lasted but a short time—such being the custom to make quick dispatch. I took leave of the Shah and retired together with the other ambassadors—of Poland, the Tatars, and the Arabs, and among others from the king of Siam, who presented a large number of most beautiful presents. It has been no small marvel to them that I, without gifts (for they have not yet arrived), have had so outstanding an audience. For the king did not talk, or have any conversation with any other whatsoever. But they (the Persian officials) are expecting the presents, the delay in arrival of which gives me very great trouble, causes me very heavy expense and keeps my hands tied without my being able to discuss any business at all, neither with the Shah nor with his officials,² as many as to whom these are to be offered: if it should be necessary to wait still another year, it would be ruination for me and shame me in the eyes of this Court. . . .”

Bishop François Picquet ended by making requests:

“I have to beg the Sac. Congregation to be pleased to provide me with a coadjutor and successor as speedily as possible. I am old, feeble and sick: my life will not last long, and this diocese needs to be maintained and aided assiduously. . . .”

As a matter of fact, already in 1680 a minute in the records of the Sac. Congregation raised the expediency of providing him with a coadjutor:³ and he himself had evident views of his own as to the individual suitable for the office, seeing that when at Diarbakr on his journey to Persia he had addressed in June 1681⁴ a letter to:

¹ Nobles and great tribal chieftains, leading merchants still after the Great War, 1914–8, gave their banquets or had European guests to meals in this fashion, sitting on the floor, fingers of the right hand only used in lieu of knife and fork.

² This was another point of diplomatic etiquette in those times: an envoy must have given his presents before coming to discuss the object of his mission.

³ *S.R.*, vol. 477, pp. 337–8.

⁴ *S.N.R.*, I, p. 385.