

“dying of starvation: that was known from the frontiers, but from the capital no letters were coming. . . . Letters from Erzerum report that the best articles were being removed from Tabriz elsewhere, because the Afghan troops were drawing nearer and committing unheard-of cruelties. . . . Even the Georgians have put themselves on the defensive. . . .”

From Isfahan itself all that is to be learnt in the archives of Propaganda Fide may be judged from the following statement recorded in the transactions of the session of the Sacra Congregation, 2.7.1726¹ (i.e. more than four years after the Afghans had reached Isfahan)—present: Cardinals Sacripante the Prefect, Barberini, Spinola, de Polignac, Alberoni and others:

“Mgr the Patriarchal Vicar at Constantinople has forwarded to the Sacra Congregation two letters from Mgr Barnabas Fedeli, Bishop of Isfahan in Persia, from whom since the commencement of the wars which still continue in those regions no news had ever been received. The first of the letters in question is ancient, being dated 10.10.1722, and in it he refers to the very severe straits in which he was placed by reason of the famine then reigning in the country: and he asks for the reimbursement of the expenses incurred by him in presenting the Briefs of the Sovereign Pontiff and the letters of various Christian princes to the late deceased Sufi in order to obtain, as he did in fact obtain, reparation and compensation for the losses inflicted by the heretic patriarch on the Capuchin missions in Tiflis. The second letter is recent—written from Julfa, the 1st [*sic* 14th] October 1725 and is extremely short: and in it he begs to be paid on account of his annual allowances such sum as would be notified by Mgr the Patriarchal Vicar at Constantinople, to whom he had written to obtain it there for him either as a loan, or on interest, and to remit it to him, so that he might get some relief in the extreme misery in which he is placed.

“The said Patriarchal Vicar at Constantinople was, however, unable to find any means of relieving him, because of the difficulties in making remittances, for, though he indeed tried to arrange for a certain Emmanuel Shariman, secretary of the embassy sent to the Porte by Shah Ashraf, the present sovereign in Persia, to consent to take charge of it, the latter did not want to bind himself to carry money to those parts for the reason that, as trade between the two empires had once more been prohibited and the Porte had declared war on Ashraf, he could not be sure of not being arrested and plundered on the journey in company with the ambassador in question. The poor prelate still remains deprived of his allowances, which have accumulated for many years, the balance to his credit in account totalling, as he indicates, about 780 scudi: and there can be no other means of getting some money conveyed for his assistance, so the Patriarchal Vicar suggests, except that of Persian merchants residing in Smyrna, who, he says, are trustworthy and good Catholics.”

The ‘extremely short’ letter of the 14th October² mentioned indeed merely has this note of general interest:

“Although I have written *some letters* to your Eminences since the arrival of the Afghans in this royal city, none the less I am certain that few will have reached Rome.”

With that doubtless had travelled another letter, which he had previously, on 18.8.1725, written to his brother, Conte Joseph Fedeli:

“The road to Constantinople being now opened. . . . In the very great want which we suffered in the city three years ago, when the price of corn had risen to as much as 3 Tumans (i.e. 60 scudi of Milanese money) for the measure that equals 12 Romani: the price of rice to 4 Tumans, i.e. 80 scudi: at that time it was a luxury to eat not only horses, mules and asses, but even dogs and cats: then in the public square human flesh

¹ *Acta* of 1726.

² *S.R.*, vol. 653.