

“the trials of our Fathers at Shiraz who, besides having been maltreated, beaten and the Fr. Vicar put in prison and released only on payment of money, have been robbed of “much, down to their clothing and tunics. . . .”

In various letters to Rome during the later part of the Afghan rule in Isfahan the good bishop appeared more preoccupied about discipline than relief of the distress: that of 8.4.1725¹ is all about the interdict he had placed on the ‘chapel’ of the French consul, because the latter during eight years had failed to produce the ‘privileges’ for it he had repeatedly alleged to hold. He prohibited, 15.4.1725, all priests from saying Mass in houses of secular persons or in the open without his special licence, under pain of suspension—a decree against which, 19.4.1725,² a vigorous protest was signed by the Carmelite vicar of Julfa, as being contrary to the Bull of Paul V and privileges granted Carmelites in Persia, and by all other superiors of the Orders in Isfahan. Bishop Fedeli explained in a letter to Rome, 2.5.1726³ (when he admitted his failure to correspond with the Sac. Congregation):

“. . . After four long years of profound silence . . . I shall begin to loosen my tongue. “. . . Among the other abuses which began to appear was that of Holy Mass being “celebrated by some missionary Fathers in houses of private people, without consulting “the bishop and without need . . .” (he cited one Carmelite Father) ‘who had come from ‘Bandar ‘Abbas with the English Agent and, because the latter was bringing with him five ‘or six French soldiers, Catholics, whom he had as “slaves” (i.e. prisoners of war), and ‘would not allow them to go outside the house, the Father who was constantly in the house ‘of these English took it on himself to celebrate daily there. . . .’ “Shortly after the “Afghans arrived and, as long as the siege lasted, other missionaries took a like liberty. . . . “When the siege had ended and the city surrendered, after the Fathers had each returned “to his House . . . the abuse seemed to me too great, particularly because there are 8 “Catholic churches open, four in Isfahan, four in Julfa. . . .”

But the Dominican bishop brings to notice also a recrudescence of Armenian malice against the Catholic Uniats. Gifted as a race with a great capacity for adaptation to circumstances—political opportunism—the Armenians rapidly contrived to gain a footing with the Afghans: as the ‘merchant princes’ of the capital, with credit and relations and knowledge of affairs and business, and with information outside as well as across Persia, their leading men doubtless made themselves useful, apart from providing funds.

Indeed Fr. du Cerceau’s book at the end of its recension of the memoirs of Fr. Krusinski⁴ refers to a strange

“edict published in Isfahan and all over the kingdom since the Afghans conquered it, by “which the nationalities are placed in the following degrees. The first rank is assigned to “the Afghans:⁵ *the second to the Armenians*: the third to the Daghistanis, being Sunnis like “the Afghans, brought to the number of above 100,000 by Mir Mahmud to dwell at “Isfahan: the fourth rank to the Gabrs (Zardushtis): the sixth to the Jews: the seventh to “the Persians who are treated like slaves by the other six nations . . . it is ordered by an “edict published at Julfa that all suits arising among the Armenians shall be determined “by judges of their own nation, any Armenian appealing to any other magistrate will be “fined. . . .”

¹ *S.N.R.*, III, p. 540.

² *O.C.D.* 238 u.

³ *S.N.R.*, III, p. 537.

⁴ Vol. II, p. 198.

Fr. du Cerceau’s *History of the late Revolution in Persia* (1740, London) makes the curious assertion (vol. I, p. 137):

“The Afghans (Aghwans) who were originally of the province of Shirwan, which was anciently called Great Albania, “situated between the Caspian Sea and Mount Caucasus, were formerly subdued by Timur the Lame . . . in order to “keep them under the stricter subjection he placed them between Persia and the Indies. ’Tis said they were anciently “Christians, of the Armenian sect, but that they turned Muhammadans for want of the assistance and instructions of “their priests. . . .”