

sites, they would have found themselves in the quiet and ordered government of the nineteenth century under the Qajar Shahs, Fath 'Ali and Muhammad, and been able to build up rapidly the Catholic position on its traditional sites and with all the advantages of continuity and, for a variety of reasons, the schismatic Vartapets far less in a position to molest. Then, as far as human eye can judge, the twentieth century would have seen the Catholic Church vastly more influential both with the people and with the government than it is today in Persia.

For reasons unexplained the Vicar General, Fr. de Bernardis, quitted Julfa and on 31.5.1774¹ arrived in Basra, where he remained, teaching Armenian to Carmelite Religious until 20.7.1775, when

“he passed to the better life, a missionary above all criticism, living for God and his
“neighbours. . . .”²

The Armenian priest, Fr. John son of Aratun, who was appointed to succeed him as Administrator of the diocese of Isfahan by decree of the Sac. Congregation, 8.6.1776, in three letters, two of them dated 20.4.1777, the other 18.9.1777, furnished the Sac. Congregation with information regarding the diocese. Not the originals but the combined gist of them as given by Cardinal Pamphilj in his report in the session of 7.9.1778³ will here be translated:

“Beginning with the episcopal centre, Isfahan, he states there are three churches and as many Convents, which at present are inhabited by Muslims, the first that of the Discalced Carmelites, the second that of the Augustinians, the third that of the Capuchins: these, he asserts, could be redeemed with little difficulty from the Muslims; but, since there is no one to go and live in them, because there are no Catholics domiciled there, in the present circumstances these convents could not be put to any use: when at times Catholic merchants turn up, at small inconvenience to themselves they go to Julfa, which is only half-an-hour's distance by road from Isfahan.

“Then, in Julfa there are four churches and three convents—that where the Administrator has established his quarters is dedicated to the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, and is called the ‘Shariman’ church.⁴ Almost all the others threaten to collapse in ruins, as there has been nobody in charge of them in the past. The best preserved is that which formerly belonged to the suppressed Company of Jesus, although at present it lacks furnishings and the ornaments needed in church and house, and it is situated among the Muslims, far away from the township. This church, together with the residence and vineyard, had fallen into the hands of the heretics by reason that the deceased Vicar, Fr. de Bernardis, entrusted it to a perfidious Christian who mortgaged it to the heretics. Seven months ago the present administrator redeemed it by expending 60 scudi. For four years, too, he has had charge of the hospice and church of the Dominican Fathers⁵ which is in the middle of the township and provided with everything necessary to a poor priest. The one most in ruins, he says, is that of the Discalced Carmelites which is furnished with nothing but a few books and pictures; and, besides, the site is in the midst of Muslims and all of them evil people, robbers and bloodthirsty. In order to repair those last two churches and pay the tribute on them, the Administrator says that he has spent about another 30 scudi—all of it . . . from his own stipend. . . .”

The Administrator went on to report that at Shiraz, the seat of Karim Khan, there were no Catholics permanently resident except two butchers living a very bad life and two or three soldiers, who had practically become Muslims, at rare intervals some Catholic traders passed

¹ and ² *Cont. Basra Chron.*

³ *Acta* for 1778, p. 309.

⁴ The Superior of the Lazarist (Vincentian) Fathers at Isfahan stated, 4.11.1937:

“About 200 metres away from the property” (i.e. the site of their church and Residence at Julfa) “of the Carmelites there is indeed a small church called ‘of the Annunciation’, for long past not used for worship, in the vicinity of a ‘hammam’ which still bears the name of the Shariman family.”

⁵ Which were being used by the Priests of the Mission (the Lazarist Fathers) from their coming to Julfa till 1934.