

For some time the numbers of the Carmelites had been growing at Isfahan: six, apart from the Vicar Provincial, signed a document in June 1689: and with new arrivals in 1693 there were four Fathers and a lay brother at the convent in the city, five Fathers in the new hospice at Julfa. Never before (since the early Church at last) or since can there have been so many Catholic priests in Isfahan, or in one place in Persia: so that Bishop Pidou, in his letter of 29.6.1694,¹ announcing his approaching departure to Hamadan remarked:

“If the bishop-elect (of Isfahan) bewails that I am abandoning him in the warfare and fierce persecution by the Osniesensi or schismatic Armenians, who are now more than ever infuriated against the missionaries and all Catholics, whom they want to chase away from Julfa, I reply that the 25 or more missionaries now here ought to suffice him without me or mine. . . . In the present emergency I have several times called into counsel all the missionaries: and it was almost decided to petition the Christian princes to help us and to put a check on the insolence of these daring men by placing an arrest and embargo on their goods at sea and on land . . . although I have always been opposed to such violent remedies. . . .”

On the part of the schismatics some idea of the temperament and turbulent methods of the Vartapet Stephen may be gauged from the following reference in a letter of 23.2.1694² to the Sac. Congregation:

“. . . the new Armenian patriarch, Nahapiet, is very troubled by the revolt raised against him by Stephen, the rabid schismatic bishop in Julfa, who tried by intrigues and money to have him (Nahapiet) deposed by the king of Persia, although he has already been confirmed by the latter. . . .”

There are several documents and accounts dealing with developments in the situation at Julfa from March 1694 onwards—a lengthy letter in Latin addressed to Pope Innocent XII himself by Fr. Elias of S. Albert on 7.8.1694:³ another, with different details, written by him on 10.8.1694 to the Cardinals of the Sac. Congregation de Propaganda Fide:⁴ Lay Brother Francis of S. Sirus' interesting recital in his *Vita P. F. Elia a S. Alberto*,⁵ whose companion he was for several years: and Fr. Elias' long narrative about the persecution of the missionaries, written in July 1694⁶ and enclosed in his letter of 10.8.1694 cited above. This last will be used as the basis for the following version of events, with details of interest, where omitted, collated or added from the other documents specified:

“. . . In Julfa the Catholic Faith had become considerably spread, as I have informed your Reverences in my letters during the past 15 years: in this present letter, to my great grief, I have to report to you its serious ruination.

“We already had a house there and, wishing to enlarge it, about the end of March last past I bought another contiguous, paying for it 525 piastres and, the owner having given possession of it to me, I opened up in the wall of a room in our first house a door, so as to be able to get into it (the new premises). The title-deeds of this new purchase were not handed over to me, however, by the seller, as he delayed doing so until promises that he had made to give another adjoining had been carried out. After six weeks' peaceful possession the schismatic bishop of Julfa, named Stephen, having got to know that I wanted to utilize the ground of another house in order to build a church, determined to make every effort to prevent it. Gathering his ecclesiastics, therefore, with some leading merchants and the Kalantar, i.e. the burgomaster, he stirred up the people against us. Proceeding in a crowd to the square a short distance from that house recently purchased they planned to assault it and set it on fire, if they were unable to break down

¹ S.N.R., II, p. 104.

⁴ *Idem*, p. 110.

² *Idem*, p. 95.

⁵ O.C.D. 320 e.

³ *Idem*, II.

⁶ S.N.R., II, p. 293.