

“to Gregorian chant and preaching every Sunday and feast-day. When the sermon is over the Catholics, on leaving the Church, are in the habit of giving some small alms for distribution to the poor, who gather in large numbers. They remain round the church till the end of the Office. When all is over, one or two of our scholars get them together and make them sit in a circle: the hour-glass is turned, and they begin to teach them the catechism for one hour: after that the alms are distributed among them. On the other days of the week there is school—usually 60–80 Catholics and heretics: some have to be taught to read and write Armenian, others rhetoric and others philosophy and the older ones too the moral theology of the Blessed Albert, geometry, etc. In this all the day is spent; but for want of sufficient Religious not so much profit is derived from it as there should be and would be: for now there are never more than two Religious and it is impossible for two to attend to everything. In this House it would require at least ten or twelve missionaries . . . ; but in regard to this our Superiors . . . say they have nothing with which to maintain and support them . . . so we need to find a half-way house to obtain funds . . . and for this the best plan, it appears to me, would be to do away with the Seminary at San Pancrazio . . . and the money which goes to that Seminary could be sent to Persia to increase the number of missionaries. . . .”

(The “Narrative” adds, ingenuously and with some humour: “. . . or else a general collection might be made among all the Cardinals and prelates, and a fund established with it. . . .”)

To the Cardinal Prefect on 20.4.1702 Fr. Peter of Alcantara¹ wrote frankly with regard to Julfa:

“For the present we have to be content with keeping up the little Catholic community there is among the Armenians and to sing the glories of the Crucified in the midst of enemies of the Cross. To say more than that would be mere pretence: because, if indeed Persians do not refuse to discuss religion, it is out of pure curiosity and display of intellect, not out of any desire to profit by it, or out of any pious liking they may have for the mysteries of our holy Faith. This lack of real affection extends likewise to foreign nations, especially the Franks and, if it appears that they pay respect to foreigners, it is, I believe, purely feigned and out of self-interest”;

and he ended by relating the treatment the Court had meted out to a Tatar envoy who wanted to return to his own country with the diverting remark:

“to whom they refused a passport on the pretext that, when he passed through here on his way to Europe, he declined to receive the customary royal (payment” or allowance) for expenses, which they put down to the great crime of *pride*. . . .”

Still, Fr. Faustin, Vicar Provincial in 1721, who made the Convent in Isfahan city his dwelling, when not at Hamadan, wrote² of

“this house, where Persian notables come almost daily, and also some of the royal race, taking pleasure in conversing with me and in this garden, which is very large. . . .”

In 1708 the French envoy Michel, of whom more will be said anon, obtained from Shah Sultan Husain

“a *raqam* which confirms that which had been given to the reverend Discalced Carmelite Fathers to have their House in Isfahan repaired at the expense of his Majesty and to have water in their garden without hindrance.”

¹ S.N.R., II, p. 427.

² O.C.D. 238 g, 26.5.1721.