

the 'fairy tales' his touchy neighbour Carmelite, the Bishop of Baghdad, had spread in Rome of the tranquillity in Persia, he continued:

"Let him demonstrate how many, and who are the Catholics who have up to today returned to Persia, and whence they departed, notwithstanding all the invitations and assurances of Karim Khan and the repeated pressure I myself had brought on them, offering to accompany them myself . . . can he mention to your Eminence a single one of the Catholic rite who emigrated as having returned to Julfa or Isfahan and remained there? Two years ago a Catholic Armenian, a silversmith by trade, attempted to go there in order to aid by his work his family, which had been left in Julfa, but very soon I saw him back in Basra, cursing the hour he had gone there. As to the schismatic Armenians, those who have returned to Julfa at the very utmost number a score of persons, all of them people who were living on alms in Basra and had nothing to lose by returning to Persia. The most noteworthy of them was an Armenian 'bishop' or Vartapet, to whom Karim Khan, in order to induce him to go there, granted the 'lordship' of Julfa, so that now the administration both spiritual and temporal of that place is in the hands of this Armenian Vartapet, a heretic working great harm to the Faith and liberty of the missionaries. But all this will be better understood from the true and faithful statement which I am about to lay before you regarding both spiritual and temporal affairs in this country. As to spiritual matters here is the list of Catholic souls now in Persia.

"In *Isfahan* there is not one single baptized soul, Catholic or Armenian.

"*Shiraz*, a heretical Armenian church,<sup>1</sup> with some Armenians and one priest, with no Catholic there.

"*Tabriz*, a heretical Armenian church, with some Armenians.

"*Hamadan*, a heretical Armenian church.

"*Rasht*, although there is no Catholic permanently there, Catholic Armenian traders often come there from Astrakhan for commerce.

"*Bandar 'Abbas*, there is one Latin Catholic family living there, consisting of 7 persons.

"*Bushire*, there are 35 souls.

"*Kharg*, there are 100 souls,<sup>2</sup> including the Catholic soldiers, but not counting the passengers who come to the last two places on board ships from India and other parts, at times there being as many as 200" (i.e. Catholic) "persons.

"*Julfa*, there have stayed behind 30 souls altogether, the majority women. In order the better to be assured of them you can see from the enclosed note sent me by Fr. J. B. de Bernardis, O.P., written in his own hand; but I should warn you that from the number in question there should be deducted all the girls, who, born of a Catholic father, have a schismatic mother, because not only along with their mothers do they frequent the heretical church, but further it is very probable that they will marry heretics for want of Catholic husbands, as already others have done. In the second place there should be deducted from that number those who, as the Dominican Father himself informs you, go sometimes to the Catholic church, at others to the schismatic church, some out of fear, others out of self-interest, others again for the sake of companionship, and some lastly out of indifference in matters of Faith, so that the Father in question thought perhaps he was giving me a great piece of good news, when writing that at Easter he had eight Communion made.

"That is the state and number to which the Catholic community in Persia is now reduced.

"As regards ecclesiastics, in the whole diocese there is no secular priest, nor any Catholic cleric: of the missionaries there remain only the Dominican in Julfa mentioned, and here with me at Bushire one Discalced Carmelite Father, whom from time to time I send to hold missions on the island of Kharg, which is only a few hours' distance from here "(Bushire).

<sup>1</sup> Not the existing schismatic Armenian building which dates from early in the 1800's (see English mural tablets), but possibly a smaller and previous edifice still standing, used as a store.

<sup>2</sup> Bushire and Kharg paradoxically in 1764 had the largest Catholic communities in the country.