

“As to the hope of new conversions, if it be a question of the Muhammadans, it is not “within the realms of possibility, or even to be imagined: if (it be thought) of those ancient “Persian fire-worshippers called ‘Gabr’, none are to be found in those parts, all having “been compelled to become Muhammadans fifty and more years ago in the reign of Shah “Sultan Husain. So there remains no hope except of the conversion of the heretical “Armenians. But this is a very difficult business to encompass in Julfa, because of the “influence and opposition of the bishops, monks and priests of the race . . . : it would “appear to me that in the present circumstances my staying and residing in Bushire and “Kharg, places near each other, would be more useful and necessary: firstly, because of “the larger number of Catholics there are here and who doubtless will increase: secondly, “because of the greater security that the protection and influence of the English and “Dutch established here afford us:¹ thirdly, because of the greater liberty and facility there “is here for working at the conversion of souls. . . .”

After the expulsion of the Dutch from Kharg the Bishop, 11.3.1766,² used these words about his staying in Bushire:

“God has willed to ease the pain it was to me not to be able to give satisfaction to the “Sac. Congregation in its pressure on me to go to Isfahan, as He has permitted me to “be here to show all the charity possible in spirituals and in kind to these poor Dutch, “who with their governor and officers have been left here half naked . . . nor has this “charitable assistance of ours remained fruitless for souls, because . . . I have disposed “already some to abjure error and baptized also some Hindu slaves of the Dutch. . . .”

That lengthy epilogue was minuted in the Secretariat of the Sac. Congregation:

“Let him go to Isfahan, when he can: he is permitted to remain as long as legitimate “obstacles last.”

Here, with reference to the anticipated opposition by the schismatic clergy, may best be interpolated such evidence as has been observed of continuance during the period covered by this chapter of the malice on the part of the dissident Armenians, which formed so serious a difficulty and problem under the later Safawi monarchs and Nadir. The first allusion to the attitude of the schismatics noticed in the present search, on the contrary, represents the other current of their relations with the Latins. While a refugee at Basra, Bishop Sebastian wrote, 1.5.1754, to Mgr Lercari, Secretary of the Congregation, that:

“The heretical ‘archbishop’ of Julfa, who is a rival of the present patriarch, is here too “in Basra with his priests and people, who have taken asylum here. One day he came to “see me and beg for a letter of recommendation for Rome and Venice where he wishes “to go for his greater spiritual welfare. From this I gather he wants to embrace and profess “our holy Catholic Faith. To this end I am seeing and cultivating him. If this spiritual “business should be successful, his people will all become Catholics, because they, having “smelt something of the business, unanimously said to me in these past days: ‘If our ““Vartapet”’ (i.e. the ‘archbishop’) ‘becomes a Catholic, we shall all become Catholics.’”

But the remnant of Catholics in Julfa were made to suffer even by the comparatively small number of lay schismatics left: for, 20.5.1757, the Dominican Fr. Raymond reported to the Vicar General at Basra:

“. . . You know of the persecution stirred up in Julfa by the Kalantar” (i.e. headman: town bailiff) “Sarkis: that is, for more than a month he has been taking either by force

¹ Within a year the eclipse of the Dutch in Kharg upset this argument, and a year or two later the temporary withdrawal from Bushire of the English followed, as related elsewhere.

² *S.N.R.*, VII, p. 358.