

“Ego, Petrus de Valle *Peregrinus*, testor hanc ultimam voluntatem esse scriptam manu “et caractere praedicti Domini Georgii Strachani: hominem ejus scripturamque optime “novi. Spahani, die 26 Sept. 1621. Petrus de Valle *Peregrinus*.”

(I, Pietro della Valle, the Pilgrim, testify that this last will is written in the handwriting of the said Mr. George Strachan; the man and his writing I have known very well—Isfahan, 6.g.1621.)

It would be interesting to trace the identity of this Scottish orientalist, and still more to know what became of his collection of oriental manuscripts. The family of Strachan took its name from the lands in the NW. of the *Mearns*, the old name for Kincardineshire (hence George calls himself ‘Merniensis’). Sir Alexander Strachan of Monboddo and Thornton, a commissioner of the exchequer, was created a baronet of Nova Scotia by king Charles I in 1625; but there were other branches of the family in the *Mearns*, in Angus, in Edinburgh and Aberdeen. To this Scottish gentleman there are several brief references in letters, e.g.:

“The Fathers have an ‘Englishman’ as their teacher of Arabic—a good Catholic who “had studied in Rome—reading for two hours daily, and having conversation one hour” (Fr. Prosper, 27.8.1621).

“A Scottish gentleman is teaching us Arabic” (Fr. Prosper, 27.9.1621).

“Although we have not the funds for our food I did not wish to miss the opportunity of” (profiting by) “a man eminent in Hebrew, Greek, Chaldaean, and Arabic, and he sent off “his books by the Fr. Visitor. . . . I have arranged with him for the six months he will “be here that the Fathers will assist him to make his journey by paying him 50 scudi. . . .” (*idem*).

Early in 1619 the Vicar Provincial, Fr. John Thaddeus, summoned a congress of missionaries at Isfahan: all Fathers present drew up and signed a representation to the Definitory General in Rome of the needs of the Mission financially and in numbers, and this was sent through Fr. Redempt: della Valle mentions how he had gone out to meet the Vicar of Hurmuz, Fr. Leander, on 3.3.1619: the views of the Vicar Provincial have been learnt from his letter of January of that year, already quoted above. To round about this year refers also an undated note (in Spanish by Fr. John Thaddeus, from its context written in 1621) in the archives of the Order: that from lower Luristan, or more properly upper Khuzistan, seekers after the Christian religion should come will cause surprise to those who knew that region in more recent times:

“There are many people in Luristan ready to become Christians, but they say that it “cannot be done from Isfahan, but only on the spot in their own country: and that they “want to have Fathers with them. The Kalantar who is administrator” (‘regidor’) “of “all Luristan . . . of Shushtar, Ramuz” (i.e. Ramhurmuz) “and Shush . . . his ancestors “and his family have held the governorship of that province since the time of Alexander “the Great according to the ancient tradition they have. They are a bellicose people. “Finally this Kalantar dispatched various persons, and more recently his son, Rustam “Baig by name, to Fr. John Thaddeus, begging the latter to visit them and to send Religious “to them.<sup>1</sup> As we did not have Religious to send, none have been dispatched, nor has “the Father been able to go on a visit there, because of his being till now Superior here “. . . now that he is no longer holding office, he is ready to go there and do whatever “obedience” (to superiors) “will bid him do. . . .”

Only a few months previously, 31.12.1618, Fr. Dimas of the Cross, an Italian Religious who had arrived in the mission at the end of 1616 and was to prove one of its mainstays through

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* P. della Valle’s letter, 21.10.1619: “On 14.9.1619 Fr. John Thaddeus baptized Jalal, servant (of della Valle) and native of the province of *Susiana*, by the name of Khatchatur.”