

“Holy Spirit, Prior of this convent of Isfahan, to the City (Rome), and in the names of
 “all of us he will lay them at your sacred feet and beg the blessing of Your Holiness, and
 “so that Your Holiness may be informed by him of past happenings in this mission so
 “specially initiated and promoted at the bidding and by the decision of the Apostolic See.
 “Meanwhile, praying God to be pleased to preserve Your Holiness for many years as the
 “head of our Church,

“Isfahan in Persia—24th of August 1624, the humblest and least of your servants,
 “Discalced Carmelites of the Convent of Isfahan,

“Fr. John Thaddeus of S. Elisaeus

“Fr. Balthazar of S. Mary

“Fr. Dominic of S. Mary

“Brother Diego of the Cross.”¹

That within a year of what might well have been considered a crushing blow—(a) blood-thirsty repression by Muslim authorities of a considerable proportion of the relatively few converts made, (b) the internment of the Religious within their premises at Isfahan for some eight months, (c) the loss of their Residence at Hurmuz and its special sphere of usefulness, (d) the loss of that Portuguese stronghold on the south Persian coast and all the influence the presence of the Portuguese there in traffic, national connections and monetary assistance had meant for the Carmelites, (e) the loss of intimate relations with the Shah, and his patronage—the widest development of any single year in the history of the Mission should be witnessed was surely no mere coincidence: and this, though the mother-convent at Isfahan was in such great straits, in debt, living on loans and advances. It may be considered significant, too, that Fr. Paul Simon of Jesus Mary, senior of the three Fathers founders of the Mission, who took a warm, personal interest in its progress and success, was 6.5.1623, elected Praepositus General of the Order, seventh in succession; for attention to needs in numbers, scope, activities and funds oscillated at most periods of its history according to the relative importance assigned to foreign missions by the Definitory General of the time being.

On 26.3.1623 Fr. Basil of S. Francis, a Portuguese from Santarem by race, was dispatched from Isfahan (where at the time there were seven Fathers priests and two Lay Brothers in residence) to Basra, to see whether it would be possible to found a Residence in that port and, if this proved not feasible, at least to obtain a sufficient sum in alms from the Portuguese ships sometimes visiting it as would relieve temporarily the great financial needs of the convent at Isfahan. It was foreseen that there would be considerable numbers of Christian sailormen and travellers frequenting the port, to whom a resident Carmelite might minister, a Portuguese in particular. At that period Basra and its district were ruled by a local Arab dynasty, independent² of any control from Baghdad or the rest of Mesopotamia, whoever—Turk or Persian—might be by force of arms possessed of Babylon, but owing in a vague degree the Sultan at Constantinople as suzerain. It was in this year, indeed, that Shah 'Abbas became master of Baghdad; but Basra was not affected, save for apprehension by the local Arab 'Pasha' or Shaikh that greed and ambition would lead the Persian king or his viceroy in the south to extend their operations to Basra—an apprehension which made the Arab governor doubly anxious to attract Portuguese to the Shatt-ul-Arab, for increased customs duties and increased prosperity of the port, and to gain the armed alliance and protection of the war-vessels from Goa and Masqat.³

It would have been difficult to have found a more suitable and adequate pioneer for the

¹ *Vide* in Vat. Libr., Fondo Barberini, 7817, Lat.

² *Vide* Fr. Basil, 20.6.1623, O.C.D. 241 g. “The Pasha is, as it were, absolute lord of this town and of many other places under it.”

³ *Vide* Fr. Basil, in the same letter: “. . . because of the great need he (the Pasha) had of the king of Portugal . . .”: also letter of 8.4.1625, O.C.D. 241 a.: “. . . five Portuguese warships which the Pasha greatly desired to see because of the fear of the king of Persia in which he stood.” See also Fr. Eugenius, 16.1.1625, O.C.D. 242 i.: “. . . This land is in peace at present, though some time ago there was fear that the Persians might take it, as they had come one day's journey away to capture a fort and, if there had not been 20 Portuguese ships in local pay, which went to the rescue, it might have been taken, it is said.”