

"Some months ago I wrote to Mgr Ingoli, Secretary of the Sac. Congregation, in reply to a letter of his, especially about some points concerning these 'Christians of S. John'. . . . Now, to your Eminences I have to add that I have found some books regarding their beliefs, and one in particular, which with the help of a person learned in their language I am translating and, when the translation is finished, I shall send it with the others. . . . The Viceroy of Goa has placed in my hands the business about the transplantation of these 'Christians of S. John', in regard to which I shall relate what has happened up till now. . . .

"In the convoy of Portuguese ships, which came this year at the beginning of September to Basra, there arrived a letter for me from Don Juliano de Noronha, 'captain-general of the Straits of Hurmuz' written to me by order of the Viceroy of Goa, in which on his own behalf and that of the Viceroy he begs me earnestly to *try and revive* that business, which began in the time of Fr. Basil and then collapsed, with regard to transplanting the 'Christians of S. John', who are scattered about here in Basra and neighbouring townships of Persia and Arabia, and amount to a total of 10,000 or 20,000. At once on receiving the letter I summoned the principal men of the community and read to them what had been written and the liberal promises made by the Viceroy to those who would go to the Portuguese dominions. . . . I told them that it was the wish of the Viceroy that for this year not more than four or five of their chief men, those with the most authority, should go to discuss this business with him, and what he might wish to grant them, mainly in the island of Ceylon. They answered that, when I had approved those chosen, each would willingly go. So four of their older men, of fine presence, with influence and a knowledge of business, were sent to Goa by me along with another twenty of their race: and I embarked them on a Portuguese ship on the 16th October of this year" (1646).

By the following year, 15.2.1647 (O.C.D. 241 m.), Fr. Ignatius had written to the Order in Rome:

". . . I have informed Mgr Ingoli of a book which I have composed, in which I speak of the origin, customs, rites and errors of the so-called 'Christians of S. John'. . . . I have written it in Latin and also in Persian, and I am now putting it into Arabic. . . ."

Of this book published by the Sac. Congregation of Propaganda in Rome in 1652 copies exist in the archives of the Congregation, and of the Order, and doubtless elsewhere: it was entitled: *Narratio originis rituum et errorum Christianorum Sancti Joannis . . . auctore P. F. Ignatio Jesu Carmelita Discalceato.*

Though he stated at the beginning that this community are called 'Subbi'—Sabaeans—by Arabs and Persians, and call themselves Mandaeans or 'Mandaeans of Yahya',¹ (John) this Father was less cautious, less outspokenly negative than Fr. Basil had been, and seems to emphasize in his book the reality of some Christian connection or origin for the race—a theory which modern scholarship has discarded altogether. In fact his initial supposition was that the Mandaeans from long association in a common habitat with the Chaldaeans, i.e. Syrians,

"were also called Chaldaeans, but that, when about 170 years ago the Syrians abandoned their obedience to the patriarch of Babylon, these people—the Mandaeans—also abandoned the Faith.

"They baptize nowhere except in some river . . . every year they hold the observance: for there is one most noteworthy festival among them which they call '*aid-i-panjeh*'² (i.e. festival of five days): and on these five days all—men, women, little ones—come to their Shaikh" (i.e. priest) "and are baptized by him in the river, so that they may celebrate the baptism of John and imitate it. . . . Near the town of Shushtar in Persia in a certain field they say there is a certain house, in which they assert is the tomb of S. John Baptist,

¹ i.e. 'knowers' of John (adopting the derivation from the word meaning *gnosis*).

² These are Persian words.