

(Chap. XIV): “. . . These ‘Christians of S. John’ so dislike the colour blue, that they “do not dare to put on anything dyed with this colour, or touch it: if anybody be seen wearing clothing of that colour, *ipso facto* it is known to everyone that the person in question “professes a creed contrary to that of the ‘Christians of S. John’. . . . They tell this story “as the reason why they abhor that colour. They say that some of the Jews had a vision “in a dream, from which they learnt that the Jewish religion was to be destroyed by the “baptism of John. The Jews, hearing this and seeing S. John Baptist ready to baptize the “Lord Jesus, moved by ill-will, brought a great quantity of indigo dye, which is called “*Nil*,¹ with which things are dyed sky-blue or sea-blue colour and, throwing this into the “waters of the Jordan, when Jesus was to be baptized, stained them and made them unclean, “in order to prevent the baptism from taking place. Seeing this God Almighty miracu- “lously ordered a great vessel to be carried by the angels and filled with pure water of the “Jordan itself, and while they raised him in the air S. John baptized Christ the Lord, also “raised in the air, out of that vessel: and that from that time God cursed and excommuni- “cated the colour blue. . . .”

Further evidence of the sequel to the efforts to secure the migration of the Mandaeans from the district of Basra is afforded in a certificate² dated 15.2.1649, signed by Fr. Matthew of S. Joseph, and Senhor Francisco de Campos, agent in Basra of the viceroy of the Portuguese Indies:

“We, the undersigned, bear witness that the very reverend Fr. Ignatius of Jesus, Vicar “of the Discalced Carmelites at Basra, two years ago” (i.e. in 1647) “dispatched some of the “chief ‘Christians of S. John’ as ambassadors from their race to the viceroy of Goa, together “with some other twenty who accompanied them in order to negotiate their migration “hence to Catholic countries, and in order to see the lands which the viceroy is willing to “give them in the island of Ceylon: and, if it were not for the great war the surrounding “Arabs are waging against Masqat, a large part of these ‘Christians’ would have left. “Further, we certify that the said Fr. Ignatius of Jesus in the month of October last past “sent about 50 of these ‘Christians’ to Masqat, and from Masqat they have already gone to “Goa, others of them have left with their entire families and are going with the object of “living there the life of Catholics. Further, we bear witness to have seen some letters which “the viceroy of Goa and the captain-general from Masqat wrote, thanking Fr. Ignatius “for the trouble and diligence he had taken in this matter, and begging him to continue “until it be completely effected. . . .”

A medical man, and no mean botanist in India later, this Fr. Matthew of S. Joseph had come to the conclusion after a brief residence in Basra that the religion of the Mandaeans was a composite, based on other creeds—he himself thought to find a connection with the Quran

“from the ‘Sura’ (i.e. chapter) Miriam in their book of S. John Baptist: the ‘book of Adam’, “which contains all the books of the world, and according to which theirs is the chief sect “of all mankind, (the idea) taken from the ‘Sura’ Ta. Their book of ‘Zakharia’ they have “taken from the chapter Al-Anbiya (the Prophets), for instance, where they say that those “of their sect should not be mated to any other. From the chapter ‘Sad’ that God created “the angels from serpents: and from the chapter ‘Muhammad’ that in paradise there are “rivers of honey, wine, milk, etc. . . .”

Fr. Matthew had also written a tract³ on the Mandaeans—“*Strada della Perdizione e della Salute*”: the ‘Path to Perdition and to Salvation’—and in it he qualified the race as ‘apes’, because

¹ The Persian word for ‘indigo’.

² O.C.D. 241 n.

³ *Vide* his letter of 28.5.1649, O.C.D. 241 n.