

The news in Fr. Barnabas' letter of 12.5.1657<sup>1</sup> was more serious:

“. . . I cannot tell you all, but shall only say that the Shah of Persia” (this was 'Abbas II) “has thrown off the mask and shown the venom he has in his heart. He has . . . ordered “. . . that the Sabaeans also shall embrace the religion of Muhammad; and all those at “Hawaizeh, Khalafabad, Durakh, Shushtar and Biyaban (? Bihbihan) and Pul-i-Pulad “[? sic] have done so. . . . The Pasha here” (Basra) “has received letters from the king of “Persia exhorting him to purge his territory of the ‘infidels’ . . . which is what they call “all who do not hold the Muhammadian faith: so everyone is apprehensive, especially the “Sabaeans. . . .”

If the decree regarding the Mandaean community was enforced (as in the district of Isfahan Armenians had been caused by violence and threat of deprivation of their property to apostatize) the information is of historic value: for it not only fixes a date, but explains why in the Persian townships named the community of Mandaeans, flourishing till 1656, disappeared.

Writing from Basra, 5.4.1660<sup>2</sup> Fr. Anselm of the Annunciation in his *Briefve Relation* stated:

“Le nombre des dits Sabéens peust arriver à huict ou neuf mille” (8,000–9,000) “tout au “plus, y compris les femmes et les enfants, et ils sont dispersez en 40 ou 50 habitations, qui “sont villes, villages, ou isles. . . . Ils sont tous renfermez dans l'exercice de quatre mestiers “ou vocations. Je veux dire qu'ilz sont tous ou orfèvres, ou serruriers, ou charpentiers ou “laboureurs. . . . Ilz observent le dimanche, et ne travaillent point en iceluy. . . . “Ordinairement partout si quelqu'un d'eux se faict Chrestien c'est afin, ou que l'on leur “fasse prester quelque argent pour augmenter leur trafic, ou bien soubz l'esperance que “durant le temps de la motion” (i.e. the monsoon) “le révérend Père Vicaire de cette maison “le fera employer par les Anglois, Holandois ou aultres marchands avec lesquels ils trouvent “beaucoup de profit . . . quand nous aurons faict quelque Sabéen Catholique, si nous le “voulons conserver tel, il nous le fault envoyer à Goa, où les Portugais et la Sainte Inquisi- “tion auront soin de le faire cheminer comme il fault. . . .”

After that blunt appraisal of the sincerity of the baptisms received, and conversions recorded by his predecessors at Basra, and passing on—over the years of fighting in Basra—to 1674, it is not so surprising to read (in the edition of the *Chronicle of Basra*, published by Sir H. Gollancz, London, 1927—“The Settlement of the Carmelites in Mesopotamia”) that Fathers Tussanus (Toussaint) of Jesus and Agathangelus of S. Teresa:

“finding in the book, where the names of those who are baptized are noted the names of “hundreds baptized from the sect of the Sabaeans, and in the books, where the names of “those buried are entered, not a single one of the said sect buried with us, and seeing how “very few attended the church, they were thrown into doubt, and greatly marvelled. Note “that some have said that it is easy to convert the Sabaeans and that they easily recant; “but they might have better said that they are in no wise converted, but very readily dis- “semble: and among them there is the erroneous opinion that the three or four drops of “water of Christian baptism do not render invalid the immersion of the Sabaeans, which is “done in a river, and is repeated as many times as they wish: on the other hand marriage “and burial” (according to Christian rites) “does conflict with their” (religious) “law.

“And so, from the time when our Fathers came to Basra, although they have baptized “very many, they have joined none in matrimony . . . with the exception of one who re- “pudiated his aged Sabaeon wife, in order to take to wife a young and beautiful Christian “ . . . when this woman went off to the Indies with her daughter married to a certain English “captain, the Sabaeon grumbled for several years and at length, worn out by old age and

<sup>1</sup> O.C.D. 241 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*, 241 a.