

One of Fr. Dionysius' long reports—thirteen pages of foolscap—dated 1650<sup>1</sup> narrates the way in which this work began,<sup>2</sup> with yearly results. Here only the abstract of results is taken from it:

'On 25.9.1646, when Fr. Balthazar of S. Mary was Prior of the Convent, the first case occurred: they had seen a youth called Gushtasp at Khairabad, ill for a long time past. They entered his house, but other persons were there, so they went away to return later and, though his brother and sister-in-law were present, whispered in his ear about his soul and the Christian Faith and, finding him willing, after having given him what instruction was possible, they baptized him. They learnt the next day that he had died suddenly that night: and enquiries from his sister-in-law showed that he had done and said nothing contrary to our Faith. In the autumn the Father returned to Khairabad and baptized there and elsewhere about a dozen, all moribund. Near the convent a small girl was baptized, but afterwards improved in health: however, within a short time she fell from a roof and died. On Christmas Eve Fr. Dionysius, going out into the street from the convent, met a respectable woman carrying a child which was very ill, and they baptized it there and then in the street: it lived till March.

'In 1647 the Carmelites had not yet begun to enter houses in search of sick, unless asked to do so: they baptized those to be found, 95 in all, some of them Jewish children; the Jews being very simple people willingly ask for the Gospel to be recited over the heads of the sick! In this year a Gabr (i.e. Zoroastrian) woman came with a sick child, and she herself with two other children wanted to become Christians. That autumn there was much sickness, and many children were baptized before death. Fr. Dionysius decided to extend his operations. There were 100 villages round Isfahan, and thirteen to fourteen could be visited in a day, it was thought.

'In 1648 120 children were baptized.

'In 1649 375 baptized: in summer and autumn sickness was prevalent.

(Many examples are given in the narrative of fortuitous finding of dying children; then, on Sundays Fr. Dionysius was given permission to go out of the convent and search for them.)

'In 1650 "up to the present 326 baptized".'

Inasmuch as it was impossible for him, or any other, to be certain that a child baptized would die, and as, if it survived and grew to puberty, clearly the parents or others would bring it up as a Muslim, thus causing the child unwittingly to become a renegade from the Christian Faith, some of the Religious had scruples of conscience regarding the moral and spiritual justification of the practice, which at that date (comparatively early in the history of Catholic missions), was evidently little known, for the Vicar Provincial, Fr. Dominic of S. Nicolas,

<sup>1</sup> His work is briefly mentioned by the Jesuit author of a small pamphlet entitled *Divers Voyages de la Chine et autres Royaumes de l'Orient, avec le retour de l'Auteur en Europe par la Perse et l'Armenie*, Paris, 1681, which was translated by Lt.-Col. Sir A. T. Wilson, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.P., and published in a *Bulletin* of the School of Oriental Studies: this Jesuit passed through Persia in March-July 1648, when the enterprise had hardly begun:

"I knew a Flemish Carmelite in Isfahan, called Father Denys, who was able in this way to send 40 little children, who died shortly after he had baptized them, to Paradise."

Lt.-Col. Sir A. T. Wilson had also translated, and published in the *Bulletin*, vol. IV, part V, 1925, a *Relation de la Mission des Pères de la Compagnie de Jesus, établie dans le Royaume de Perse*, 1659, by Père Jacques de Machault, S.J., which purported to be an account of the Jesuits in Persia during the time of Fr. Alexandre de Rhodes, S.J., and is a panegyric on that ecclesiastic:

"I am told, indeed, that a certain brother of the Barefoot Carmelites baptized during one year more than 3,000 children, whom Heaven took to itself forthwith by a peaceful death. . . ."

This Fr. Alexandre de Rhodes had been previously in Tonkin: his gravestone at Julfa was recognized by the Apostolic Delegate as late as the end of 1932, with the inscription that he died 5.11.1660, aged 68, after 40 years' work in various missions of the East (*vide Osservatore Romano* of 18.2.1633).

<sup>2</sup> O.C.D. 235 d.