

“ships lately come from Goa bring us the news that all the foreign Fathers have left there
“and retired to Malabar, only Portuguese Fathers remaining”—,

and though Fr. Gaspar Joseph,¹ the Prior of Isfahan, was dispatched at the end of August 1691² with a companion to hold the Congress of the missionaries at Goa, a few years later all connection between that port and the Carmelite Mission of Persia ceased (as may be read in the section of this book dealing with the establishments one by one).

Left insufficient in numbers for the pastoral care of each Residence, short of funds or in actual debt, the Carmelites were sorely tried, in addition, during this reign in endeavours to comply with the ‘Instructions’ of their Order in respect to (a) the holding triennially of the ‘Congress’ for the selection of a Procurator to proceed to Rome and take part in the chapter-general of the Order on behalf of the Mission. Reference is first made to this as a new regulation in 1634.³ The Priors of the two Convents of Isfahan and Goa, each with a Companion ‘Socius’, under the superintendence of the Vicar Provincial or Visitor General had to meet and choose a Procurator and a Substitute, generally from their own number; but the place of meeting, with Isfahan 600 miles from the sea, Shiraz nearly 200, and a sea voyage of 1,000 miles or more to Tatta or Goa meant in those days of slow sailing (and that only during one short season of the year) an absence of many months for some of the delegates, whether they went to Goa, to Kung, to Shiraz for the Congress (e.g. on 31.10.1667 the Vicar Provincial fixed a date for the Congress to be held at Basra, or in certain eventualities at Diu: actually it was held at Kung early in 1669). Such displacements were possible so long as numbers were sufficient in the first half of the century; but the expense of such lengthy journeys, the stopping of work in a mission post fell harder on the Religious from 1660, and many are the complaints: “visitations and congress—things which do nothing but ruin the spiritual and financial condition of the missionaries,” as one put it.⁴ After 1691 there is no further allusion to the Prior of Isfahan leaving the Convent to proceed to a rendezvous for such a purpose: the loss of the Convent at Goa presumably made it superfluous. (b) The election of a Prior for the Convent at Isfahan by all conventuals, whether in Isfahan or working in one of the outposts or Residences, Bandar ‘Abbas, Basra, Shiraz, similarly became difficult to achieve when the numbers left alive or making the journey dwindled, as in 1670–3, to two Religious only voting. To make the journey from Basra meant perhaps five months’ absence. The propriety of such an election being held, and the validity of the acts of those elected were matters which troubled the consciences of and caused unpleasantness between the various Religious.

With all these hardships and disabilities accruing during the first twenty years of Shah Sulaiman it is not surprising that the Carmelite Mission was left at a relatively low ebb: a French Father who, while being the typical Gascon in temperament and no doubt trying in his ways and language, was yet one of the most polished linguists in Persian the Order produced on the evidence of the massive dictionary, Persian, French, Italian, Turkish, which he compiled and had published at Amsterdam in 1684 and by the statements of some of his companions in Persia, as well as from his own assertion that he knew Persian as he did French—Fr. Angelus of S. Joseph—has painted in vivid and perhaps sometimes exaggerated terms the mode of life of the Carmelites in the 1670’s: and that may serve to convey to the student how far the life of the missionaries had fallen from the level of 1608–38, for instance:⁵

“If your Reverence knew that at present no Religious would dare show his face there
“without receiving a good flogging at the gate, you would not have taken so much trouble
“to exhort me to keep away from the Court of the Shah. If your Reverence knew that
“Persians in general consider it a point of the religion they practise to treat all Christians
“and those of other religions differing from their own as *nijis*, i.e. unclean; and that for

¹ This Religious, in a letter of 23.7.1691, O.C.D. 236 b, speaks of being occupied on a “history of the mission begun many years before, but interrupted”.

² Fr. Elias, 24.9.1691, O.C.D. 238 u.

³ “New orders as to the method of choosing the procurator and substitute to go to the Chapter General,” see Fr. Dimas, 31.10.1634.

⁴ Fr. Angelus, 25.3.1669, O.C.D. 238 l.

⁵ Fr. Angelus, O.C.D. 236 i, 1.10.1672.