

“contrary to the decrees of Urban VIII and Benedict XIV but, further, harmful to the trade of the French, who have commenced business with Basra and who would never submit to the jurisdiction of an Italian bishop so long as they possess, and have the right to have, a bishop who is French and at the same time consul for France. I therefore beg your Excellency to be so good as to write a letter on this subject to Monsieur le Marquis de Steinville, so that he may oppose the steps taken by this Bishop and ask for his departure from Basra, where he has been residing for 2½ years, although he might withdraw in all security to various ports in the Persian Gulf—Kharg, Bandar 'Abbas, Bushire . . .”

In making his request it will have been noticed that Bishop Sebastian of Isfahan wrote of his having visited Bushire to investigate possibilities for his journey up-country to Isfahan, and his concluding in the negative. On 17.5.1753 with his brother, Fr. Hyacinth, he left Basra (where they had jointly arrived, 5.7.1752).<sup>1</sup>

To Mgr Lercari, Secretary of the Sac. Congregation, 23.12.1753,<sup>2</sup> Fr. Hyacinth explained from Basra:

“ . . . News having come from Persia which appeared at first sight somewhat good, in the month of May last both together on an English ship we left for Bandar Rig and, after giving a mission there for about forty days, we arrived at Bushire . . . where also a mission was given and, thanks to the Lord, to the spiritual profit of those Catholics who were there passing through it; and after staying at Bushire for five months and more, always in the hope of being able to go on to our Residence at Isfahan, at the end of the season in the month of October 1753 such bad news came from Julfa and Isfahan that it was no longer practicable for us to penetrate as far as there . . . it is absolutely no longer possible for a long time, and for many years (God knows when) to go and dwell there, for the reason that all Christians, on account of the constant executions and the danger of being enslaved and even losing their lives, are running away. . . . The truth is, most reverend Mgr Lercari, that it was a real providence of God that Mgr Sebastian and I have escaped being made prisoners, and even worse. . . . Humanly speaking, we both should have been in the midst of the furnace, if the Lord had not inspired Mgr Sebastian . . . to wait for the end of the campaign and the issue of the civil war. . . . So that we have been preserved by a particular grace of Heaven from such risks, having been obliged to run away” (i.e. from Bushire) “and to return and take ship for Basra.”

(He ended by an inopportune advocacy of the addition of Basra to the diocese of his brother—in advance, in fact, of the Bishop's official petition of the following January.) The reader will find the spirit of this very far removed from that which animated the early Carmelites at the time of the martyrdom of the converts, or from that of Fr. Basil of S. Francis' journey on foot from Isfahan to Bushire in disguise in 1623, the poverty and hardships he faced.

*Cont. Basra Chron.* noted under 5.10.1753 the return of the Bishop and his brother, “Vicar of Julfa”<sup>3</sup> to Basra from “our House at Bushire” so that the building purchased by Fr. Urban in 1745 was presumably still maintained. About eighteen months later, 22.6.1755, there came the entry:

“After several days' illness Mgr Sebastian of, S. Margaret, Bishop of Isfahan, died and we buried him in the church on the following day.”

His brother, Fr. Hyacinth, 30.6.1755,<sup>4</sup> communicated the news to the Secretary to the Sac. Congregation:

<sup>1</sup> See *Cont. Basra Chron.*

<sup>3</sup> The chronicler appended the observation:

“Fr. Hyacinth, Vicar of Julfa, added in the books of the House: ‘after carrying out a mission for 6 months in Bushire, ‘Bandar Rig and island of Kharg,’ and (caustically), ‘it is to be noted that at that time the Dutch had not yet occupied ‘the island of Kharg: no one else but Muhammadan Arab-Persians lived there: in Bushire and Bandar Rig one or two ‘Catholics might be found. . . .’”

<sup>2</sup> *S.N.R.*, VI, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> *S.N.R.*, VI, pp. 246, 250, 257.