

'by His Holiness, who will reside there and be able to make excursions to the neighbouring Christians. . . .'

Within four months of the founding at Basra, and still without any funds, under the leadership of the energetic Prior the Carmelites in Persia had seized an opportunity and taken on themselves a further responsibility and purchased a house in Shiraz, the capital of the province of Fars. The Prior himself put it in one of his letters that:

“. . . the Khan of Shiraz, who had had the four Christians killed, has now been moved “to ask the king for permission for us to make an establishment in his province . . .”;¹

but the circumstances are best narrated in sequence by Fr. Dominic of S. Mary:²

“. . . Our Religious,” he wrote, “had . . . for years previously judged it requisite to “have a house in Shiraz, both because of the conversions to be expected there, as also of “the perfection in the knowledge of the language and religious laws (of Persia) to be “attained there. . . . On many occasions in previous years the Khan of Shiraz had “signified clearly to our Fathers that he would be greatly pleased if, just as the Fathers “were at Isfahan, they should also be (settled) at Shiraz: and in confirmation or demon- “stration of this on many occasions he showed favours and courtesies to those Fathers who “had to pass through Shiraz and deal with him. . . . In March 1619 our Fathers at “Isfahan by common accord and instrument approved of such a mission in Shiraz being “to the good, and that it would usefully be undertaken: that document having been sent “to Rome, they say that our Superiors thought well of it and agreed to charge with it “Fr. Vincent of S. Francis, sent as Visitor to these parts. In the instructions given him “he was to arrange for such a foundation (at Shiraz), just as also they gave him a commission “for a mission in the province of Luristan,³ and for that said mission in Luristan the said “Fr. Vincent in 1621 gave orders and permission that it should be taken in hand, provided “there were the approval and consent of the three senior Fathers at the convent” (then Frs. John Thaddeus, Prosper and Dimas) “by whom on 4th November it was proposed “as a necessary (preliminary) for such a mission in Luristan that there should be a hospice “in Shiraz.⁴ The Lurs themselves deemed it necessary and suitable. . . . For that reason, “after secret voting by all three votes it was voted well to make a start with the said hospice “at Shiraz. In accordance with those desires and instructions in the name of all Fr. John

¹ Fr. Prosper, 4.7.1623, O.C.D. 238 d.

² 27.9.1626, O.C.D. 238 o.

³ In the ‘Instructions’ on record in O.C.D. 284 g., signed by the Praepositus General Fr. Matthias of S. Francis, 30.6.1620, no such specific mention of Shiraz and Luristan has been noticed. But it does include the words: “Your Reverence will “bring us a full report . . . on the fresh missions which offer . . .”: and clause 2 authorized the Visitor to dispatch to “missions other than those, which our Fathers already have . . .” and “to accept hospices or Residences with or without “an oratory”.

⁴ To twentieth-century eyes and minds, considering the modern province of Luristan as a hundred or two miles away to the NW., across interminable ranges of wild mountains and valleys, the nearest Lur tribes at least 80–100 miles, it reads strangely that ‘Lurs’ should have regarded the establishment of a branch mission at Shiraz as a necessary centre-point for evangelizing work by the Carmelites among them.

Yet that there must have been ground for the statement in Fr. Dominic’s narrative can be seen by comparing the following remarks by Fr. John Thaddeus himself in his lengthy ‘Report’ to Rome, drawn up in 1624 (*S.R.*, vol. 209), on the motives for planting a mission station at Shiraz in relation to the Lurs:

“First, it was out of fear of the Shah; secondly, because we had no house where we can catechize them; thirdly, hitherto “on account of insufficient numbers of missionaries and by orders of our Superiors we had not sought conversions, “because they” (the missionaries) “would not be able to catechize afterwards those whom they had baptized: so they “have refused to baptize those who came to the convent, carrying on with them as best may be” (For this reason, he adds, more missionaries and funds are needed.) . . . “Nevertheless quite a number of the Lurs became Christians and “especially after the death of the first four Persian martyrs (who) were of the ancient race of Persia, who bear undying “hatred for the king because he subjugated them and have retired to a more impregnable part of Persia, such as are the “provinces of Luristan and Kurdistan. And the Fathers are in relations with the people of Luristan, from whom came the “five men baptized, of whom four became martyrs. These people begged the Fathers to build a church among them, “but so that the Shah might not suspect their relations. The Fathers told them they would found a Residence in their “[? sic] chief town, Shiraz—although expelled from it the Lurs have always regarded this as their country—and they “told the Fathers that, even if the Shah had subjugated them and killed 30,000 of them, another 30,000 might well die “for the true Faith. So the Fathers founded a hospice in Shiraz. With this race some results can be obtained, but only “in time. . . .” (Note that Fr. John Thaddeus did not consider one of the five to be a martyr—perhaps Alexander?)