

INTRODUCTORY HISTORICAL REVIEW UP TO 1585

THAT AS the sixteen hundreds began—now fast approaching three and a half centuries ago—the Discalced Carmelites first went into Persia was no matter of haphazard selection for evangelization of any area in the globe, which might have attracted the interest of any individual head or member of an Order only recently remodelled and little inclined for external activities: personal velleities had small part in it. Rather, it was brought about by a concatenation of needs which, under the disposition of Divine Providence, the Order was appointed to serve and set itself to serve, in large measure against the current of its own volition. It will be the task of the introductory chapter of this study to approach it—sometimes in much detail—along the several lines of development and action which finally fused in that dramatic decision and cry “In Persidem” of the Sovereign Pontiff in the summer of 1604, as well as to imbue the reader who cares for it with a thorough sense of the ambients in which the enterprise began its existence.

How the Order, after its reform, came to listen to a call for missionary energies in the face of much to deter it; why, with Europe and America offering immense scope and easier communications, a country so distant and difficult of access in the Muslim East came to be its objective; what caused Pope Clement VIII to find it necessary and desirable to send his own representatives to Persia at that particular juncture; what moved an autocratic ruler in the heart of the Middle East to allow Christian propagandists into his realms and to establish themselves there in spite of all the prejudices of fanaticism; some account of the general political relations of European states with the East at the time the mission was launched; and the internal conditions of Persia itself as illustrated by phases of its history during the previous hundred years—these are all lights which must be allowed to illuminate the ground before the task confronting the pioneer Carmelites, the inherent difficulties under which they laboured, and how far they made good, can be appraised at their full value.

Ignoring the travels and preaching of isolated friars and priests, who had been to or in the East from the thirteenth century onwards, one may first note how many Orders had established and were working definite, permanent, missionary areas and stations in the continent of Asia by 1600.

There were, of course, the Franciscans, the Friars Minor of the Holy Land, sole and exclusive ‘Guardians of the Holy Sepulchre’, as has been their merit since 1496 by grants and confirmations of various Popes; they were at Alexandretta before 1600, before 1560 at Aleppo, while their present church and convent at Tripoli date from 1582 (irrespective of single years and short periods between 1250 and 1496, when in numerous documents, they are mentioned as residing in several towns of Palestine and Syria), and they were at Smyrna in 1400. In the Far East the Franciscans claim to have had a church in Peking in 1299, an archbishop with six suffragans by 1307; but their missions in China had been ruined in 1368, and were restored only in 1579 by missionaries from the Philippines.¹ Beginning from 1534 they had missionaries (doubtless not permanently in several cases, but at times) in India; on the west coast at Diu, Chaul, Basseim, Goa, Mangalore; at Tuticorin and Colombo in the south and Ceylon; at Negapatam and Meliapur on the east coast; at Chittagong on the Ganges in Bengal.

The Capuchins appear not to have been in the East before the seventeenth century.

The Dominicans by 1548 had their headquarters for missions in India, Ceylon, Siam and Malacca at Goa: they claim to have been since 1559 in China, since 1586 in the Philippines, in Japan from 1601 till the common expulsion of missionaries. From 1318 they had, too,

¹ These, and other dates following, are approximate, as taken from articles in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*; *La Compagnie de Jésus*, by J. Boucher, S.J.; *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, 1895.