

The Mandaeans in Basra district presumably were harshly treated by the Arabs [Fr. Basil, 26.2.1628, "these men are so afear'd of the Arabs . . ."] that in another letter of the same date he is writing to Cardinal Ludovisi, putting forward a project for their relief, viz. their own wish to be given land for settlement elsewhere:

"The letter of your Illustrious Lordship, dated Rome 26.2.1627, caused the greatest pleasure to the hearts of these poor Christians" (i.e. of S. John) "who have been very delighted to be told that a letter had come from Rome in the name of the Pope remembering them and desiring to know the state of their affairs: it seems to these poor men (on account of the oppression under which they live) that it is a heaven-sent gift—as indeed it is—that such a personage should have thought for them. It appears to them a good channel to attain an *aspiration which they have had for long past*, and exhibit a great desire to realize, i.e. that His Holiness *should give instructions to the king of Spain to give them some one of the places he possesses in this Persian Gulf*, in order that they may live there with greater freedom, without being under the yoke of the Muslim Arabs—a business on which I have not reported hitherto and do not report at present to your Illust. Lordship, because I am keeping it back, waiting for certain results and details; and both on this and other matters I shall keep in mind to inform your Lordship more minutely . . . and before doing so I greatly desire to go to Hawaizeh, on which place much depends for the information to be more complete. . . ."

"As to your Illust. Lordship recommending me to try and win back the 'Christians' to the obedience of the See of Rome . . . what I did three years ago . . . was only in regard to the Armenians, Syrians and other Christians, because something else than obedience is required in the case of the 'Christians of S. John'. . . ."

On that the following instructions were issued to Fr. Basil from Rome¹ by Cardinal Bandini in July 1629:

"As the business of the 'Christians of S. John' proposed by your Reverence has appeared very serious to the Sacr. Congregation de Propaganda Fide, and as the latter has been unable to take the decision that behoved it from lack of sufficient information, the Sacr. Congregation desires that, after having used all the diligence that so important a matter deserves, your Reverence will signify what you gather with regard to the following points:

"*First*, the Sacr. Congregation desires to know the number of souls among the 'Christians of S. John' who would desire to leave and place themselves under the jurisdiction of the king of Spain,

"*Second*, in what province of the king of Spain would they be willing to go; because, if they would care to retire to the East Indies, the business might perhaps not be so difficult. But, should they want to come to Europe, there would be signal obstacles on all hands, as your Reverence can understand on considering the length of the journey, the risks in bringing so many people, and the princes through whose dominions they would have to pass.

"*Last*, if these 'Christians' wish to enter India, whether they will decide to profess the Catholic Faith and the Latin rite. . . . Therefore your Reverence should write a full report with regard to those points, so that subsequently the matter may be discussed with the Catholic king (i.e. of Spain), and these 'Christians' may be aided with all the good offices possible. . . ."

Fr. Basil of S. Francis, 22.2.1630,² acknowledged receipt of those instructions and answered:

"*First*, I have made careful reckoning and found that this community altogether will be about 2,000 souls³—not more, less probably: and I have had talks with a large part of

¹ S.R., vol. 115 (V), 'Lettere di Levante', p. 412.

² S.R. vol. 115 (V), p. 415.

³ This figure must refer to the district round Basra only.