

“they ape the Turks in their ablutions and polygamy, the Persians in their horror to eat food cooked by non-Mandaeans, or drink from their vessels: from idol-worshippers, such as Brahmins, other features: from yet others, from Christians veneration of the cross and a sort of ‘Mass’, in which flour, wine and oil are the elements. Besides, they mock at all (others) and particularly at us, saying that they would sooner become Turks than Roman Christians. If they say they want to go and live among the Portuguese, it is to free themselves from Turkish tyranny, not to abandon their own superstitions and creed. . . .”

Transplantation to Portuguese dominions was, however, shortly to cease with the loss of Masqat to the Arabs of Oman in December 1649, of Colombo to the Dutch in 1657, and then of all Ceylon: and in two letters of Fr. Matthew of S. Joseph, 22.6.1650 and 28.4.1651, he asserts:

“. . . there is no hope of doing anything with the ‘Christians of S. John’: I have baptized only one, aged about 35, whom I dispatched to India. . . . I shall shortly send a dictionary of the Mandaean tongue. . . .”

Fr. Barnabas of S. Charles, at the beginning of his long vicariate of Basra, 1.9.1650, was altogether a sceptic as regards work among the Mandaeans:

“They desire to emigrate to a Christian country, but let this be said . . . in order to remove themselves from the incredible oppression of the ‘pagans’ . . . neither I, nor Fr. Matthew, nor Fr. Ignatius, though for 9 years he was vicar of this House, have ever been able to find one of them disposed for baptism. Besides, already they go off to Portuguese territory and many come back: and of all those who return I have not seen one who has become a Christian, save a poor soldier in Masqat, 16 years ago. . . . I think that their departure to Christian countries ought to be arranged, because little by little the fathers or children would become Christians. . . .”

But before long he had altered his views, or his endeavours:

“30.11.1655. Fr. Casimir and I are fairly well content, seeing the mercy of God extended to these poor Sabaeans, nine of them and one Gentile having been baptized; but we hope that His pity will stretch out to many more; and the two brothers baptized in Rome¹ certainly give us much help. . . . Pray God because the women in these parts are very obstinate and are difficult to get to listen to reason. . . . Today I have brought into the House a young Sabaeon from Durakh . . . in whose dwelling I stayed in Durakh² for some days: he wants to be baptized, and I wish to instruct him thoroughly, as he is intelligent. . . . By means of him I hope to draw to God some six households in Durakh, where I shall go with this young man. . . .”

“2.2.1656. . . . Things are going prosperously, speaking of the object for which we have come. Every day there are people coming over from S. John to Christ by way of the water of baptism; and today, the Feast of the Purification, three women and twelve men will receive the water. . . .”

“28.5.1656. . . . In a short time there have been about thirty of the community baptized. . . .”

“18.1.1657. . . . In a few days we shall baptize a family of sixteen souls, Sabaeans, with whom I have been labouring for three years past . . . the Pasha here, now that he has learnt that these Sabaeans are becoming Christians, has set his mind of making them Muslims, and leaves nothing undone to bring them over to his own religion. . . .”

¹ These were baptized in Rome, John Baptist Orsino and Isidor Pamfilio.

² This place is in Persia, in the triangle of Khuzistan between the sea and the Karun.